



ESL Podcast 387 – Describing Talent and Ability

GLOSSARY

a natural – a person who has natural ability; one who is born with a certain skill
* Adam has learned to play the piano very quickly. He is a natural at learning to play musical instruments.

no one comes close to – far superior to others; others cannot compete
* You have a lot of friends. In fact, no one comes close to having as many friends as you do.

dexterity – the ability to do something quickly and skillfully; the ability to use one's hands effectively
* The Harlem Globetrotters are a basketball team known for handling the ball with great dexterity.

instinct – natural behavior; the way one naturally thinks or behaves
* When in danger, Gabi's first instinct was to protect her children.

flair – natural ability; ability to do something in a skillful and interesting way
* It is fun to watch Hanna because she plays the violin with great flair.

promising – showing signs that something will be successful or enjoyable; giving reason to expect a good result
* I am encouraged about my job search because I found two promising job leads today.

to keep an eye on – to pay attention to; to watch carefully
* Would you keep an eye on the children while I go to the store?

to do (something) in one's sleep – to do a task without making much effort; to do something easily and well
* We have driven to that city so many times, we can almost do it in our sleep.

to be good at – possessing a certain skill or ability; able to do something well
* People like talking to Sharon because she is good at listening.

knack – skill or ability to do something well; ability to accomplish something easily
* Joon always seems to know how I feel. I think he has a knack for reading people's feelings.



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first-rate – of the highest quality; rises above most others in quality

* The organization had many first-rate volunteers, which made the event a success.

to be head and shoulders above – to be far better or greater than others; to exceed all the rest

* There was one movie this year that stood head and shoulders above the others and I think it will win several awards.

to make do – to use what one has even if it is not the best; to manage without things one would like to have

* Tracy wants to move her company into a larger, newer building, but she will have to make do until she can save enough money to do so.

mediocre – not so good; medium to poor in quality

* That writer's first novel was mediocre, but his work has become better over the years.

to judge for (oneself) – to evaluate for oneself; to form one's own opinion about something

* Don't take my word for it – come to the concert and judge for yourself how well the group sings.

to be impressed – to admire or respect someone or something; to think highly of someone or something

* Everyone who works with Rico is impressed with his organizational skills.

talent – natural skill or ability; skill one has, often without being taught

* Sasha has a talent for sewing and so she makes many of her own clothes.

to be dazzled – to think someone or something is extremely good or exciting; to be very impressed by a person or thing

* Dazzled by his first trip to New York City, Nate decided to move there.



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COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

1. Why has Kathy gone to see the team?
 - a) To meet the coach.
 - b) To find new players.
 - c) To report on the game.

2. What information does the coach share with a recruiter?
 - a) Their game plan for the upcoming season.
 - b) Information about the team's wins and losses.
 - c) Facts about the athletes' skills and personality.

WHAT ELSE DOES IT MEAN?

promising

In this podcast, “promising” means that something or someone has great potential for success: “The editor was willing to work with the promising young writer because he believed someday he might write a bestseller.” Another meaning for promise is found in the phrase “to keep a promise,” which means to do what a person has said he or she would do: “Susan said she would be on time and so I know she will. She always keeps her promises.” Finally, “to promise someone the moon” means to say one will do much more than is humanly possible: “In order to get elected, the politician made several speeches promising the moon.” Or “Carlos promised Cheryl the moon in order to convince her to marry him.”

to make do

The phrasal verb “to make do,” in this podcast, means to manage with something of a poorer quality than one desires: “The new tent and camp stove we ordered did not arrive in time for our trip, so we had to make do with our old camping gear on this trip.” Another similar phrasal verb is “to make something up,” which means to invent something, such as a story or an excuse: “Some children are good at making up excuses for why they did not finish their homework.” And we use the phrasal verb “to make it” when we mean someone has been successful: “After years of trying, Jamal finally made it in the music industry with a number one song.”



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CULTURE NOTE

A “sports scout” is a person who works to find great new players for a sports team. For example, a scout for a university football team will travel to many high schools looking for the best football players. A scout will watch the “athletes” (sports players) in action, looking for those with the skills needed “to build up” (improve) their team.

A scout may offer a “scholarship” (money for school) to the players he or she wants to recruit. This can be a good opportunity for students to be able to pay their “tuition” (school bill) while at the university, but these students will need to devote a lot of time to practicing and playing the sport, and their studies may “suffer” (become worse in quality). Of course, some athletes who are recruited continue to develop their skills even more while playing at the university, and then are able to become “professionals,” making a career from playing that sport.

Before getting recruited, high school students may need to spend all their free time and energy developing their skill in a sport. In fact, children as young as 10 years old are sometimes forced by their parents to choose one sport to practice all year long. Some of these children may suffer knee or arm injuries from practicing too much or too “strenuously” (requiring a lot of physical effort) at too young of an age. Young people may also “burn out” (become tired or disinterested due to working too hard at something) on the sport. Or they may feel “resentful” (dislike caused by being forced to accept something) toward their parents or coaches who push them to succeed.

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



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COMPLETE TRANSCRIPT

Welcome to English as a Second Language Podcast number 387: Describing Talent and Ability.

This is English as a Second Language Podcast number 387. 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. If you go there, you can download a Learning Guide for this episode that contains all of the vocabulary, definitions, sample sentences, additional definitions not discussed on the podcast, comprehension questions, cultural notes, and a complete transcript of everything we say on this episode.

This episode is called "Describing Talent and Ability." It's a dialogue between Kathy and Brad talking about how good certain members of a sports team are. Let's get started.

[start of dialogue]

Kathy: Thanks for inviting me to see your team. Who's your best player?

Brad: That would be Sarah. She's a natural. No one comes close to her speed and dexterity. She has good instincts and a flair for getting out of difficult situations.

Kathy: She sounds promising. Anyone else I should be keeping an eye on?

Brad: Mollie is a good player, too. In terms of scoring points, she can almost do it in her sleep. She's also very good at being a leader to the other players, and she has a knack for getting along with even the most difficult teammates.

Kathy: As you know, we recruit only first-rate players for the national team, and this year, we hope to be head and shoulders above any of the other teams. The days of making do with mediocre players are over.

Brad: I understand that. We have a game this Saturday. Why don't you come out and judge for yourself? I think you'll be impressed with the talent you see.

Kathy: I'm sure I will. I'll be here on Saturday ready to be dazzled.

[end of dialogue]



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In our dialogue, Brad has invited Kathy to come to see his sports team. We assume Brad is the coach of the team. Kathy begins by saying, “Thanks for inviting me to see your team.” And then she asks, “Who’s your best player?” – who is your best player? Brad says, “That would be Sarah.” Brad could also say, “Sarah,” or “Sarah is the best player.” But he says, “That would be Sarah,” which is sort of what we might call a conditional use, as if he were saying “if I had to pick the best player, it would be Sarah.” This is actually quite common; people say, “that would be me” – “that would be her.” It really means the same as “that is me,” or “that is her,” but it is very common to hear “that would be.”

Brad says, “That would be Sarah. She’s a natural.” A “natural” means a person who has natural ability, who is born with a certain skill. We sometimes use this expression with the preposition “at”: “He’s a natural at ice skating” – he was born to ice skate. Not me, of course, I was a terrible skater when I was young! But some people are naturals; they are born to do that, they have this natural talent.

Brad says, “No one comes close to Sarah’s speed and dexterity.” “No one comes close to” means that Sarah is much, much better than any of the other players. She is faster – no one comes close to her speed – and she has the ability to do things quickly and skillfully. That’s the meaning of the expression “dexterity.” It is especially used when talking about your hands. “She has great dexterity” – she can move quickly and accurately and do things very skillfully.

Brad says, “She has good instincts and a flair for getting out of difficult situations.” If you say someone has “good instincts,” you mean that they are able to think and behave quickly and naturally. It’s almost similar to the expression “he’s a natural,” or “she’s a natural.” It means that they are born with, or they seem to have acquired – they seem to have learned how to do things very quickly and without having to even think about something. To say someone “has a flair for something” means they, once again, have a natural ability; they’re able to do something very well. I have a flair for making my wife mad at me. I’m very good at that; it’s my natural talent!

Kathy says Sarah “sounds promising.” When you say someone “sounds promising,” or something “sounds promising,” you’re saying that it is likely to be successful or enjoyable; you think that it will have a good result. “That movie sounds promising,” means I think it’s going to be good, it sounds like it will be good; I expect it to be good. Kathy asks, “Anyone else I should be keeping an eye on?” To “keep an eye on something” means to pay attention to something, to watch something carefully.



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Brad says, “Mollie is a good player, too. In terms of scoring points, she can almost do it in her sleep.” Brad is now talking about another player; he says that Mollie, when it comes to, or “in terms of scoring points,” if we are talking about her scoring points on the team, “she can almost do it in her sleep.” To be able to do something “in your sleep” means to do it very easily, without even thinking about it, without much effort. Brad says Mollie is “also very good at being a leader to the other players.” To be “good at something” means to have a certain ability, to be able to do something well. Brad also says that Mollie “has a knack for getting along with even the most difficult teammates.” To “have a knack” (knack) means to have a skill, to have an ability, to be able to do something well. Mollie is able to “get along with” (to be friends with) all of the other teammates even if they are difficult to get along with normally.

Kathy says, “As you know, we recruit only first-rate players for the national team.” So now we learn that Kathy is there to “recruit,” or to find people to join the national team. We’re not sure what sport this is, but that’s what Kathy is there for – to find first-rate players. When we say someone or something is “first-rate,” we mean of the highest quality, the very best.

Kathy says, “this year, we hope to be head and shoulders above any of the other teams.” The expression “to be head and shoulders above” something or someone means to be much, much better than anyone else. Your “head,” of course, is what’s on the top of your body – well, for most of us! Your “shoulders” are the tops of your arms. “To be head and shoulders” means, in some ways, to be taller, but really to be better than other people, in this case the other teams.

Kathy says, “The days of making do with mediocre players are over.” The expression “to make do” means to use what you have, even if it’s not the best; to manage to do something but not to have the best things to do it with. “Mediocre” – there are several uses of that expression; take a look at our Learning Guide for some additional explanations. Kathy says, “The days of making do with mediocre players are over.” Someone who is “mediocre” is someone who is not very good, medium to poor in quality. “He’s a mediocre piano player” – he’s not a very good piano player.

So, “The days of making do with mediocre players are over,” meaning we’re not going to do that anymore. Brad says, “I understand that. We have a game this Saturday. Why don’t you come out (why don’t you go to the game) and judge for yourself?” To “judge for yourself” means to evaluate for yourself, to get your own opinion by looking at or observing something. Brad says, “I think you’ll be impressed with the talent you see.” To be “impressed” means that you think very highly or have a very good opinion of someone or something. “Talent” is, once



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again, your skill or ability; often skill or ability that you are born with or that you don't have to be taught by someone else.

Kathy says, "I'm sure I will be (meaning I'm sure I will be impressed). I'll be here on Saturday ready to be dazzled." To be "dazzled" means to think something is extremely good or exciting, to be very impressed with a person or thing. "I'm ready to be dazzled" means I expect this is going to be very, very good.

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

[start of dialogue]

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[end of dialogue]

The script for this episode was written by a woman with a flair for writing, Dr. Lucy Tse.

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



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