



TOPICS

Ask an American: The meaning of work; apart from versus in terms of; off the cuff; also versus as well

GLOSSARY

to earn a living – to make enough money to pay for the things one needs in life, such as housing, food, clothing, and transportation

* She works as an engineer to earn a living, but her real passion is skiing.

to come down to – to be basically equal to something; for something to be the main essence or most important part of something else

* The success of any project comes down to our ability to work together as a team.

paycheck – a small piece of paper that one can take to the bank and exchange for money, given to one by an employer for the work that one has done

* Oscar already spent all his money, so he can't buy anything else until he gets his next paycheck on Friday.

hustle – to sell something and try to get people to buy something

* They spent all day at their hustle, trying to get people to buy their special designer watches.

greatly – very; very much

* Once Debbie started exercising, her health greatly improved.

debt – money owed to a person or a business

* If Beya studies at Princeton University, she'll have a lot of debt by the time she graduates.

to pay off – to pay all the money that is owed on something, so that one fully owns that thing

* Lilly didn't have enough money to pay for the car with cash, so she took out a loan that she's going to pay off over five years.



ENGLISH CAFÉ – 226

chain – a series of events or things that are connected to each other

* All living things are part of a food chain, where plants are eaten by small animals, which are eaten by medium-sized animals, which are eaten by larger animals.

defined – identified as something

* Famous musicians are defined by their music, but their close friends and relatives know that they have many other interests and talents.

imaginative – able to think of new and interesting ideas, normally related to things that don't actually happen in real life

* Why do so many imaginative children become adults with no imagination?

apart from – outside of; except for; not in reference to (relating to) something

* Apart from going to the mall, there's really nothing to do in this town.

in terms of – concerning; regarding; relating to

* Was the project successful in terms of making children read more?

off the cuff – without much preparation or thought ahead of time; improvising

* Israel lost the notes he'd prepared for his presentation, so he had to speak off the cuff.

also – in addition

* Pauline likes to eat fruits and vegetables, but she also enjoys ice cream and cookies.

as well – in addition to

* Pack your swimsuit, as well as sunscreen and sandals.



WHAT INSIDERS KNOW

She Works Hard for the Money

In 1983, American singer Donna Summer “released” (produced and shared with the public) a song called “She Works Hard for the Money”. It was a popular dance song in the 1980s, and you can still hear it on the radio today. More than five million copies of the “single” (a tape or disc with just one song) were sold.

Here’s the “chorus” (the part of a song that is repeated many times):

She works hard “for the money” (to make money)
So hard for it “honey” (used when talking to someone one cares about)
She works hard for the money
So you better “treat her right” (be nice to her)

Based on the chorus, it seems like she is working only to make money, but some of the “verses” (sections of the song where the notes are repeated, but the words are different), “tell a different story” (give a different impression). They make it seem like she is working because she enjoys helping other people and knowing that her work “matters” (is important) to them. Here are the lyrics to two verses:

Twenty-five years have
“Come and gone” (passed)
And she's seen a lot of tears
Of the ones who “come in” (come to where she works)
They really seem to need her there

It's a “sacrifice” (difficult to do) working “day to day” (every day)
For little money just “tips” (money paid in addition to the bill, like in a restaurant) for pay
But it's worth it all
Just to hear them say that they care

Donna wrote the song based on the story of an “exhausted” (very tired from working too much) “bathroom attendant” (a person who keeps a bathroom clean and, at a nice bar or restaurant, gives people soap, towels, and mints).



COMPLETE TRANSCRIPT

You're listening to ESL Podcast's English Café number 226.

This is ESL Podcast's English Café episode 226. 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. On it, you can visit our ESL Podcast Store. You can also download the Learning Guide for this episode, and every current episode. The Learning Guide contains lots of additional information, including a complete transcript of this episode, as well as vocabulary words, definitions, sample sentences, cultural notes, and a comprehension quiz.

On this Café, we're going to have another one of our Ask an American segments, where we listen to other native speakers talking at a normal rate of speech – a normal speed. We're going to listen to them and explain what they are saying. Today we're going to talk about the meaning of work, or why and how work is important to people. We're also going to have a chance to listen to several different kinds of accents. All of these are from New York City, or least the people we're going to listen to are from New York City. But you'll get a chance to hear other accents other than Southern California or Minnesota. And as always, we'll answer a few of your questions. Let's get started.

Our topic on this Café is an Ask an American segment about the meaning of work. We're going to listen to some people talking about how and why their work is important to them. These are voices that are all recorded in New York City, so people are going to be speaking a little faster. People in New York have the reputation for talking very fast, and some of the people we'll listen to today do talk rather fast. But don't worry if you don't understand it the first time, we'll go back and explain everything they're saying.

We're first going to listen to a law student. We're actually listening to an interview on Voice of America. You're going to hear the law student speaking first; his name is John. And then, the Voice of America interviewer will ask him another question, and then he'll speak some more. Let's give it a listen, and then come back and talk about it.

[recording]



ENGLISH CAFÉ – 226

Well, work is what you do to earn a living, you know? I mean, that's essentially what it comes down to. It's what you do all day to earn your paycheck.

Is work only about your paycheck?

Well, I mean, you know, it's going to vary from person to person. Like some people do what they love and they're obviously in it for more than the money. There's other people going to a job they hate every week just to get a check, you know? So it really depends on the individual.

[end of recording]

Okay, well, that was fast! Let's go back and try to figure out what he said. He begins by saying that work is what you do to earn a living. The phrase "to earn (earn) a living" means to make enough money to pay for the things that you need in life, like housing, food, clothing, transportation, beer, all of the necessities – the things you absolutely need in life. Then he says, "I mean, that's essentially what it comes down to." "I mean" is one of those phrases that native speakers use when they're trying to think of something else, or sometimes when they want to clarify – when they want to be even more specific about something. He says, "I mean, that's essentially what it comes down to." Earning a living is what it comes down to. The expression "comes down to" means to be equal to something; in this case, it's what is the most important, the most essential thing. For example, a person might say that she became a doctor for many reasons, but it came down to her desire to help people. It came down to – the most important thing was her desire to help people, even though there were many reasons why she became a doctor. Well here, John, our law student, is saying that working comes down to earning a living, making money for things that you need.

He continues, "It's what you do all day to earn your paycheck." Normally a check is a small piece of paper that you take to the bank and exchange for money, or give to someone else instead of giving them cash. A "paycheck" is the check that comes from your employer, the company you work for, usually every one to two weeks, sometimes every month. This is the money that the company is paying you as an employee; that's your paycheck. John says that it's what you do all day – work is what you do all day to earn your paycheck.

Then the interviewer asks him a question; he says, "Is work only about your paycheck?" meaning is that the only thing that's important. John answers, "Well, I mean, you know," these are all filler expressions – that is, he's filling up the time thinking of something to say, but he says some very quickly. "Well, I mean, you



ENGLISH CAFÉ – 226

know, it's going to vary (it's going to change) from person to person," meaning everyone will be different. Then he says, "Like..." meaning for example. "Like some people do what they love and they're obviously in it for more than the money." When we say someone "is in it for (something)," we mean that's their motivation, that's the reason for doing something. So if you love what you do in your work, then you're in it for something in addition to, or other than, the money. John then says, "There's other people (there are other people, we would normally say) going to a job they hate every week just to get the check, you know?" "Just to get the check," they are working only for the paycheck, nothing else. "So it really depends on the individual," John says. Let's listen one more time.

[recording]

Well, work is what you do to earn a living, you know? I mean, that's essentially what it comes down to. It's what you do all day to earn your paycheck.

Is work only about your paycheck?

Well, I mean, you know, it's going to vary from person to person. Like some people do what they love and they're obviously in it for more than the money. There's other people going to a job they hate every week just to get a check, you know? So it really depends on the individual.

[end of recording]

Next, we hear from a man named Vab (Vab) who stands on the street and tries to sell CDs of his music. We'll listen first, and then we'll explain what he says.

[recording]

Like, right now, I'm standing on a corner and I'm stopping people, collecting donations for my music. That's...that's my hustle. That's what I do. That's work to me.

[end of recording]

Vab says, "Like, right now (meaning at this time), I'm standing on a corner and I'm stopping people, collecting donations for my music." "To be standing on a corner" means you are standing at the intersection of two streets, where two streets come together, usually at a 90 degree angle. He's standing on the corner



ENGLISH CAFÉ – 226

and he's stopping people; he's trying to get people who are walking by to stop, and is collecting donations for his music. He calls them "donations," but really it's the price for his CD. This is very popular in New York; when you walk down the streets of New York sometimes you'll see people selling things on the street, often without permission. But, there's so many people in New York it's hard to control that.

Vab says, "That's my hustle." "Hustle" (hustle) is normally a word we use as a verb; "to hustle" means to move very quickly. If you're old enough, you may remember a popular American dance song in the 1970s called "Do the Hustle". [Jeff sings] *Do the hustle...* There are no other words, just "do the hustle," those are the only words in the song. In this sentence, however, Vab is using it as a noun to mean selling something, trying to get people to buy something. He's selling CDs, that's his hustle – that's his job, that's what he's trying to do. So hustling – working hard, moving quickly, trying to get people to buy from him – is his work. He says, "That's what I do. That's work to me (that's what I do as work)." Let's listen again.

[recording]

Like, right now, I'm standing on a corner and I'm stopping people, collecting donations for my music. That's...that's my hustle. That's what I do. That's work to me.

[end of recording]

The next person we're going to listen to is a man named Ricardo, originally from Colombia but now living in New York City. He's a taxi driver (a cab driver). Let's listen to him talk about his job.

[recording]

It's not a great skilled job, you know what I mean? But the money's good. You know, you take care of your family. You pay all the debts, all the bills, all the...uh, you know, whatever you have. It's paid off two houses!

[end of recording]

Ricardo says that his job, being a taxi driver, is not a great – I think he means greatly – skilled job. "Greatly" means a lot here. So it is not a very or high-skilled job. A skilled job is something that usually requires education and some sort of



training and expertise – being an expert. A doctor, a mechanic, an electrician; these are all examples of skilled jobs. The opposite would be unskilled work.

Ricardo says that driving a taxi isn't a greatly skilled job. Again, "greatly" here means very much. A taxi driver does need some skills, like knowing how to drive and how to get around the city, where to go, but according to Ricardo it isn't a very or highly skilled job. He says, however, that the money is good, meaning he can make a lot of money as a taxi driver. With that money, he's able to take care of his family and pay for the things that he and his family needs. So he says, "You know, you take care of your family. You pay all the debts, all the bills, all the...uh, you know, whatever you have." Remember, "uh" and "you know" are fillers; he's thinking of the thing he wants to say.

He says that taxi drivers can pay their debts and bills, at least he can. A "debt" (debt) is money that you owe someone, or owe a business. Many Americans have credit card debt, where they spend too much on their credit card, and now they have to pay the credit card company back with interest. Of course, you pay your credit card when you use it, but if you pay it every month in full they won't charge you interest. But having credit card debt means that you probably have not paid your bill in full, and therefore you owe something to that company – Visa, MasterCard, and so forth. Ricardo is saying that the money he makes as a taxi driver allows him – lets him pay his debts and bills.

The money has also allowed him to pay off two houses. To "pay off" is a two-word phrasal verb meaning to pay the money that you owe someone, so that you own something completely. For example if you buy a house in the United States, and you borrow 100,000 dollars to buy that house from the bank, you pay a small amount of money to the bank every month, usually for about 30 years. After 30 years, you will have paid off your home. "To pay off your home" means to pay for the loan that you got from the bank, what we call a "mortgage" if you're buying a house.

Ricardo says that his job paid off two houses, meaning he made enough money to pay for his mortgages. Sometimes people pay their home loans – their mortgage loans before the end of the loan agreement, sometimes in 4-5, maybe 10 years. That's not the common way people do it, but it does happen. Let's listen to Ricardo talk about it once again.

[recording]



ENGLISH CAFÉ – 226

It's not a great skilled job, you know what I mean? But the money's good. You know, you take care of your family. You pay all the debts, all the bills, all the...uh, you know, whatever you have. It's paid off two houses!

[end of recording]

The next person we're going to listen to is named Puru (Puru). He's a software engineer. I believe he's originally from India; I'm not sure. He has an accent that sounds like it is Indian English. He talks about the importance of work in the general society – in the general economy, as well as the time he spends working. Let's listen.

[recording]

I am spending my money. I am buying food or something. Other people are able to sell it. They're able to survive. So this whole chain has to...has to go on. Most of my life goes into work, and then I...I try to steal some time for fun.

[end of recording]

Puru says that because he's working, "I am spending my money. I am buying food or something. Other people are able to sell it." What he's saying is because he makes money he spends money, and that allows other people to stay in business. That's the way the economy works. Because people make money by selling something to him, they're able to survive.

Next he says, "So this whole chain has to go on." Normally a chain is a long string of many small circles of metal that are connected or hooked together, and they make a very strong metal, almost like a rope. Many necklaces that you wear around your neck are made of chains, and of course, big chains are sometimes used in industry – in making things. In this context, though, a chain is a series of events that are connected to each other. A is connected to B, which is connected to C. A buys something from B, B has enough money then to buy something from C, and so on. Puru says that this chain has to be able to continue, and that's why it's important for him and everyone else to work.

At the end, he says that he puts most of his life goes into work; "Most of my life goes into work," he says, "then I try to steal some time for fun." "Steal" here means take time away from his work time in order to have fun. He doesn't really mean he steals it; he takes it. Let's listen one more time.



ENGLISH CAFÉ – 226

[recording]

I am spending my money. I am buying food or something. Other people are able to sell it. They're able to survive. So this whole chain has to...has to go on. Most of my life goes into work, and then I...I try to steal some time for fun.

[end of recording]

Finally, we're going to listen to a woman named Dale who is a writer, she's going to talk about her work. Let's listen.

[recording]

I find, particularly in cities, people say, "What do you do?" and that really defines you. I'm content with that because I'm happy to be defined as a writer, which implies being creative and imaginative and interesting.

[end of recording]

Dale says, "I find, particularly in cities (meaning especially in cities – big cities), people say, "What do you do?" (meaning what kind of work do you have). She says, "That really defines you." When we say something "defines you," we mean it's something that you have an identification with; you identify with something. Being a podcaster is one of things that defines me; it's one of the things that tells you who I am. Of course it's not the only thing; I'm also a son, a brother, a husband, a teacher, an applied linguist, a baseball fan, a lover of cats. These are all things that define me – well, all but one of those!

So Dale is saying that your job is one of the things that defines you. She then says, "I'm content with that (I'm happy with that; I'm satisfied with that idea that work defines me), because," she says, "I'm happy to be defined as a writer." Somebody who writes for a newspaper, a magazine, someone who writes books, someone who write scripts; these are all writers.

She says, "I'm defined as a writer, which implies being creative and imaginative and interesting." When we say being a writer "implies" these things, we mean it makes people think that you are creative, you have lots of good new ideas, you're imaginative; you can use your imagination to think about things in a different way, and you're interesting – people are interested in you. Dale has what we would call a very high opinion of herself; she thinks she's creative and



imaginative and interesting just because she's a writer. Hmm, maybe! Let's listen one more time.

[recording]

I find, particularly in cities, people say, "What do you do?" and that really defines you. I'm content with that because I'm happy to be defined as a writer, which implies being creative and imaginative and interesting.

[end of recording]

So we've heard several different people living in New York with different accents talking about their view of work. Now let's answer a few of your questions.

Our first question comes from Mohamed (Mohamed) in Ireland, but originally from Sudan in Africa. Mohamed wants to know the difference between the expression "apart from" and "in terms of."

"Apart from" means except for, or outside of, not relating to something else. For example: "Beth's whole family is nice, apart from her uncle," meaning everyone is nice except, or but, the uncle. "This painter is a genius, apart from that painting he did last week," that was terrible, but everything else is great.

"In terms of" means concerning, regarding, relating to: "In terms of the money, it was a great job." "In terms of the number of hours you had to work, it was a terrible job." "In terms of," here, refers to the topic that you're talking about, the thing that you are comparing it with, or the particular subject of your comment. I'm talking about my job, I'm talking about the money, and about how much I work – in terms of the money, in terms of the hours. Or you could say, "Richard is brilliant in art, but in terms of mathematics he's not so good. He feels lost." "In terms of mathematics" here means when we are talking about mathematics, that specific topic.

Both "apart from" and "in terms of" begin prepositional phrases; "from" and "of" are prepositions. When using these phrases usually you have to follow them with a noun. "Apart from getting to bed so late, Alex liked to go out with his friends." Notice that after the word "from" you hear "getting," which is a gerund, which is a noun form of the verb. It's not possible to say "Apart from he gets to bed so late, Alex likes to go out with friends." That would not be correct because prepositional phrases cannot have separate subjects and verbs, as this one did.



Jargal (Jargal) – I’m sure I’m mispronouncing that – originally from Russia, now living in Canada, wants to know the meaning of the expression “off the cuff” (cuff).

When you do something “off the cuff,” you do it without much preparation, without thinking about it before you do it. Someone may say, “I made some off the cuff comment to my sister about how much I disliked her husband.” I’m kidding, of course! I love my sister and her husband. “Off the cuff” would mean you didn’t prepare for it. Sometimes people use this as an excuse for something they said that they later realized was a bad thing to say, not a good thing to say. They said, “Oh, well, I did that off the cuff. You see, I...I really didn’t think about it first.” It’s usually best not to make off the cuff comments; they can get you into trouble.

Finally, Gilles (Gilles) from France wants to know the difference between “also” (also) and “as well.” Both “also” and “as well” mean in addition: “I would like the salad, and the soup as well.” I want both. Or, “Janine will also have the steak.” She’s going to have salad and the steak, so it’s in addition.

“Also” and “as well” mean the same thing, but they often go in different parts of the sentence. “Also” can go in between what we call a helping verb (a verb like “will” or “do”) and the main verb. For example: “The dog is going to the park, and he is also going to the veterinarian (the doctor).” Notice that we put “also” in between “is going.” “Also” can also go at the end of the sentence: “He is going to the park also.”

“As well” cannot be placed in between the helping verb and the main verb. You can’t say, “He is as well going to the park.” No. “As well” almost always goes at the end of the sentence; it doesn’t have to, but it often does. “Are you go to the park as well?” Really, this is what sounds better to the native speaker. Technically, you can put “as well” in another place, but usually it goes at the end of the sentence.

There’s a third word, “too” (too), that can go at the end of the sentence, and also means “also” or “as well.” “He’s going to the park, too.”

We welcome your questions, and your comments as well. Just email us at eslpod@eslpod.com.

From Los Angeles, California, I’m Jeff McQuillan. Thank you for listening. Come back and listen to us next time on the English Café.



English as a Second Language Podcast
www.eslpod.com

ENGLISH CAFÉ – 226

ESL Podcast's English Café is written and produced by Dr. Jeff McQuillan and Dr. Lucy Tse, copyright 2010 by the Center for Educational Development.