



ESL Podcast 535 – Describing Speed and Pace

GLOSSARY

slowpoke – a person who is very slow; a person who does not move quickly

* Stop being such a slowpoke! The sooner you finish cleaning your room, the sooner we can go do something fun.

to hurry up – to do something more quickly; to rush; to increase one's speed

* If the taxi driver doesn't hurry up, we're going to arrive at the airport too late to catch our flight.

to get a move on – to hurry; to begin moving more quickly

* We have a lot of work to do today, so let's get a move on!

breakneck – very quick; a speed so fast that it's dangerous

* The car came around the corner at breakneck speed and almost hit an old lady who was crossing the street.

to trudge – to walk very slowly while dragging one's feet; to walk slowly because it is very difficult or because one does not really want to go somewhere

* The kids sadly trudge to school every morning, but happily run home every afternoon.

ruins – what is left of an old building or group of buildings with a lot of historical interest

* Have you ever visited the Mayan ruins in Mexico?

worth (one's) while – worth the effort; justifying the work that was needed to get or do something that is very nice or pleasant

* You might not enjoy studying much now, but it will all be worth your while when you get a good job in a few years.

to pick up the pace – to increase one's speed; to move more quickly; to hurry

* I can't believe it took you five minutes to cut one carrot! Pick up the pace, or we won't be able to eat until midnight!

to dawdle – to move very slowly; to take a long time to go somewhere or to do something

* Little kids often dawdle while getting ready for bed, brushing their teeth as slowly as possible so that they can stay awake a little bit longer.

at a snail's pace – very slowly

* Kumi reads books at a snail's pace, usually reading just one page each day.



ESL Podcast 535 – Describing Speed and Pace

to keel over – to fall over or fall down, possibly losing consciousness, usually because one is very tired or ill

* If we keep running like this, I'm going to keel over and die of a heart attack.

to sprint – to run very quickly over a short distance

* Fritz isn't a very good long-distance runner, but he is very good at sprinting.

blinding – very impressive; making one feel awed or amazed

* Jean-Philippe's teacher says that he has blinding musical talent.

to feel sorry for (someone) – to have sympathy or empathy for someone; to feel bad because someone else is having a difficult or painful experience

* Did you hear that Kazu lost her job? I feel so sorry for her.

physically challenged – with a physical disability; with a body that does not work normally because there is some injury or a genetic problem

* Norma Jean lost her arm in a car accident as a child, but even though she's physically challenged, she has learned how to do almost everything other people can do.

mentally challenged – with a mental problem or a mental illness; with a medical condition that affects how one thinks, making it more difficult for a person to learn and/or communicate

* Why did you do such a stupid thing? Are you mentally challenged?



ESL Podcast 535 – Describing Speed and Pace

COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

1. What would you expect a slowpoke to do?
 - a) Dawdle.
 - b) Keel over.
 - c) Sprint.

2. Why is Sarah moving so slowly?
 - a) Because she wants to annoy Chiu.
 - b) Because her body is very tired.
 - c) Because she has already seen the ruins.

WHAT ELSE DOES IT MEAN?

ruin

The word “ruins,” in this podcast, means what is left of an old building or group of buildings with a lot of historical interest: “The archeologists were thrilled to discover ancient ruins in the desert.” The word “ruin” also describes a situation where one has lost all one’s money and/or relationships: “His ex-wife left him in ruins after their divorce, when she got almost all the money.” Or, “The years of lying and cheating left their relationship in ruins.” The phrase “to go to ruin” means for something to fall apart or be destroyed: “The house went to ruin when no one lived in it for a few years.”

blinding

In this podcast, the word “blinding” means very impressive, or making one feel awed or amazed: “The actress gave a blinding performance in that movie.” Something that is “blinding” can also have a light that is so bright it hurts people to look at it: “That sunlight is blinding, even when I’m wearing my sunglasses.” If one looks at something that is “blinding,” one may be unable to see for a short period of time as a result: “They had to stop the car, because the blinding snow made it impossible to see the road.” Finally, a “blinding headache” is a very bad headache that causes a lot of pain: “Eberhard had a blinding headache that was so bad he finally decided to go to the hospital.”



ESL Podcast 535 – Describing Speed and Pace

CULTURE NOTE

“Track and field events” are many different athletic activities that “involve” (include; are based on) running, jumping, and throwing. Track and field athletes try to “break records” (beat the best performance ever) in different “events” (competitions for a specific track and field activity).

Many track and field events are “races” (competitions to see who can do something most quickly). “Sprints” (very fast runs over short distances) range from 50 meters to 400 meters. Middle-distance events range from 600 meters to 3,000 meters, and long-distance events include the 5,000 and 10,000 meter races. “Road races” cover longer distances, up to and including the “marathon” (a 42-kilometer race).

There are also “hurdle events” where runners have to jump over “hurdles” (barriers in the path of a runner). In “relay events,” runners work together as a team, running part of the race and then “passing” (giving with one’s hand) a metal “baton” (stick) to the next runner.

The field events are divided into throwing and jumping events. There are four types of throwing events. Athletes can throw a “discus” (a heavy, round, flat object), a “hammer” (a heavy metal bar attached to a wire and a handle), a “javelin” (a very long “spear” (pointed stick)), or a “shot put” (a heavy metal ball).

There are also four jumping events. Athletes can compete in the “high jump” (jumping over a horizontal bar), the “pole vault” (using a long stick to help oneself jump over a horizontal bar), the “long jump” (running and then jumping as far past a line as one can), and the “triple jump” (running and then doing one hop, one step, and one jump to go as far past a line as one can).

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



ESL Podcast 535 – Describing Speed and Pace

COMPLETE TRANSCRIPT

Welcome to English as a Second Language Podcast number 535: Describing Speed and Pace.

This is English as a Second Language Podcast episode 535. I'm your host, Dr. Jeff McQuillan, coming to you from the Center for Educational Development in beautiful Los Angeles, California.

You can support this podcast by going to our website and either becoming an ESL Podcast member or making a small donation. These audio podcasts are free, but they are supported by your memberships. If you become a member, you can receive our Learning Guides, which are 8- to 10-page written guides for every current episode of ESL Podcast that will help you improve your English even faster. Take a look at our website under the Learning Guide section for some more information.

This episode is called "Describing Speed and Pace." It's a dialogue between Chiu and Sarah that uses a lot of vocabulary we use to describe how fast or how slow things go. Let's get started.

[start of dialogue]

Chiu: Come on, slowpoke, hurry up! We'll never get to the top of the hill if you don't get a move on.

Sarah: There's no way you're going to get me to move at breakneck speed. I've gone up at least 500 steps already, and my legs are about to fall off. Tell me again why we're trudging up this hill?

Chiu: It's the only way to the ruins and the view from there will really be worth your while. Trust me. Pick up the pace or we won't get there before sunset!

Sarah: It's not like I'm dawdling here. I may be moving at a snail's pace, but this is as fast as I can manage without keeling over. If you're in such a hurry, you can sprint up there by yourself. Go ahead. Impress me with your blinding speed.

Chiu: I'm not about to leave you here all by yourself.

Sarah: Why? Do you feel sorry for me?

Chiu: Yes, I always feel sorry for the physically challenged.



ESL Podcast 535 – Describing Speed and Pace

Sarah: Oh, yeah? Better physically challenged than mentally challenged!

[end of dialogue]

Our dialogue begins with Chiu saying to Sarah, “Come on, slowpoke, hurry up!” A “slowpoke” (slowpoke – one word) is an informal, somewhat insulting term to describe someone who moves very slowly, who doesn’t move very quickly. It’s a sort of thing that you might hear children say to each other: “You’re such a slowpoke! Why can’t you run faster?” Oh, wait a minute; that’s what they used to say to me! Anyway, “slowpoke” is someone who moves very slowly. So, Chiu is telling her to “hurry up,” to go faster, to increase your speed. He says, “We’ll never get to the top of the hill if you don’t get a move on.” “To get a move on” is another informal expression meaning to hurry, to begin moving more quickly. It’s something a parent might say to their child: “Hey! Let’s get a move on, we have to leave here by eight o’clock.”

Sarah says, “There’s no way you’re going to get me to move at breakneck speed.” Something that is “breakneck” (breakneck – one word) is something that is very quick, something that is so quick – so fast that it’s dangerous. It’s so dangerous you could, if you fell, break your neck; I think that’s the general idea. Sarah says, “I’ve gone up at least 500 steps already, and my legs are about to fall off.” The expression “my legs are about to fall off” means she’s very, very tired. She says, “Tell me again why we’re trudging up this hill?” “To trudge” (trudge) means to walk very slowly because, perhaps, it’s very difficult to walk up, or because you really don’t want to be doing what you’re doing, walking in the direction you’re walking.

Chiu says, “It’s the only way to the ruins and the view from there will really be worth your while.” So, Sarah and Chiu are obviously visiting some tourist area, and they’re going up to see some ruins. “Ruins,” as a plural noun (and it is always used, in this sense, as a plural noun), is what is left of an old building or group of buildings, usually something that is very old, something that is of historical interest. So when you go to Rome, in Italy, you can see the ruins of the Forum, a famous area in the center part of Rome. You can see what remains of the old buildings from the ancient Romans of 2,000 years ago. “Ruin,” however, has a couple of different meanings in English, both as a verb and a noun. Take a look at our Learning Guide for some additional explanations.

Chiu says that it will be worth your while. The expression “to be worth your while” means that it is worth the effort; if you do it, it will have something very pleasant or nice at the end that will justify what you are doing – that will be a



ESL Podcast 535 – Describing Speed and Pace

good reason for doing what you're doing. Chiu says, "Trust me (have trust in me). Pick up the pace or we won't get there before sunset!" "To pick up the pace" (pace) means to increase your speed, to move more quickly, to hurry up. It's similar to "get a move on," although "get a move on" is usually a command. Here, he's also using the expression as a command, "pick up your pace," but it could be use otherwise. For example: "The cyclist picked up per pace in trying to win the race." She decided to go faster.

Sarah says, "It's not like I'm dawdling here." "It's not like" means I am not – I am not dawdling. "To dawdle" (dawdle) means to move very slowly, to take a long time to do something or to go somewhere. It's a criticism to say someone is dawdling; they're wasting time, they're not moving as fast as they could because they're lazy or for whatever reason. Sarah says, "I may be moving at a snail's pace, but this is as fast as I can manage without keeling over." A "snail's pace" means very, very slowly. A "snail" is a small animal that has the reputation for moving very slowly. So, "to move at a snail's pace" means to move very slowly. She says, "this is as fast as I can manage (as fast as I can walk) without keeling over." "To keel (keel) over" is a two-word phrasal verb meaning to fall over or fall down because you are very tired, or perhaps because you are very sick – very ill. Somebody once said to me, "Hey, Jeff. You should run a marathon," the 26-plus miles that people race sometimes, and I say, "If I ran a marathon, I would probably keel over after the first two miles," meaning I would be so tired that I wouldn't survive – which is probably true!

Sarah says, "If you're in such a hurry, you can sprint up there by yourself." "To sprint" means to run very quickly over a short distance. In the Olympics, they have a competition for the runner who can run the fastest 100 meters. We call these runners "sprinters," they run very fast, but for short distances. The opposite would be a "long distance runner," someone who can run for miles and miles. Sarah tells Chiu he can sprint up there by himself. She says, "Go ahead. Impress me with your blinding speed." "Blinding," here, means very fast, very impressive, making you amazed at how fast or how well someone does something. "Blind" has a couple of different meanings in English; take a look at the Learning Guide for some additional explanations. Here, it means very impressive.

Chiu says, "I'm not about to leave you here all by yourself." I'm not going to let you be by yourself, I'm going to stay with you. Sarah says, "Why? Do you feel sorry for me?" Do you have sympathy for me? Do you feel badly because I am experiencing something difficult or painful? Chiu says, "Yes, I always feel sorry for the physically challenged." This is a joke. "To be physically challenged" means that your body is not able to do what other bodies can do because of



ESL Podcast 535 – Describing Speed and Pace

some injury or perhaps you were born with a certain disease or illness. “Physically challenged” is a term that is fairly new; you will also hear people talk about “physical disabilities,” that means something similar. The older term for that would be “handicapped,” which is still used. People talk about the handicapped parking spaces; these are special spaces that are supposed to be used only for people who have some physical disability – who are physically challenged in some way.

Sarah says, “Oh, yeah? Better physically challenged than mentally challenged!” She says, “Oh, yeah?” meaning “you think so?” Usually we use that expression when you’re angry with someone or you’re about to reply to someone’s insult. She replies to Chiu’s insult – Chiu’s joke by saying, “Better physically challenged than mentally challenged,” meaning it is better to be physically challenged – to have a physical disability than to be mentally challenged. “Mentally challenged” is someone who has some sort of mental illness, someone who has a medical condition that prevents them from being able to think properly. Once again, this is a more modern, more recent term. It’s probably used more now as a joke than as an actual description. Somebody says, “Why did you do such a stupid thing, are you mentally challenged?” meaning do you have some sort of intellectual problem. It can be use, basically, to say that someone is dumb, but the more technical meaning is someone who would have a mental illness or something that makes them unable to be able to reason and think as a normal human being would be able to do.

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

[start of dialogue]

Chiu: Come on, slowpoke, hurry up! We’ll never get to the top of the hill if you don’t get a move on.

Sarah: There’s no way you’re going to get me to move at breakneck speed. I’ve gone up at least 500 steps already, and my legs are about to fall off. Tell me again why we’re trudging up this hill?

Chiu: It’s the only way to the ruins and the view from there will really be worth your while. Trust me. Pick up the pace or we won’t get there before sunset!

Sarah: It’s not like I’m dawdling here. I may be moving at a snail’s pace, but this is as fast as I can manage without keeling over. If you’re in such a hurry, you can sprint up there by yourself. Go ahead. Impress me with your blinding speed.



ESL Podcast 535 – Describing Speed and Pace

Chiu: I'm not about to leave you here all by yourself.

Sarah: Why? Do you feel sorry for me?

Chiu: Yes, I always feel sorry for the physically challenged.

Sarah: Oh, yeah? Better physically challenged than mentally challenged!

[end of dialogue]

We hope listening to this episode was worth your while. The script was written by someone who never needs to be told to get a move on, Dr. Lucy Tse.

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 2009 by the Center for Educational Development.