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ESL Podcast 7 - At My Desk, on Break, and at Lunch

GLOSSARY

agenda – schedule; calendar used to write down important dates or events

* Let me check my agenda to see if I have an afternoon free next week.

memo – a short document used in business to give information, usually within a company or organization

* She needs to write a memo to all the employees about the new vacation policy.

inbox – a container on one's desk or a place in an email program filled with messages or documents that needs to be read and responded to

* Don't you ever read the papers in your inbox? I put all the information you requested there last week.

to start in – to begin work on something; to begin to sort through something

* If you'll start in on making the salad, I'll get the chicken ready for baking.

project manager – a person responsible for a project

* Daniel isn't a good project manager because he doesn't understand how to follow a budget.

conference call – a phone call with more than two people

* In a conference call, it is sometimes difficult to know who is speaking. That's why people should always say their names before making comments.

head office – the main office building in a company that has offices in more than one location

* Jacob is happy about his promotion to the head office but his family doesn't want to move to Los Angeles.

to head down – to walk downstairs; to walk along a hallway

* Let's head down to the basement and find out why the water heater isn't working.

break room – a room where workers can relax, eat, and talk during their breaks from work

* In her company, the break room has free coffee and cookies all day.



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water cooler – a machine that stores drinking water and has two openings: one for cold water and one for hot water

* The water cooler is empty but the water containers are too heavy for me to lift. Can anyone help me?

on break – taking a short, relaxing pause (usually 5-15 minutes) during the workday

* I often take a short walk when I'm on break. The fresh air helps me think more clearly once I'm back in the office.

vending machine – a machine that accepts coins and dollar bills and gives out food, such as candy, cookies, chips, sandwiches, sodas, juices, and coffee

* This vending machine is full of cookies and chips. I wish there were some healthier foods in it.

bulletin board – a place on a wall where people can hang notices and announcements

* When she lost her dog, she put announcements on all the local bulletin boards asking people to call her if they found her dog.

to pack a lunch – to bring food from home to eat at the office or at school during the lunch break

* Ruth always packs the same lunch for herself: a turkey sandwich, an apple, and orange juice.

take-out – food that is bought at a restaurant but eaten at another place

* This restaurant has the best food in town, but it's too noisy to eat here. Let's order take-out.

lunch hour – an hour during the day when an employee eats lunch, often 12:00-1:00 p.m.

* I would like to eat during my lunch hour, but I often use the time to run errands like going to the bank and getting my hair cut.

casual Fridays – days when office workers are allowed to wear less formal clothing

* On casual Fridays, the bank lets its employees wear jeans and t-shirts, but shorts are never allowed.

to kick back – to relax

* After a busy week, all I feel like this doing is kicking back with a good movie.



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CULTURAL NOTE

Eating on a Busy Schedule

Families today “lead” (have; live) busy lives “balancing” (making enough time for) work, school, and play. Our busy schedules often mean that we don’t have time to make “meals” (breakfast, lunch, or dinner) for ourselves and find ourselves “grabbing” (getting quickly) food “on the go” (while going from one activity or place to another). Sometimes this food isn’t the healthiest for us.

The food we make at home “tends to be” (usually is) cheaper and healthier for us. Did you know that in 1960, 26% of the money spent on food in the United States was on food eaten away from home, and by 2011, that number had “jumped” (increased a lot) to 49%? That’s nearly half of the meals Americans eat.

Americans now buy and “consume” (eat) food away from home an average of four times a week, which can mean an extra eight pounds a year. The more we eat away from home, the more weight people tend to gain.

Our busy schedules don’t mean we have to eat unhealthy foods. We can “plan ahead” (prepare) and make a meal or a “snack” (small amount of food eaten in between meals) to take with us on days we know we’ll be “rushed” (hurried; without enough time). On the days when we don’t have time to plan ahead we can order healthier meal or smaller sizes.



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COMPLETE TRANSCRIPT

Welcome to English as a Second Language Podcast number 7: At My Desk, on Break, and at Lunch

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

In this episode, I'll talk about working at my desk, going on a short break, and going to lunch.

Let's get started!

[Start of story]

On the way to the office, I was thinking about what I have on my agenda today. When I get to my desk, there is a stack of new memos and papers in my inbox. When I turn on my computer, I see at least two-dozen emails I need to go through. Just as I start in on the email, my phone rings. It's my project manager, Julie, asking me to come in for a conference call with our head office. I don't get back to my desk for nearly two hours. By that time, I was ready for a break.

At 10:30, I head down to the break room and get some hot water at the water cooler to make some tea. There were a couple of other people on break, having snacks out of the vending machine and reading the new notices on the bulletin board. I run into Sam, one of my friends at work, and we chat a little before going back to work.

Before long, it's time for lunch. I usually bring my lunch with me to work and eat it at my desk. If I don't have time to pack a lunch, I sometimes go across the street for some take-out. The only trouble is, it's always so busy during the lunch hour and I always have to stand in line. That's usually a pain. On Fridays, I usually go out to lunch with a few friends from work. On casual Fridays, we can kick back a little and take it easy.

[End of Story]

Part six is called "At my Desk, on Break, and at Lunch." Notice the use of those prepositions. Prepositions are very difficult to translate and many people get confused when you start learning another language trying to figure out those little



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words - which word should you use. There's a difference between "at my desk" and "on my desk" and "in my desk." Those all mean different things.

"On your desk" means something is on top of your desk, like your computer. "In your desk" means something is inside one of the drawers of your desks. "At your desk" means that you are sitting next to your desk - you are, we hope, working, like you're supposed to be working right now, instead of listening to this episode.

"On break" is the expression we use when you are stopping work for a short time, usually ten, 15, maybe 20 minutes. "At lunch" means you are going to lunch - you are eating. We don't say, "in lunch" or "on lunch," we say, "at lunch." The best way to learn those little prepositions is just to read and to listen more and more, and eventually, you will know them without even having to study them.

Our story begins by me saying that, "On the way to the office, I was thinking about what I have on my agenda today." Your agenda, "agenda," means your plan for today - what are the things that you have to do today. This could include meetings; it could include phone calls; you could have many different things on your agenda.

There's another expression, "to have an agenda." To have an agenda means that you have a plan, sometimes a secret plan that you don't tell anyone about that makes you want to do a certain thing. It's like having an opinion and trying to get other people to do what you want them to do; that's to have an agenda. But here, agenda just means a list of things that you're going to do.

"When I get to my desk, there is a stack of new memos and papers in my inbox." Stack, you'll remember, is when you have thin things on top of each other. You can have a stack of pancakes; here we have a stack of papers and memos. A "memo" (memo) is short for memorandum, and it is usually like a letter that you send to someone in your company - in your office. Your "inbox" (inbox) can be a little box on your desk where people put things for you to do, your boss, for example. And, when you are done with them, you can put them in your out box. Those terms, inbox and out box, are also used for email programs now.

When I turn on my computer, I have at least two-dozen emails I need to go through. The expression, "to go through," here means I have to read them and maybe respond to them. Someone may say, "I have to go through my email," they mean I have to read my email, and I have to respond, sometimes, to my email. I have to do that everyday, just like you do, but most of my emails come from you.



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“Just as I start in on the email, my phone rings.” The expression “to start in on something” means to begin to do something. So, I start in on my phone calls, that means that I have many phone calls and I start making them - I begin making them.

There's a different expression, to start in on someone - on a person, and if you start in on a person - on your brother, on your wife - that means that you are criticizing them - you're saying something bad - something negative about them. When I was younger, if I didn't do my homework, which was often, my mother would start in on me, meaning she would criticize me. “Jeffrey, do your homework!” The only person who calls me “Jeffrey” is my mother.

Back to our story, I said that my phone rang and it was my project manager, Julie. The manager is the person that is in charge of a certain group of people - someone who is the boss - and a project is just a set of things for you to do, usually related to each other. Well, my project manager, who's like my boss, asked me to come in for a conference call with our head office. A “conference, (conference) call” is a telephone call with three or more people. And, that's very common in American business and in international business to have a conference call so more than one person can talk on the telephone. The head office (head) is the same as the main office, and this is where the company has most of its important people who are working, it's sometimes called its headquarters. The head office is the main office. The opposite of head office would be a branch office (branch). A branch office is a smaller office.

We were having a conference call with someone in our head office, and I didn't get back to my desk - I didn't return to my desk - for almost, or nearly two hours. By that time, I was ready for a break. At 10:30, I head down to the break room. The “break room” (break room) – two words – is a place in a building - in your office, where people can go and read and relax, perhaps eat their lunch, or eat some food, It's a place for you to stop work and to relax a little or to talk to other people. I use the verb “to head down,” that simply means to go to somewhere. We sometimes use that expression when we are talking about going to a different place. “I'm going to head down to the boss's office” - I'm going to go over to the boss' office.

Well, “I head down to the break room” - I go to the break room - “and get some hot water from the water cooler.” The “water cooler” (cooler) is a little machine that has water and you can get hot water or you can get cold water. That expression, the water cooler, is very common. When people say, “I heard it at



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the water cooler,” or “around the water cooler,” that usually refers to people who are gossiping - who are talking about things they probably shouldn't.

Well, I went to the water cooler and I made myself some tea, because I love drinking tea. There are “a couple of other people on break,” notice that we use that expression “on break” - people who have stopped working - “having snacks out of the vending machine.” A “snack” (snack) is a piece of food that you eat between breakfast and lunch, or between lunch and dinner, or between dinner and going to bed. A “vending machine” (vending) is a big machine where you can buy, usually, food. The verb “to vend” (vend) means to sell. So, it's a place where you can sell food and you put your money in and you can press a button and you get things like cookies and potato chips, all the things that are not good for you in the vending machine.

Some people are also reading the new notices on the bulletin board. The “bulletin board” (bulletin board) – two words – is a big piece of usually wood or plastic where people put important messages for other people to read. You can have a bulletin board at your work; you can have a bulletin board in a school, and usually, it's a place where different people can come and read the news or new things or new announcements.

“I run into Sam, one of my friends at work.” The verb “to run into” means I meet him although I was not expecting to meet him. So, “I run into Sam, and we chat a little before going back to work.” “To chat” (chat) means to talk, usually about something not very important.

“Before long, it's time for lunch,” meaning after a short time, it's time for lunch. Before long, means a short time or after a short time. “I usually bring my lunch with me to work and eat it at my desk.” Notice that use of “at my desk,” means I'm sitting by my desk and I'm eating my lunch – sounds kind of lonely.

“If I don't have time to pack a lunch, I sometimes go across the street for some take-out.” “To pack” (pack) a lunch means to make your lunch at home - a sandwich, for example - and put that into a bag or a box that you take with you to work; that is to pack a lunch. If I don't pack a lunch, I usually eat “take-out” (take-out.) Take-out is when you go to a restaurant but you don't eat at the restaurant - you don't “dine in,” we would say, (dine) in, you don't dine in, you do take-out. You could also have the restaurant deliver the food - bring the food to your house, or bring the food to your office, and we would call that delivery. So, you can dine in; you can do take-out, meaning you go to the restaurant, or you can have delivery - someone brings the food to you.



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“The only trouble is,” I say, “it’s always so busy during the lunch hour.” The “lunch hour,” in most American companies, is from noon to one or 1:30, or 11:30 in the morning to maybe one o’clock in the afternoon. It’s usually longer than an hour, though in some companies, you only get one hour. Some companies, you only get 30 minutes to eat.

“I always have to stand in line” because it’s so busy. To stand in line means to wait behind other people. In England, they would say to queue; in the US we say to stand in line. I say, “That’s usually a pain.” When we say something is a “pain” (pain) we mean that it’s very inconvenient or uncomfortable - something you do not like. People will also say a pain in the neck or a pain in the “butt” (butt). Those are the same basic meanings. Something that’s a pain in the neck or a pain in the butt means it’s not something that you like, it’s very inconvenient.

“On Fridays, I usually go out to lunch” - I go to eat somewhere else - “with a few friends from work. On casual Fridays, we can kick back a little and take it easy.” “Casual” (casual) is the same as informal. In many companies in the United States, they have casual Friday, and that’s a day where you do not have to wear as nice of clothing. Maybe you’ll wear a t-shirt and not a suit jacket, or you don’t have to wear a tie, and it’s also a day where people feel a little more relaxed. Usually it has to do with what you can wear to work.

Well, in the story I say that “On casual Fridays, we can kick back a little and take it easy.” “To kick back” (kick back) – two words – means to relax. It’s an informal expression that means that you are relaxing, and take it easy also means relax. Kick back is a little more informal; it’s something that you might do, for example, with your friends. And, if you drink alcohol, you might have some alcohol and relax; that’s to kick back.

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

[Start of story]

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[End of story]

She always writes us a great script before kicking back at the end of the day. I speak of our scriptwriter, Dr. Lucy Tse. Thank you, Lucy!

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

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