



ESL Podcast 76 – Asking for and Giving Instructions

GLOSSARY

to help out – to give someone help; to assist someone with a task or problem

* Charise helped out her younger brother with his science homework because he did not understand it.

orientation – a beginning lesson; instruction on something new and unfamiliar

* When the company started using a new type of telephone system, the employees all needed a quick orientation on how to use it.

to login – to sign onto a computer or computer network; to enter a computer or computer network by using a special name and password code

* Rudy forgot his password and could not login to his computer without it.

cubicle – a small space in an office with walls but no ceiling, where an employee works alone at a desk

* Ayako felt completely alone when she sat down in her cubicle, but when she stood up, she could see over the walls and look at all the other office workers.

to settle in – to become comfortable with something new

* It took a few weeks for Broderick to settle in to his new school, but he eventually liked being there.

to appreciate – to be thankful or grateful for; to give thanks

* Mrs. Ikner appreciated her neighbor helping her clear the snow off her sidewalk.

to cover – to include in a lesson or discussion; to discuss or talk about

* Tuesday's history lesson covered the events that led up to the Civil War, and tomorrow's lesson will cover some of the first battles.

to proceed – to move forward; to do an action that still needs to be done

* Once the introductions were over, the group could proceed with discussing the main reason for the meeting.

hairy – complicated; difficult to do or to understand

* The politician had a hairy schedule, visiting five states in three days.

to be sure to – to remember to do something that must be done; to pay close attention to something so that one does not forget about it

* Jacques told his roommate, "Be sure to lock the door when you leave."



ESL Podcast 76 – Asking for and Giving Instructions

you might want to – you should; a polite way to tell someone that he or she should do something specific

* When Ramona started preparing dinner, her mother told her, “You might want to wash your hands first before cutting those vegetables.”

to trouble (someone) – to ask someone a favor; to ask someone for help

* Stuart didn’t want to trouble his coworker, but he didn’t know how to use the new copy machine.

to print (something) out – to create a paper copy of a digital document; to create a paper copy of something originally created on a computer

* Sarah wanted to save the recipe she found online, so she printed it out and put it in the recipe box in her kitchen.



ESL Podcast 76 – Asking for and Giving Instructions

CULTURE NOTE

Supermodels May be Bad for Your Computer

Would you like to see pictures of your favorite “model” (a person who is paid to wear clothes to display them) or your favorite actress? Search for them on the Internet “at your own risk” (with the knowledge that it may be dangerous).

A large computer security company — McAfee — in 2011 “released” (made available to the public) the results of their “annual study” (research done each year) of the famous names used by “cyber” (electronic; digital; Internet-related) criminals. These cyber criminals “lure” (attract) people to websites where they encounter “malware,” which is software designed to damage visitors’ computers. Malware includes:

- a) “spyware” – a program that is installed or saved onto your computer that collects information about you without your knowledge,
- b) “adware” – a program that plays advertisements on your computer, including “pop-ups” (new windows that open with ads),
- c) “phishing” – a way to deceive or trick you into believing you are on a trusted business website asking you to type in sensitive information, such as your credit card number, passwords, and more, to gather information to use dishonestly, and
- d) “viruses” – programs that “replicate” (make copies of itself) and spread to other computers, doing damage to them.

The McAfee study found that some movie stars and models are more dangerous to your computer than others. Here’s their list of the top 10 most dangerous:

- 1. Heidi Klum — model and reality show host and producer
- 2. Cameron Diaz – actress
- 3. Piers Morgan — host of a news and interview show
- 4. Jessica Biel — actress
- 5. Katherine Heigl — actress
- 6. Mila Kunis — actress
- 7. Anna Paquin — actress
- 8. Adriana Lima — model
- 9. Scarlett Johansson — actress
- 10. Emma Stone, Brad Pitt and Rachel McAdams — actress, actor, and actress in a “three-way tie” (two or more people with the same position or standing)



ESL Podcast 76 – Asking for and Giving Instructions

COMPLETE TRANSCRIPT

Welcome to English as a Second Language Podcast number 76 – Asking for and Giving Instructions.

This is English as a Second Language Podcast episode 76. I'm your host, Dr. Jeff McQuillan, coming to you from the Center for Educational Development in beautiful Los Angeles, California.

In this episode, we're going to discuss asking for and giving instructions. Let's get started.

[start of dialogue]

My supervisor at work asked me the other day to help out one of the new employees. She needs some basic orientation on how to log in to our network. So I made an appointment with her to come to my cubicle for a little training session.

Jeff: Hi, Lucy. How are you settling in?

Lucy: Just fine, thanks. I appreciate you taking the time to help me out with this software. May I ask you what we will be covering today?

Jeff: Sure. Before I do that, could you tell me if you've worked with this program before? That will help me figure out how to proceed.

Lucy: I've done a little work with it, but not much.

Jeff: Well, it's a good idea to have the manual ready, since it can get a bit hairy. You should start by logging in with your username and password.

Lucy: How do I do that?

Jeff: You can just click on the button in the corner. Be sure to enter the password you created. You can write it down until you memorize it, but you might want to keep it in a safe place.

Lucy: Okay. Then what?

Jeff: Well, then just select the network you want to work with, and you're all set.



ESL Podcast 76 – Asking for and Giving Instructions

Lucy: Great, thanks for your help, Jeff. May I trouble you to show me how to print reports out from the program?

Jeff: Sure. I'll do what I can to help.

[end of dialogue]

In this episode, we are talking about how to ask for instructions – how to ask other people to explain to you how to do something. In this particular example, my supervisor at work asked me to “help out one of the new employees.” “To help out” means the same as “to help.” “I’m going to help her out” means “I’m going to help her.” It’s another one of those many examples of a two-word verb in English, in which the second word – a preposition – gives some additional emphasis. In the case of “to help out,” the preposition “out” stresses, or emphasizes, the fact that we are really going to be helping the person.

The employee at my work “needs some basic orientation on how to log in to our network.” An “orientation” (orientation) is when you give someone an overview, or a general idea, about what to do. Usually, when a person joins a new organization, a new company, or a new school, we give them some orientation, meaning we give them some direction, some information. We let them know how the company or school is organized, where the most important offices and people are, and so forth.

“To log in” means to enter information that allows you to be a member of or to use a particular computer system software or something similar. You might “log in” to a website. A “network” (network) is a system of connected computers in a company or organization. I asked Lucy, the new employee, “to come to my cubicle.” A “cubicle” (cubicle) is a small work space with short walls that don’t go up to the ceiling and no door. In a big office, there could be many cubicles. They are like little offices divided by small walls, but they’re not really offices because they’re not separate rooms.

I ask Lucy how she is settling in. When we ask someone, “How are you settling in?” we mean, “How are you getting used to” – or getting accustomed to – “your new situation?” You can “settle in” at a new school, a new house, or a new job. It just means that you are becoming familiar with things and adjusting, or adapting, to your new situation. Lucy says she is settling in “just fine.”

Then she says, “I appreciate you taking the time to help me out.” The expression “I appreciate you” plus the “-ing” or gerund form of a verb is a very common way of thanking someone. For example, “I appreciate you listening to our podcast” or



ESL Podcast 76 – Asking for and Giving Instructions

“I appreciate my friend taking me to the airport.” You can also appreciate someone for not doing something. “I appreciate you not punching me in the nose,” for example.

Lucy then asks, “May I ask you what we will be covering today?” This is another polite way of asking someone for something, a polite way of introducing a question. “May I ask you where the bathroom is?” or “May I ask you what we will be doing today?” Notice that the expression “May I ask you” is then followed by another question. It’s what we sometimes call an “embedded question,” which has a different subject-verb order than a regular question.

For example, in the question “What will we be covering, or going over, today?” the question word “what” comes first, the auxiliary verb “will” comes second, and the pronoun “we” comes third. That’s a normal question. But in an embedded question, or question within a question, we reverse the order of the verb and the pronoun so that “what will we” becomes “what we will,” as in, “May I ask you what we will be covering?” If you don’t say “May I ask you,” then it’s just a regular question: “What will we be covering?”

After Lucy asks me what we will be covering, I say, “Before I do that, could you tell me if you’ve worked with this program before?” “Could you tell me” is another polite way of asking someone a question. “Could you tell me if the movie starts at seven or at eight?” That’s another way of asking, “Does the movie starts at seven or at eight?” But beginning with “Could you tell me” is a more formal, more polite way of asking. I tell Lucy that knowing whether she has worked with the program before will help me figure out or help me understand how to proceed. “To proceed” (proceed) means to go forward, to move forward, to keep going.

I tell Lucy, “It’s a good idea to have the manual ready, since it can get a bit hairy.” The expression “it’s a good idea” is a polite way of saying, “You should do this.” “It’s a good idea to arrive early for your interview” means “You should arrive early for your interview.” It’s a little more indirect and polite way of suggesting something to someone. The word “hairy” (hairy) here doesn’t mean actual hair. Although you could describe someone with a lot of hair on his body as being “hairy.” Monkeys and bears are hairy. But here the word “hairy” just means difficult. “This could get hairy” means this situation could become difficult.

I tell Lucy, “You should start by logging in with your username and password.” “You should” is a very direct way of telling someone to do something. “You should tell me where the money is.” It’s not very polite, but it’s very common, particularly among people who know each other well or between a boss and her employee. I also tell Lucy, “Be sure to enter the password you created.” “Be sure



ESL Podcast 76 – Asking for and Giving Instructions

to” is another way of politely but directly reminding someone to do something. “Be sure to turn the light off” means remember to turn the light off.

I tell Lucy that she might want to keep her password in a safe place. The expression “You might want to” is similar to “it’s a good idea to.” “You might want to turn your computer off at the end of the day.” It’s a polite way of telling someone what you think the other person should do, that still has the form of a suggestion. So, you’re not saying, “You must do this,” but you’re saying, “Well, you might want to do this” – it’s a good idea. We use those two expressions interchangeably, one for the other. “You may want to”; “you might want to.” There’s really not much of a difference in meaning in normal conversation.

Finally, Lucy asks “May I trouble you to show me how to print reports out from the program.” “May I trouble (trouble) you” is another polite, formal way of asking someone for something. If you were talking to a stranger, someone you didn’t know, you might ask, “May I trouble you to tell me where the bathroom is?” Notice that was another example of a question within a question, what we call an “embedded question.” And so, the second question has the subject and verb in reverse order.

The subject comes first, and then the verb: “where the bathroom is.” If it were just a regular question, if you will, we would say, “Where is the bathroom?” But to be more polite, we would say, “May I trouble you to tell me where the bathroom is?” This is a very formal way of asking a favor of someone. If you know someone very well, it’s probably too formal. It might seem a little strange that you’re using this way of asking for information or for asking a question. However, if you are in a formal situation or if you don’t know someone, then it is perfectly okay.

Lucy asks about printing out something. “To print out” is another two-word phrasal verb where the preposition doesn’t really add much to the meaning other than emphasis. “To print out” just means to print. “I’m going to print out my report” means I’m going to print my report with the printer. But again, we often add an extra word – in this case, the preposition “out.”

There is a noun “printout” which is one word, that refers to the actual paper copy of what you print out from a computer. It could be computer information, it could be financial information, it could be a receipt, and so forth. So, “printout” functions both as a noun (as one word) and as a verb (as two words). I also tell Lucy to write down her password until she memorizes it. “Write down” is another two-word phrasal verb that really just means to write. I also tell Lucy to keep her password in a safe place, a place where no one will steal it.



ESL Podcast 76 – Asking for and Giving Instructions

Finally, I explain to her how to select, or choose, the network she wants to work with. I say after you do that, “you're all set” (set). The expression “all set” means completely ready – ready to go. If you're leaving on a big trip, you have to prepare your luggage, prepare your bags. When you're finished, you can say, “Okay, I'm all set” – I'm ready to go.

Now let's listen to the dialogue, this time at a normal speed.

[start of dialogue]

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ESL Podcast 76 – Asking for and Giving Instructions

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[end of dialogue]

Thanks to our wonderful script writer, Dr. Lucy Tse, for all her hard work, and thanks to you for listening.

From Los Angeles, California, I'm Jeff McQuillan. Come back and listen to us again here on ESL Podcast.

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