

Skate time!

Episode description

In this bonus episode, Andrew talks about going ice skating with his wife. Plus, in the vocabulary lesson, he teaches you a useful English idiom: **to set the bar high/low**.



Note: The transcript has been edited for clarity.

Kassy: Hi everyone, it's Kassy here. I know Andrew usually handles the bonus episodes, but I wanted to jump on the show here for just a moment at the start to give you one last reminder about our New Year's sale. To celebrate 2023 in style, we're currently offering a 25% discount on our yearly memberships or renewals until January 15. So, there isn't much time left. As a Culips member, you'll get unlimited access to all of our learning materials that our team of teachers create to help you improve your English faster than ever. Some of the benefits that you get as a member include interactive transcripts and helpful study guides, ad-free audio so you don't have to listen to those ads like this one. You'll also get an invitation to our monthly live streams where you can hang out and practice English with Andrew and other Culips members. Plus, there are some special bonuses like exclusive content and our member only series, the Fluency Files. Really everyone there are just too many features for me to talk about them all in detail, but if you'd like to see the full list and sign up to be a member, just visit Culips.com. But hurry because the sale ends on January the 15th. And now I'm going to throw things over to Andrew for the regular scheduled bonus episode. Have a good day guys!

Andrew: Do you have a favorite activity to do during the winter? I guess how you answer the question will depend on where you're located. But for me, the winter is a great time to enjoy the great outdoors. Some of my favorite winter activities include snowboarding, tobogganing, snowshoeing, and skating. And just last week, I went skating with my wife on an outdoor rink and we both had a blast.

My name is Andrew, and this is bonus episode 35 of the Culips English Podcast. Today, I'm going to tell you the story of my skating adventure. And towards the end of the show, I'm going to teach you a useful English expression that will help make you a better English speaker and listener. This episode comes with a completely free interactive transcript that you can access by following the link in the description or by visiting our website Culips.com. So, make sure to check it out.

Growing up in Canada, I always loved ice skating. From my childhood days spent skating with my family on the rink to skating with my friends on Backyard rinks and neighborhood ponds, ice skating has always been a favorite pastime of mine. And even though I'm not a pro on the ice, I always find it to be a delightful and fun way to spend some time. So, when my wife and I heard about the ice rink that's set up in front of the Seoul city hall, we knew we had to go and check it out. Many people had been raving about it on social media saying it was the most fun you could have for just 100 won, which is just under one dollar American. And last week we went downtown to city hall to try it out.

Now like many Canadians, I learned how to skate when I was pretty young. I remember going to the ice rink with my family when I was little and learning to skate by pushing around a kind of triangular metal frame, which is called an ice skate trainer. The trainer was essentially the ice-skating equivalent of training wheels, you know the ones that you attach to a bike so you can learn how to ride a bike. And the ice skate trainer was awesome because I could use it to develop some confidence before skating on my own. I also have memories of skating and playing ice hockey in the backyard of the family who lived behind my house. When the weather was cold enough, the dad of that family used to use his garden hose to flood the lawn and make a little skating rink in his backyard and I remember going over there sometimes and playing ice hockey with some of the other neighborhood kids. It was a lot of fun.

As you may know, ice hockey is a very popular sport in Canada, but it's got a high barrier to entry. A high barrier to entry means that it's not easy to get started with the sport. For one, it's expensive. You need to buy a lot of protective equipment before you can play, such as a helmet, a visor to cover your face, a neck guard to protect your neck from the puck, or in the absolute worst-case scenario, a skate blade hitting you. Then there's also shoulder pads, elbow pads, shin pads, plus you need gloves, a stick, and skates, of course. So, all of this gear adds up, it is expensive to buy. I did a little looking into it, and according to an article that I found on the New York Times website, the average Canadian family spends 1,700 Canadian dollars a year on equipment, registration, tournaments, and

other fees associated with playing ice hockey. So, if you compare that to other sports, like soccer or baseball, it is much, much higher.

Another barrier to entry is the limited ice availability. I think in Canada, there are many ice rinks, probably more than in most countries. But there's also a huge demand to use the ice. So, when you're just a little kid learning the sport, it means that you get the worst time slots, you get the only time that is available. And that happens to be really early in the morning. So, it's not unusual for games to start at 5am or 6am. For little kids, that's probably OK, kids wake up early anyways, right? But for parents, it can be a struggle. If your kids play hockey, there's no sleeping in on the weekends.

When I was young, I always wanted to play on an ice hockey team, but my family couldn't really afford it. So instead, I played on neighborhood backyard rinks. And on the street, I played a lot of street hockey. But when I was a little bit older, I'd say around nine or 10 years old, I did finally get to play on an ice hockey team for a year or two and experience what those early morning games were like, firsthand, it was a lot of fun. I loved playing ice hockey. And then later in my teen years, my family moved close to a little lake and that lake would freeze over in the winter. Well, not every winter, but whenever it gets cold enough, that little lake will freeze over and I heard from my folks, from my parents, that it froze over this year. I'm actually going to travel back to my hometown here in about two weeks and I'm hoping, fingers crossed, that the lake will still be frozen by the time I arrive so I can go out for a skate because skating on a frozen lake is a ton of fun, and I have some great memories of doing that in winters past. Anyway, all this is to say that I've enjoyed ice skating my whole life. Even though I'm not a great skater or anything, it's just a nice way to spend an afternoon.

My wife, on the other hand, isn't a seasoned skater like me. Did you hear the adjective I just used there? A seasoned skater. Can you guess what that means? Seasoned can mean a few different things in different contexts. But in this context, it means well prepared

or skilled at doing something. So, for example, I could say, "She's a seasoned chef who can turn even the most basic ingredients into a gourmet meal." Or, "He's a seasoned public speaker who always knows how to captivate his audience." So, I'm a seasoned skater, because I've done it my whole life, and I'm very experienced, but my wife is not a seasoned skater. In fact, before we went skating together last week, she had only tried it once before. But despite the mismatch in our experience, we both had a wonderful time.

And when we arrived at city hall, there were already many, many people skating around and the ice conditions looked pretty bad. Thankfully, we arrived right before a Zamboni break, though, and Zamboni, if you don't know, is the name of the machine that cleans the ice and makes it smooth for skating. So, while they were taking the Zamboni break, we went to the skating-pass kiosk and purchased our entry tickets, and then we lined up to get our skates. Now I had set the bar pretty low for this skating experience. I predicted in advance that there would be many people and that the rental skates wouldn't be very good. And it turns out I was right on both accounts. There were a lot of people, and the rental skates were terrible, but because I wasn't expecting much, I wasn't disappointed at all, and I was able to just have fun.

Come to think of it, a big difference that I've noticed between life in Canada and my life here in Korea, is that in Canada, it's entirely possible to do things alone. Like for example, when I was talking about skating on the lake in my neighborhood, I've been skating on that lake countless times where I was alone, it was just me and my friends. We were the only people on the lake, we were entirely alone. But that's nearly impossible to do in Korea, no matter what you do, from hiking to having a picnic at the park, to ice skating at city hall, there are always, always, always similar minded people to you who are doing the same thing at the same time. When I first moved to Korea, that was a little bit difficult for me, because I felt like I could never be alone, never on my own. But I've totally adjusted to that now and it just seems normal that you're always going to be around other people. There's no way around it, it's a highly populated and small country.

But anyways, back to the story. So, we got our rental skates, and we went to the locker room to put them on and to store our bags and our shoes in a locker. Now the skates, like I mentioned, weren't too good. They were these hideous big orange plastic skates with buckles instead of laces. And when I buckled the skates up even just a little bit, they had this super tight vice-like grip around my ankles. Painfully so actually, my ankles were really, really sore wearing these skates. But I just kept on keepin' on. I kept on keepin' on. Isn't that a great expression? To keep on keeping on. It just means to continue without stopping or complaining, even when something is difficult, or in my case, painful. So, I kept on keepin' on. Even though it hurt my ankles to wear those skates, I didn't let it stop me from getting on the ice. So finally, we were ready, and we got on the ice, and we were off.

Now I'd like to say that my wife and I had a nice romantic skate around the rink, holding hands and gazing into each other's eyes. But that was impossible, there were just way too many people. And on top of that my wife's skating skill was about what you'd expect for someone who was only doing it for the second time in her entire life. So of course, I tried to help her out as best as I could, but it wasn't the greatest environment for learning how to skate. And in addition to that, the orange rental skates were unlike any skates I had ever worn before. The skate blade was regular in the front, but very long in the back. And I later realized that that long blade was there so that you wouldn't fall over backwards. The long blade in the back helped to support you if you leaned back too far. But it also made it almost impossible for me to skate backwards so that I could help my wife and help her learn how to skate. So instead of skating, I think we did something closer to a shuffle. We shuffled around the edge of the rink, holding on to the boards for support. And unfortunately, there weren't any of those skating trainers, like the kind I mentioned earlier, available. I think if my wife had one of those, it would have been much better for her.

Anyway, after we shuffled around for a bit, my wife encouraged me to go on without her. So, I did that for a little while and skated a few laps around the rink. Then I checked back in with her, and we shuffled around together a little bit more. Despite a few near spills and falls, my wife eventually got the hang of it and we had a great time skating around the rink

and I'm happy to report that she never fell over once, and neither did I. We both stayed on our feet the entire time. After 45 minutes or so of skating, we decided to call it a day. But all in all, it was just an awesome time. And I realized that no matter where you skate, whether it's at an organized rink like the one outside of city hall, or on a frozen lake in Canada, there's just nothing quite like the feeling of gliding across the ice. And it was great to share that experience with my wife, even if she still is a bit of a beginner.

After we changed out of our skates and back into our street shoes, we stopped by a nearby street food store and ordered a popular street food here which is called hotteok, which is a kind of pancake that has a sweet, gooey filling inside which is made of brown sugar, honey and peanuts and cinnamon. They're a favorite of mine and they are delicious on a cold wintry day, and it really hit the spot. It was a fantastic way to cap off a great winter day here in Seoul.

And now it's time for this week's vocabulary lesson.

Before I let you go, I want to teach you about a really common and useful idiomatic expression that you can add to your English vocabulary. It is: to set the bar high. To set the bar high. Or: to set the bar low. To set the bar low. This expression means to set a high or low standard or level of expectation for someone or something. Did you hear when I use this expression in this episode to talk about my expectations of what the ice-skating experience would be like? If not, don't worry, because I'm gonna rewind and go back to that part of the episode again, so we can listen to it a couple of more times. Let's do that now. Here we go.

Now I had set the bar pretty low for this skating experience. I predicted in advance that there would be many people and that the rental skates wouldn't be very good.

So, as I said, to set the bar high, or to set the bar low means to set a high standard or low standard or a high level of expectation or low level of expectation for someone or for something. When I set the bar low for skating, for example, it means that I wasn't expecting the skating to be super amazing, I had a very low expectation for it, I set the bar low. Now, let me tell you how English speakers usually use this idiom. So, for example, we could say something like, "She sets the bar high for herself." "She sets the bar high for herself." And this means that the woman has high standards for herself and expects to achieve a lot. On the other hand, we could say something like, "He sets the bar low for his students." "He sets the bar low for his students." And this means that that teacher has very low expectations for his students, and he doesn't expect them to achieve much. He doesn't sound like a very good teacher, does he?

The idiom can also be used more generally, to talk about the level of quality or excellence that is expected in a field or in an activity. For example, we could say something like, "This company sets the bar high in the industry." And that means that the company has a great reputation for producing high-quality products or services. Now that we know the meaning of this expression, it's time to listen to some example sentences. I've prepared three of them for you. So, let's take a listen to the first one now. Here we go.

Example sentence number one.

The Nexotech smartphone company sets the bar high in the industry and is known for producing excellent quality products.

Let's break this example sentence down. In this example sentence, we hear that a company that produces smartphones, which is called Nexotech. By the way, I just created that name. I don't think it's the name of a real company. So, it's not like an advertisement for them or anything, just an example. And so, in this example sentence, Nexotech sets the bar high. It means that they have a very high standard and are known as being an excellent company that produces great smartphones.

Example sentence number two.

As a professional artist, Lisa consistently pushes herself to create exceptional drawings and sets a high bar for her work.

Let's break this example down. In this example, we hear about a professional artist named Lisa and Lisa sets a high bar for her work. So, that means that she sets a high standard, and she always wants to work hard to make sure that she produces very high-quality drawings. And she's not satisfied with any average drawings. No, no, no, they must be exceptional, they must be perfect.

Example sentence number three.

When he was in a band, John frequently set the bar low for himself and didn't put much effort into his performances. I guess that's why he doesn't play music anymore.

And now let's break this final example down. So, in this example sentence, we hear about a guy named John. And John frequently set the bar low for himself when he was a musician, he didn't put any effort into his performances. So, when you set the bar low, well, you're not expecting much, and you don't really have any goals or plans or expectations for yourself. And maybe that's because John just didn't want to be a musician. Maybe he wasn't passionate about it, or maybe he didn't think he was any good at it, or maybe he didn't want to do it. For whatever reason, he set the bar low for himself. He didn't expect much of himself. And because of that, he's not even a musician these days. We heard that he doesn't play music anymore.

That brings us to the end of episode 35 of the bonus episode series. Thanks for studying English with me today. I hope you learned something new and enjoyed this one. Have a great week everyone, take care, and I'll talk to you soon in the next episode. Until then, bye!

Episode credits

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