



## Real English Conversations: Discussing Daily Rituals 2

### INTRODUCTION

Hi English learners! Lori here, your teacher from [Betteratenglish.com](http://Betteratenglish.com). In this episode of Real English Conversations, you'll hear part 2 of my conversation with Kyla. We're discussing a book that we both really liked. It's called *Daily Rituals*, by Mason Currey.

The book describes the daily routines and habits of 161 creative people, people like writers, painters, musicians, philosophers, and scientists. Now, while I love the book, I don't recommend it for English learners at lower levels. This is because it has a lot of quotations from sources that are very old, and some of that language is very difficult. But if you are an upper-intermediate to advanced learner of English who needs to read English literature from different periods, it might be a great place to start. The chapters are very short — sometimes only a half a page. That means you can have the satisfaction of finishing a chapter without having to spend too much time. And it's easier to do deep language analysis and study if the text is not too long.

Right then...in this conversation you'll hear a lot of American English idiomatic expressions and a bit of slang. There are also many examples of a politeness strategy called "hedging." Remember, this was the first time Kyla and I ever spoke, so we were being careful not to be too direct. Listen particularly for language like "kind of," "sort of," and "I think." Hedges like these keep us from sounding too direct or firm in our opinions.

As always, you can find the full transcript, including a bonus vocabulary lesson at [betteratenglish.com/transcripts](http://betteratenglish.com/transcripts).

OK, here comes the conversation!

## CONVERSATION TRANSCRIPT

Kyla: Well, I was just going to say, that book came out of blog posts, **didn't it?**  
Like, was he blogging? *[note: [you can find the original blog here](#)]*

Lori: I believe the story is, he's – he's a...he's actually a published author;  
quite a **prolific** author, I think, in– in, like, magazines and things like  
that. And he did have this blog that, I guess, started out just as some  
kind of personal interest.

Kyla: Right.

Lori: And then someone **got in touch** with him saying, “Hey, do you...this  
would make a really cool book,” and so he did the extra work too to turn  
it into a book. And I'm glad he did because it's really **fascinating**.

Kyla: Yeah. [laughs]

Lori: [laughs] Really interesting.

Kyla: It is —

Lori: Um...

Kyla: Well, it's — oh, you **go ahead**.

Lori: No, no. Go ahead.

Kyla: I was– I was just going to say, it actually kind of makes me really...“Why  
wasn't I a writer?! It seems like they **have it so easy!**” [laughs]

Lori: [laughs] Is that based on– on reading about the habits of writers in the  
books or the book, I'm —

Kyla: Yes. Yeah, exactly. That was...by – by the end of it, it was just like, yeah.

Lori: **That's funny** you had that reaction because I **actually** thought that writ-  
ing seemed really, really **freaking** hard.

Kyla: Oh, yeah. [laughs]

Lori: [laughs] Like, really hard. I guess, some of the things that– that **struck**  
me that all the things that the writers do to try to make it easier on  
themselves, like, I really [laughs] — one thing, I can't remember which

person it was, but there was someone who was, like, totally taking **Benzdrine** which is, I guess, apparently, **Adderall**.

Kyla: Right. [laughs]

Lori: And after reading that passage, I was like, “Hey man! **I want to get me some of that** stuff! [laughs] How can I...that’s my problem too! I can’t focus. I can’t concentrate. Like, **sign me up!**” [laughs] And coffee, as well. I was surprised at how many people really depended on stimulants like coffee.

Kyla: Yeah. And it seems like, every, like, pretty much every ritual was like, “Well, I have my coffee,” and then, like — Oh, who is that? Like, the guy that would have... maybe it was, who would have, like, I don’t know. His butler had to choose the coffee each day and then **justify** his choice. Like, “This is —

Lori: Oh, I think it was the cup.

Kyla: Oh, it was the cup! He had to...that’s right. It was the cup. He had to justify why that cup was chosen. [laughs]

Lori: Yeah. Can you imagine working for a **dude** like that? Like, that’s part of your job, is to choose the cup and then explain **to his satisfaction**, “Why?”

Kyla: ...why you chose it. [laughs]

Lori: That was the cup of the day. Yeah, I can’t...I remember the— the passage but I can’t remember who it was, actually.

Kyla: That was exactly that but...

Lori: But yeah, hilarious. But what was it that you think...I mean, you’re obviously a creative person; you play guitar, you mentioned you’re— you’re creating an app and learning coding.



Kyla: Yup.

Lori: What it is that you think **drives** people to want to read a book...like this?

Kyla: [laughs] Well, definitely you want to know what other people like. “What other people are doing? What’s working for other people?” Maybe someone else has...you know, other creative people have clearly **dealt with** the same problems I’m dealing with, so “What- what is that other person’s solution?” I think that’s a big drive.

And one thing that I didn’t...I wasn’t expecting to get out of the book but that I really...something that I really appreciate about this book is, you sort of feel a connection to other people. You really realize, “Oh yeah. These, like, creative people all go through the same problems and have the same, sort of, **obstacles** they need to get through; they need to defeat.” But then also I was really...I guess, someone who’s always had a job or various jobs to keep the bills going, it was really inspiring to read about how many...like Mussorgsky, he was a **pharmacist**. He had a family and a **9-to-5**, and he managed to, you know, compose a huge body of work that’s still listened to and enjoyed today. And it kind of really made me feel better about how my life is going, I guess. And the amount of... yeah, the amount of creative people who are like, “No, we just need to find a little bit of time every day and we are able to create and still, sort of, go about keeping a regular life.”

Lori: Yeah, I thought that was really striking in the book as well. That the idea that even if you do have to work a regular job, you know, just to pay the bills and, you know, we all have to, to pay our bills and earn a living. And then maybe it’s nothing to do with the thing that- that you **burn for**, you know, with your- your creative passion. That even if you can just find the little time you can every day, or maybe not even every day, maybe a few times a week — that those hours add up...

Kyla: That’s right.

Lori: ...over time. And like, even, I think it was...I think that’s how Agatha Christie worked as well. I mean, who- who is like super, super, super prolific and successful **by any measure**. She was basically just this mar-

ried woman who was even kind of embarrassed about being thought of as a writer, or just found the idea of writing embarrassing. And she would sort of **sneak away** whenever she could to some quiet, undisturbed place. And I guess it even frustrated journalists because — later on when she was successful — because they would want to take a picture of her at her writing desk and she didn't actually have one. [laughs] But it was surprising how just that, that little bit every day and people who stick with it; they eventually are able to create these great things.

*Journalists wanted  
a photo like this.  
But they were disappointed.*



Kyla: That's right, yeah.

Lori: It's inspiring for those of us...

Kyla: Yes, yeah. [laughs]

Lori: ...who don't **have the luxury of** just devoting every day to the things that interest us.

## FINAL WORDS

That's all for this second part of the conversation. I hope you enjoyed it. Make sure to download the transcript and vocabulary lesson so you can read along to check your understanding. The transcript also has notes about the language we use in the conversation, and explains a lot of the vocabulary. You can find it at [betteratenglish.com/transcripts](http://betteratenglish.com/transcripts).

Until next time, keep on practicing your English. In fact, you can practice right now by leaving me a voice message or writing something on the Better at English Facebook page. You can find all the ways to get in touch at [Betteratenglish.com/contact](http://Betteratenglish.com/contact). Bye for now!

## VOCABULARY

### didn't it?

Tag question - hedging strategy.

Example: Thanks for *stepping up to the plate* and helping me clean the garage. I really appreciate it!

### prolific

If someone is prolific, they complete a lot of work

Example: Steven King is a prolific author. He's published more than 50 novels and 200 short stories.

### fascinating

extremely interesting

The book was so fascinating I couldn't put it down. I had to read the whole thing in one day.

### to get in touch with

to contact someone so you can communicate with them

Example: I need to get in touch with Nigel. Do you have his phone number?

### go ahead

When you accidentally interrupt someone, you can say *go ahead* to encourage them to take their turn talking. Sometimes each speaker wants to be polite and let the other one talk, so they tell each other "go ahead" many times before one of them continues. Note the example below from the conversation:

Kyla: It is —  
Lori: Um... [*accidentally interrupting Kyla*]  
Kyla: Well, it's — oh, you go ahead. [*being polite, wanting Lori to continue*]  
Lori: No, no. Go ahead. [*knows she interrupted Kyla, wants her to continue*]  
Kyla: I was — I was just going to say, it actually kind of makes me really...“Why wasn't I a writer?! It seems like they have it so easy!” [*Kyla chooses to take her turn and speak*]

## to have it (so) easy

To have no difficulties, to be in a situation with no troubles or difficulties. Often used to talk about how other people seem to have fewer difficulties than you do yourself.

Example (a woman speaking): Men *have it so easy!* They don't have to put on makeup every morning!

## that's funny

*Funny* in this context means “surprising.” Lori is showing that she is surprised that Kyla's opinion is so different from her own.

## actually

Actually is a signal that you are going to say something that contradicts what someone else has said. It makes it slightly more polite.

Example:

A: Being a writer looks easy.

B: *Actually*, I think it's probably more difficult than it looks.

## freaking

In this context, *freaking* is used as an **intensifier**, a word that makes another word stronger. General intensifiers in English are words like *very*, *really*, *so*, etc. *Freaking* is a *euphemism* for the extremely vulgar intensifier *fucking*. Euphemisms are “neutral” words or phrases that replace offensive or vulgar language.

In the conversation, Lori combines *freaking* with *really*:

Lori: That's funny you had that reaction because I actually thought that writing seemed *really, really freaking* hard.

Intensifiers go before adverbs and adjectives. For example:

- 1) She is *freaking* beautiful!
- 2) That is a *freaking* huge pizza!

## **to be struck by something**

In this context, *to be struck (by something)* means that it impresses you

Example: One thing that *struck me* was how many writers needed stimulants like drugs and coffee to be creative.

## **Benzedrine**

A type of stimulant drug (amphetamine) that wakes you up and gives you extra energy

## **Adderall**

An amphetamine commonly used to treat ADHD

## **I want to get me some of that**

A slang expression people use when they see something attractive that they want to have for themselves. Often used to indicate romantic or sexual interest.

## **sign me up!**

An informal expression that shows you want to be included in something or join a certain group or activity. Often used when talking about hypothetical situations.

Example: Many artists used coffee and other stimulants to increase their creativity. Sign me up!



## to justify

to show good reasons for doing something

Example: I don't see how anyone can *justify* smoking cigarettes. They are deadly!

## dude

A very informal American English slang word for *man*, *guy*, or *you*. Women also are sometimes called *dude* or the "feminine" form *dudette*.

Example [one friend to another]: *Dude*, I'm starving. Do you want to order a pizza?

## (to do something) to someone's satisfaction

A rather formal way of talking about doing something in a way that someone thinks is acceptable, pleasing, or good enough

Example (to a boss): I hope my report is *to your satisfaction*.

## to drive someone to (do) something

To cause someone to do something

Example: Her husband's constant complaining finally *drove* her to leave him.

The noun *drive* means motivation.

Example: Animals have a strong *drive* to eat. It's important for survival.

## to deal with

to manage or cope with something

Example: I am not good at *dealing with* large amounts of email. It takes so much time to answer it all!

## pharmacist

A person who is professionally trained to prepare medicines and give them to people. Pharmacists usually work in a *pharmacy*, which can be located in a hospital or a shop.

Example: The *pharmacist* gave me my medicine and answered my questions about it.

## 9-to-5 (also written nine to five or 9-5)

A job with working hours from nine in the morning to five in the evening. These are the traditional times of a normal working day. Nine to five can be used as an adjective, with a word like *job*

Example: I want to quit my boring *nine-to-five* job and start my own business.

It can also be used as a noun all on its own (the “job” is understood).

Example: I want to quit my boring *nine to five* and start my own business.

## to burn for something

If you *burn for* something you are passionate about it and enjoy doing it very much

Example: Some writers absolutely *burn for* their writing. They must write to feel alive.

## by any measure

By any criteria you use to measure something, the result is the same

Example: Bill Gates is a successful person *by any measure*.

## to sneak away

to leave a place quietly and carefully so that other people don't notice

Example: Agatha Christie used to *sneak away* to write because she felt embarrassed about it.

# Better@ English

## to have the luxury of (doing) something

to do or have something pleasant or desirable that you normally can't afford

Example: They don't *have the luxury of* unlimited time to devote to their hobbies and passions. They have to work for a living.

---

 FIND A NATIVE ENGLISH TEACHER ONLINE [START TALKING](#)



Find us on  
**facebook**