



ESL Podcast 543 – Describing Different Smells

GLOSSARY

to renovate – to improve a room or building by rebuilding, expanding, and/or redecorating it

* They're going to renovate their house by adding another bathroom.

stale – not fresh; old and used

* The bread won't become stale as quickly if we keep it in a closed plastic bag.

musty – slightly wet and bad-smelling because something hasn't had enough air moving around it

* The basement is really musty. Would it help to put a fan down there?

to air (something) out – to make air move around something so that it becomes fresher and better-smelling

* If you don't have time to wash your gym socks, at least air them out before you put them back on.

putrid – dead and decaying, with a very bad smell

* They couldn't understand why their entryway had such a putrid smell until they found the dead rat under their front porch.

faint – very slight; almost unnoticeable; barely

* Can you hear that music? It's very faint, but you can hear it if you stand very still.

nasty – very unpleasant and disgusting; gross

* Why would anyone want to live in such a nasty apartment building?

to permeate – to be present in every part of something; to be found throughout something

* The sound of laughter permeates the air at school during recess.

burnt – damaged by fire; damaged by being burned

* After the fire, a few pieces of burnt wood were all that was left of the building.

smoky – with a lot of the smelly, hot, grey air that is produced by a fire

* Let's open the flue in the chimney before we start the fire, or else the whole room will get smoky.



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to hold (one's) breath – to not breathe, usually to avoid smelling something or to avoid making a noise

* When we go in there, hold your breath! The air is full of poisonous gases.

truckload – the amount that would fill one truck; the amount of something that can be carried by one truck; a large amount

* They used two truckloads of river rocks to decorate the area in front of the building.

scented – with a pleasant smell

* Do you like to use scented soap when you take a bath?

perfume – a liquid with a strong, pleasant smell, used by women to make themselves more attractive, usually placed on the wrists and neck

* The smell of her perfume quickly filled the elevator, and people began to cough.

to mask – to cover something else; to make it impossible to see, smell, hear, or perceive something else

* Yu-Lin tried to use makeup to mask her acne.

foul – very unpleasant

* We went to that restaurant last week, and we were served the foulest food we'd ever tasted. It was horrible!

to stink – to have a very bad smell

* That blue cheese stinks! I don't know how you can eat it.

sense of smell – the ability to smell things and/or to recognize something by its smell

* Dogs have a great sense of smell, so police officers use them to help find drugs in suitcases at airports.



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COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

1. What kind of smell would you expect to find around a dead animal?
 - a) A musty smell.
 - b) A putrid smell.
 - c) A burnt smell.

2. What does Giles mean by saying he'd have to lose his sense of smell to work there?
 - a) He'd have to learn to stop breathing.
 - b) He'd have to bring good-smelling things to work.
 - c) He'd have to stop being bothered by smells.

WHAT ELSE DOES IT MEAN?

faint

The word “faint,” in this podcast, means very slight or almost unnoticeable: “There’s always faint music playing in the office, but it’s never so loud that it interrupts our work.” The phrase “a faint hope/chance” means a slight possibility that something might happen: “There’s only a faint chance that people are still alive under the collapsed building, but we have to keep looking.” The phrase “to not have the faintest idea about something” means to not know anything about something: “What do you think she meant by that?” “I haven’t the faintest idea.” Finally, someone who is “faint-hearted” is not trying very hard, usually because one doesn’t think one can do it, or because one doesn’t really want to do or have it: “Marissa made a faint-hearted attempt to get the job, but she really wants to stay home with her children.”

foul

In this podcast, the word “foul” means very unpleasant: “Bryan hates changing his daughter’s foul-smelling diapers.” The phrase “foul language” means bad or rude words that may be offensive: “Please don’t use foul language around the children.” If someone is in a “foul mood,” he or she is in a very bad mood and might get angry very easily: “Don’t do anything to make Mom mad. She’s in a really foul mood today.” In sports, a “foul” is an action that doesn’t follow the rules: “The player got a foul for hitting another player.” Finally, the phrase “foul play” means an illegal or dishonest activity, or murder: “The newspaper said she died of natural causes, but the police suspect foul play.”



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CULTURE NOTE

Many “breeds” (types of an animal) of dogs have a very good sense of smell. For that reason, these dog breeds are often used as police dogs, which are also known as “K9s,” meaning “canines” (dogs or dog-like animals).

A “public order enforcement dog” is used to help police officers “chase” (run after) “suspects” (people whom the police believe have committed a crime). These dogs can also help to protect the police officer by “attacking” (physically fighting against) a criminal, if necessary. These are usually large, strong, and intelligent dogs.

A “tracking dog” is used to “track” (find where someone has gone and follow that direction) criminals or people who have become lost. The dog might be given a small piece of the person’s clothing and then be told to track that person. The police officers follow the dog until the person is found.

An “illicit substances dog” is used to find drugs or “explosive devices” (bombs). These dogs are often seen at airports where they “sniff” (smell something by breathing in loudly through one’s nose) suitcases. If the dog “detects” (finds something), it points to the suitcase until the police officer comes over and opens it.

Finally, a “cadaver dog” is used to find “cadavers” (dead bodies) through its sense of smell. With the right training, some dogs can even smell cadavers that are underwater.

Police dogs are “valued” (respected and honored) members of the “police force” (a group of police officers). Sometimes they are given their own “badges” (a piece of metal worn to identify oneself as a police officer or firefighter). When the dogs are “killed in the line of duty” (killed while working), they are often given a full police “funeral” (the ceremony held after someone dies).

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



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COMPLETE TRANSCRIPT

Welcome to English as a Second Language Podcast number 543: Describing Different Smells.

This is English as a Second Language Podcast episode 543. 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. Go there today to download the Learning Guide for this episode, that will help you improve your English even faster.

This episode is called "Describing Different Smells." It's a dialogue between Julia and Giles talking about the different words we use to describe how things smell in English. Let's get started.

[start of dialogue]

Giles: Do you really think we'll be able to renovate this place and turn it into a restaurant?

Julia: It's not so bad. I know it smells a little stale and musty in here, but all we need to do is air it out.

Giles: Air it out? This place needs a lot more than an airing out. The kitchen smells putrid. I wonder what died in there.

Julia: There is a faint smell of something nasty in there, but I don't think it permeates through the rest of the building, do you?

Giles: No, but there are different nasty smells in other parts of the building. Oh! There's a really strong burnt, smoky smell in this corner. Hold your breath!

Julia: This is a restaurant. I'm sure a thorough cleaning will make all the difference.

Giles: That might be true for the kitchen, but what will you do in the dining room? An entire truckload of scented candles or bottles of perfume couldn't mask those foul smells. This place just stinks, from top to bottom!

Julia: All right, I'll look for another building, but this place is cheap and within our budget.



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Giles: Yes, but if I had to work here, I'd first have to lose my sense of smell!

[end of dialogue]

Giles begins by saying to Julia, "Do you really think we'll be able to renovate this place and turn it into a restaurant?" "To renovate" means to improve a room or an entire building by usually rebuilding parts of it, expanding it, perhaps putting different decoration – different colors, that sort of thing. "To renovate" means to make new, in some ways, the room or the building. Giles wants to take a place, some place they own or are renting, and turn it into a restaurant, meaning make it into a restaurant. Maybe it was a store before, now it would be something different.

Julia says, "It's not so bad." The place is not too bad is what she's saying. She says, "I know it smells a little stale and musty in here, but all we need to do is air it out." "Stale" is a way of describing a smell that is not fresh, that is old; something that smells used could be described as stale. "Musty" (musty) is something that smells like it's slightly wet; it's a very bad smell, usually because there hasn't been enough air circulation in a particular area. If you live in the northern part of the United States and your house has a basement, sometimes in the basement it can get very moist, very damp, meaning there's water there, and that can lead to a musty smell. "To air (something) out" means to open windows or to do something to make the air move around the particular space so it dries out, smells better, gets rid of the bad smells. You might open a window, for example, to air something out.

Giles says, "Air it out? This place needs a lot more than an airing out." Notice he uses "airing out" as a noun, from the verb "to air (something) out." He says, "The kitchen smells putrid." "Putrid" (putrid) is the smell of something that is dead, something that is perhaps decaying, meaning that, for example, it's been sitting there for a long time and so it starts to come apart. A human body, if it were left in a room – a dead body, that is – would start to decay. It would start to change colors; it would start to smell bad. Well, that bad smell we could describe as being putrid. It doesn't just mean it's a dead body; there are other things that can smell putrid. "Putrid" is perhaps one of the most negative words you can use to describe the way that something smells. Giles says, "I wonder what died in there." He's joking; he doesn't mean something actually is dead in there – although it's possible!

Julia says, "There is a faint smell of something nasty in there, but I don't think it permeates through the rest of the building, do you?" A "faint (faint) smell" is a



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very slight, very small – so small you can almost not notice it. “Faint” has a lot of different meanings in English in addition to this one. Take a look at the Learning Guide for some more explanations. “Nasty” (nasty) is something that is very unpleasant; we might even say it’s disgusting or it’s gross. It’s a very negative way to describe something. You could say, “It was a nasty fight.” The two people were fighting, they were yelling at each other, they were shouting, using bad language. That would be a nasty fight. Here, “nasty” means that the smell is very bad. Julia says there’s a faint smell something nasty in there, but she doesn’t think it permeates through the rest of the building. “To permeate” (permeate) means to be present in every part of something – in every part of, in this case, the building. If a nasty smell permeates the building, we mean you can smell it everywhere in the building.

Giles says that he doesn’t think the nasty smell permeates through the rest of the building, but there are different nasty smells in other parts of the building. He then says, “Oh! There’s a really strong burnt, smoky smell in this corner. Hold your breath!” A “burnt (burnt) smell” would be something that smells after it has been damaged by fire. “Smoky,” similarly, means that something has been burning, or something has been producing smoke, and the smoke is now the smell that you get when you go close to that object. So if there’s a fire in the room, and there was a wooden chair, after the fire whatever is left of the chair might have a burnt, smoky smell. Giles says to Julia, “Hold your breath!” “To hold your breath” means not to breathe, usually because you don’t want to smell something. You want to avoid a bad smell, hold your breath. It means not to breathe.

Julia says, “This is a restaurant. I’m sure a thorough cleaning will make all the difference.” So I guess they’re in a building that had a restaurant, but it’s an old one and it needs cleaning up. Giles says, “That might be true for the kitchen, but what will you do in the dining room (the place where people eat, or dine)? An entire truckload of scented candles or bottles of perfume couldn’t mask those foul smells. This place just stinks, from top to bottom!” Giles says that an entire truckload of scented candles or bottles of perfume couldn’t mask those fousl smells. A “truckload,” here, would be the amount that you could put into a truck; more generally, it just means a large amount of something. So he’s saying that even if we had a large number of scented candles – “scented” means with a pleasant smell. So you buy a candle, and you light it, and it gives off a pleasant smell. That would be a scented candle. I personally don’t like scented candles, because I don’t think the smell is very pleasant at all usually. Giles also mentions bottles of perfume. “Perfume” is a liquid with a strong, pleasant smell. It’s used primarily by women. When men use perfume, they don’t call it perfume, they typically call it “cologne,” just so they don’t seem like they’re women I guess.



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I don't know; it's all perfume basically! "To mask" (mask) means to cover something, to make it difficult or impossible to see or smell or hear something. In this case, make it difficult to smell something. "Foul" (foul) is like the word "putrid," something that is very unpleasant, something that is very bad. "Foul," however, has some other meanings; take a look at the Learning Guide for those.

So going back, Giles says, "An entire truckload of scented candles or bottles of perfume couldn't mask those foul smells. This place just stinks, from top to bottom!" "To stink" means to have a very bad smell. You would never want to say to your boss or to your girlfriend, "Boy, you really stink!" That is not a nice thing to say. More generally, "stink" means to be very bad at something. So we could say, "Ah, that baseball player stinks." "David Beckham stinks," for example. I'm not saying he actually stinks; I don't watch soccer so I don't really know! But when Giles says, "This place just stinks," he means it literally stinks; it smells "from top to bottom," meaning the entire building – the entire room.

Julia says, "All right, I'll look for another building, but this place is cheap and within our budget," meaning we can afford it; we have enough money for what we planned. Giles says, "Yes, but if I had to work here, I'd first have to lose my sense of smell!" Your sense of smell is your ability to smell. We talk about the five senses: smell, see, hear, taste, and touch. And then of course, the sixth sense, which is the ability to see dead people – if you saw the movie, you know what I'm talking about!

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

[start of dialogue]

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Julia: All right, I'll look for another building, but this place is cheap and within our budget.

Giles: Yes, but if I had to work here, I'd first have to lose my sense of smell!

[end of dialogue]

There was nothing stale about this dialogue, because it was written by 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.

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