



ESL Podcast 585 – Being Clear or Confusing

GLOSSARY

confused – feeling puzzled; not understanding what is happening or what is being discussed

* Taku was really confused when he went to the conference room for the big meeting and nobody else was there.

to keep (something) straight – to be able to understand something by keeping it well organized; to avoid confusion

* It's hard to keep all the little kids' jackets, hats, and gloves straight. Who does this jacket belong to?

convoluted – complicated, especially when involving many layers or many different pieces; very difficult to understand or follow

* The book editor told Lee that he would have a hard time finding a publisher for such a convoluted novel.

twists and turns – with many unexpected changes in direction or ideas, making something difficult to follow or understand

* The movie is really interesting, with lots of twists and turns that keep the viewers wondering what will happen next.

straightforward – direct; uncomplicated; plain

* We were hoping the tax attorney could give us a straightforward answer, but instead he said he'd have to research the tax laws.

for once – used to talk about something that happens very rarely or never, although one wishes it would happen more often

* It would be nice for my wife to offer to mow the lawn for once. I have to do it every week!

complexity – having a lot of complications or being very complicated and complex; being difficult to understand because many details are involved or because something requires specialized knowledge

* These students are fascinated by the complexity of higher-level math.

to go off on tangents – to begin talking or writing about something that is not directly related to the main subject, often changing the subject unintentionally

* It's impossible to have a short meeting with Ademir, because he's always going off on tangents and talking about things that have nothing to do with our project.



ESL Podcast 585 – Being Clear or Confusing

irrelevant – not relevant; not related to what is being discussed; not useful or important for one's intended purpose

* How productive you've been in the past is completely irrelevant. What really matters to us is how productive you are now.

to contradict – to counter or disagree with what has just been said; to say the opposite of something else

* The advice my mother gave me contradicts with what my teacher told me to do.

intricate – detailed and involved; with many small parts and details that work together

* How did you learn to paint such intricate portraits?

crystal clear – very clear; very direct and easy to understand, without any doubt or confusion

* The students appreciate Wataru's explanations, which are always crystal clear.

detail – a single, small piece of information about something; fact

* It's hard to make a decision without knowing all the details.

delusions of grandeur – the idea that one is much more important or powerful than one actually is, often associated with mental illness

* Ever since Adela earned her graduate degree, she has been suffering from delusions of grandeur, acting like she's the most important person in the world.

to seek professional help – to meet with a doctor, especially a psychologist or psychiatrist, to become healthier or to find a solution to a problem

* If the fever persists for more than one week, seek professional help.



ESL Podcast 585 – Being Clear or Confusing

COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

1. Which type of story has the most irrelevant information?
 - a) A convoluted story.
 - b) A straightforward story.
 - c) An crystal clear story.
2. Why does Laurent think Bethany should seek professional help?
 - a) Because she thinks she can talk to Shakespeare.
 - b) Because she needs to take a writing class.
 - c) Because she thinks she writes much better than she actually does.

WHAT ELSE DOES IT MEAN?

for once

The phrase “for once,” in this podcast, is used to talk about something that happens very rarely or never, although one wishes it would happen more often: “Just for once, it would be really nice to come home to a clean house and have dinner waiting for me.” The similar phrase “at once” means immediately: “Come to my office at once!” The phrase “once more” or “once again” means again, or happening another time after something has already happened many times: “Let me explain this to you once again.” Finally, the phrase “all at once” means suddenly and unexpectedly: “We were sitting at home, enjoying a quiet dinner, when all at once we heard a loud explosion and then the neighbors’ shouting.”

detail

In this podcast, the word “detail” means a small fact, or a single, small piece of information about something: “When redecorating their home, they paid attention to all the details, including paint colors, textures, fabrics, and more.” The phrase “down to the last detail” means completely, without leaving anything out: “The instructions were extremely clear, down to the last detail.” The phrase “to have an eye for detail” means having the ability or talent for paying attention to even the smallest things: “Her success as an artist is due to her having an eye for detail.” Finally, in the military or in a police force, a “detail” is a specific assignment or the group that one works with: “How long have you been working on the security detail?”



ESL Podcast 585 – Being Clear or Confusing

CULTURE NOTE

In the United States, there are many “storytelling” (the art of sharing stories orally, without using written information) “festivals” (fairs; celebrations and competitions). Some storytelling festivals are only for professional storytellers, while others are for “amateurs” (people who do something for fun and don’t charge money to do it).

Some festivals last only a few hours, but others last several days. During the festivals, each storyteller has a certain amount of time to tell a story to the audience. At many festivals, the storytellers are “judged” (evaluated) on how well they told the story and how well they “captured” (caught) the audience’s attention and “imagination” (ability to believe something that isn’t really true).

Many of the storytelling festivals are geographically based, meaning that all the storytellers live in a particular state or “region” (large area). Other storytelling festivals are based on a particular theme, such as Native American stories, fairy tales, historical events, or stories about nature.

The National Storytelling Network is a membership organization that tries to improve storytelling throughout the country, promoting it as a “performing art” (related to acting, singing, dancing, etc.), a “literacy tool” (something that helps people learn to read), and an important “cultural element” (part of culture). The organization publishes Storytelling Magazine and organizes a national conference where storytellers can meet to “network” (make professional connections and build relationships with other people) and share ideas and “techniques” (ways of doing things) with other storytellers. At the conference, storytellers can attend many classes and workshops to improve their storytelling abilities.

Comprehension Questions Correct Answers: 1 – a; 2 – c



ESL Podcast 585 – Being Clear or Confusing

COMPLETE TRANSCRIPT

Welcome to English as a Second Language Podcast number 585: Being Clear or Confusing.

This is English as a Second Language Podcast number 585. I'm your host, Dr. Jeff McQuillan, coming to you from the Center for Educational Development in beautiful Los Angeles, California.

Our website is eslpod.com. Go there to download a Learning Guide. The Learning Guide will help you improve your English even faster than just listening to this podcast. It will also make you healthy, wealthy, and wise!

This episode is called "Being Clear or Confusing." It's a dialogue between Bethany and Laurent about explaining things, especially to someone else, that may be difficult for them to understand. Let's get started.

[start of dialogue]

Laurent: So I'm confused. Who's David again?

Bethany: David is my roommate's friend's brother. Haven't you been listening?

Laurent: I have, but how am I supposed to keep all of these people straight? Your stories are always so convoluted, with too many twists and turns. Why don't you try telling a straightforward story for once?

Bethany: My stories are only confusing for people who don't pay attention or who can't deal with complexity.

Laurent: Complexity? Is that what you call going off on tangents and including completely irrelevant information? Half the time the end of the story contradicts the beginning!

Bethany: You just don't appreciate intricate plots. My stories are crystal clear to anyone who pays attention. Good stories have lots of detail. Just ask Shakespeare.

Laurent: Talk about delusions of grandeur! When you start comparing yourself to Shakespeare, it's time for you to seek professional help!



ESL Podcast 585 – Being Clear or Confusing

[end of dialogue]

Our dialogue begins with Laurent saying, “So I’m confused.” “To be confused” means not to understand what is happening or what is being discussed. We might also say to feel puzzled. Laurent says, “Who’s David again?” Obviously, we’ve come in in the middle of a story in this dialogue, and Laurent is trying to get Bethany to explain it better to him.

Bethany says, “David is my roommate’s friend’s brother.” Notice in English that you can have a possessive of in front of a possessive in front of a possessive. Here, we have “my roommate’s friend’s brother.” This is the brother of my roommate’s friend. Bethany says, “Haven’t you been listening?” Laurent says, “I have, but how am I supposed to keep all of these people straight?” “To keep (something) straight” (straight) means to be able to understand something by keeping it well organized in your mind. If you’re reading a very complicated novel with lots of different people in it – lots of different characters, like one of the Russian novels from the 19th and 20th centuries, they’re very difficult perhaps to understand – to keep everyone straight, to understand who is who.

Laurent says that he cannot keep all of these people in Bethany’s story straight. “Your stories are always so convoluted,” he says, “with too many twists and turns.” “To be convoluted” (convoluted) means to be very complicated, very difficult to understand or to follow. “Twists (twists) and turns” is an expression that means there are many unexpected changes, making the story difficult to understand. Sometimes you will go to see a movie and there’ll be many different twists and turns, there’ll be many different changes in the story that make it difficult to understand. Laurent says, “Why don’t you try telling a straightforward story for once?” “Straightforward” (one word) means uncomplicated, not difficult to understand, simple, direct. “For once” is an expression we use to mean that it doesn’t happen very often, that something is very rare; you want it to happen more often. In this case, Laurent wants Bethany to tell a simple, easy to understand story more often. That’s why he says, “Why don’t you try telling a straightforward story for once?” The “for once” implies Bethany doesn’t do it very often, but that she should. For example, it would be nice if my neighbor stopped yelling into his cell phone outside of my window for once, implying that he does it all the time – and he does!

Bethany says, “My stories are only confusing for people who don’t pay attention, who can’t deal with complexity.” “To pay attention” means to listen, to try to understand, to follow something. “Complexity” means very complicated, very convoluted, very difficult to understand because there are many different parts of



ESL Podcast 585 – Being Clear or Confusing

the story. Bethany says that her stories are only confusing to people who can't "deal with" complexity; that is, they can't handle – they don't know how to behave or think in a certain situation.

Laurent says, "Complexity? Is that what you call going off on tangents and including completely irrelevant information?" "To go off on a tangent" (tangent) means to begin talking or writing about something that is not directly related to the topic. I do this all the time here on ESL Podcast and English Café. I go off on a tangent; I start talking about something that isn't directly related to this episode. Some people really hate that; they don't like it, they can't follow the story. Laurent says that Bethany is including in her story completely irrelevant information. "Irrelevant" means not related to what is being discussed, not connected to your main topic. Laurent says, "Half the time (meaning most of the time, or at least 50 percent of the time) the end of the story contradicts the beginning!" "To contradict" means to disagree with what has been already said, to say something opposite of what is said. You should never contradict your wife, for example.

Bethany says, "You just don't appreciate intricate plots." Something that is "intricate" (intricate) is something that is very detailed, we might say very involved; there are many different parts that work together. You can have something physical that is intricate: a watch, for example, or a piece of jewelry. In this case, Bethany is talking about the plots of her stories. A "plot" is what happens first, then what happens next, and so forth – the actual events of the story. She says her plots are intricate. "My stories," she says, "are crystal clear to anyone who pays attention." The expression "crystal clear" means very direct, very easy to understand. Very clear – no confusion. She says, "Good stories have a lot of detail." A "detail" is a single, small piece of information about something, a single fact. "Detail," however, has other meanings in English, and those can be found in the Learning Guide. Bethany says, "Just ask Shakespeare." Shakespeare, of course, was the great playwright who wrote very complicated, interesting plays. "Just ask" is an expression we use when we are trying to compare ourselves perhaps to someone else, or to make reference to someone else. You're using that someone else as an example of something. For example: "The study of geometry is easy, just ask Euclid."

Laurent says, "Talk about delusions of grandeur." "Delusions" are things that you imagine that are not true. "Grandeur" is something very powerful, something very important. "To have delusions of grandeur," however, means that you think that your ideas or that you are very important, very powerful, more important than you actually are. It's often something we would associate with someone who



ESL Podcast 585 – Being Clear or Confusing

perhaps has some sort of mental illness – someone who’s crazy. So Laurent says, “Talk about delusions of grandeur.” “Talk about” means this is a good example of. “When you start comparing yourself to Shakespeare, it’s time for you to seek professional help!” meaning when you get to the point that you are comparing yourself to Shakespeare, it’s time for you “to seek,” to look for, to get professional help. Usually, “professional help” refers to a doctor, especially a psychiatrist or perhaps a psychologist that will help you find a problem. Usually what you are saying is that the other person is crazy.

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

[start of dialogue]

Laurent: So I’m confused. Who’s David again?

Bethany: David is my roommate’s friend’s brother. Haven’t you been listening?

Laurent: I have, but how am I supposed to keep all of these people straight? Your stories are always so convoluted, with too many twists and turns. Why don’t you try telling a straightforward story for once?

Bethany: My stories are only confusing for people who don’t pay attention or who can’t deal with complexity.

Laurent: Complexity? Is that what you call going off on tangents and including completely irrelevant information? Half the time the end of the story contradicts the beginning!

Bethany: You just don’t appreciate intricate plots. My stories are crystal clear to anyone who pays attention. Good stories have lots of detail. Just ask Shakespeare.

Laurent: Talk about delusions of grandeur! When you start comparing yourself to Shakespeare, it’s time for you to seek professional help!

[end of dialogue]

The scripts for ESL Podcast are never confused or convoluted; they don’t go off on tangents. They’re crystal clear, and yet intricate. Thank you, Dr. Lucy Tse, who writes them.



English as a Second Language Podcast
www.eslpod.com

ESL Podcast 585 – Being Clear or Confusing

From Los Angeles, California, I'm Jeff McQuillan. Thank you for listening. Come back and listen to us next time on ESL Podcast.

English as a Second Language Podcast is written and produced by Dr. Lucy Tse, hosted by Dr. Jeff McQuillan, copyright 2010 by the Center for Educational Development.