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**ESL Podcast 663 – Having Problems Concentrating**

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**GLOSSARY**

**driver's test** – a written and driving exam that one must pass before one can receive a driver's license

\* For the driver's test, you'll need to know the maximum speed limit in residential areas and on freeways.

**distracted** – not able to concentrate; with one's attention divided among two or more things

\* Shayna tried to study for the test, but she was distracted by the loud music coming from her neighbor's house.

**manual** – a small book that tells one how to do or use something

\* When you buy a new computer, do you read the user manual first, or do you start using it right away?

**deadly** – very unpleasant and/or difficult; extremely boring

\* Don't take any classes with Professor Tse. Her lectures are deadly!

**to focus** – to concentrate; to put all of one's attention into a particular thought, task, or action

\* Good lifeguards focus on the safety of swimmers at all times.

**to keep (one's) mind on** – to concentrate; to think about a particular thing without stopping or being distracted

\* It's hard to keep my mind on work when we're having so many problems with the kids.

**the rules of the road** – the laws and regulations that govern how people should drive

\* In the United States, everyone drives on the right-hand side. Those are the rules of the road.

**to concentrate** – to focus; to do or think about only one thing, without doing or thinking about other things

\* If you don't start concentrating during your dance lesson, you'll never learn to dance the waltz.



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**for (one's) mind to keep wandering** – for someone to be unable to focus on any single topic, instead thinking about many different things, especially if those things are not relevant or important

\* That movie was so boring! I tried to pay attention to the story, but my mind kept wandering.

**to throw in the towel** – to give up; to stop trying to do something, usually because it is very difficult or frustrating

\* Hank tried to follow the recipe five times before he decided to throw in the towel and just buy a cake instead of making one himself.

**to buckle down** – to become very serious about trying to do something, without delaying or making excuses, especially when it is very difficult or challenging

\* If I want to learn how to play the piano, I need to buckle down and practice every day.

**to crack the whip** – to make someone do something; to be very demanding and controlling about what another person does and how he/she does it

\* If my parents hadn't cracked the whip while I was a kid, I never would have been a good student.

**What's in it for (one)?** – an informal phrase used to ask what advantages or benefits one will get from a particular situation or as a result of doing something

\* Yes, I could loan you my green dress, but what's in it for me?

**to chauffeur** – to drive someone to many different places when asked

\* A designated driver chauffeurs friends to and from bars and their home when they are too drunk to drive themselves.

**for one second more than (one) has to** – a phrase used to show that one is very anxious or eager for something to end, and will stop doing that thing as soon as possible

\* Kyung hates his job and swears he won't work for one second more than he has to. As soon as he has enough money saved, he will retire.

**the look** – a facial expression; the way the position of one's eyes, eyebrows, and mouth can express emotions

\* When I saw the look on Mom's face, I knew we were in trouble.



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### COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

1. What does Liesl mean when she says, “Reading this manual is deadly”?
  - a) The manual is about car accidents and death.
  - b) The manual teaches how to avoid death while driving.
  - c) The manual is very boring and uninteresting.
  
2. Why does Vagner tell Liesl to buckle down?
  - a) Because she needs to concentrate on studying.
  - b) Because she needs to remember to wear her seatbelt.
  - c) Because she needs to stay seated.

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### WHAT ELSE DOES IT MEAN?

#### **manual**

The word “manual,” in this podcast, means a small book that tells one how to do or use something: “According to the manual, this flashing yellow light means that we need to replace the batteries in the camera.” The phrase “manual labor” or “manual work” means physical work that is performed with one’s body or hands: “People who perform manual labor need to eat more than people who work in front of a computer all day.” Something that is “manual” can also be something that is done without using electricity or machines: “Have you ever driven a car with manual steering?” Finally, doing something “manually” can mean doing something without automation or without the help of a computer: “Did you make those calculations manually, or did you use a computer program?”

#### **to focus**

In this podcast, the verb “to focus” means to concentrate, or to put all of one’s attention into a particular thought, task, or action: “Lourdes works from home, but it’s hard for her to concentrate when her kids are playing and making a lot of noise in her office.” The verb “to focus” also means for a camera or binocular lens to make a picture sharper, making it easy for an object to be seen clearly: “How can I make the camera focus on a distant object?” One’s eyes can also “focus” on an object: “If it’s hard for you to focus on the blackboard, you might need to start wearing glasses.” Finally, the verb “to focus” can mean to point light in a particular direction: “Could you please focus the flashlight on this pipe while I try to fix it?”



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### CULTURE NOTE

In the United States, “driver’s licenses” (documents that give one legal permission to drive) are “issued” (given out) by individual states, so the requirements “vary” (are different). However, “applicants” (people who want to get a driver’s license) always have to meet certain requirements.

For example, applicants usually have to be a “resident” (a person who officially lives in a particular place) of that state and at least 16 years old. They need to bring “proof” (a document showing something is true) of their name, identity, and address. For example, they might need to bring a birth certificate, passport, “utility bill” (a bill for water, gas, or electricity mailed to one’s home), or other documents.

Then, the applicant needs take the written test. This test “covers” (includes) information in the state’s driver’s manual. Most of these tests are “computer-based” (with one’s answers put into a computer), but they can also be paper-based. The tests cover the rules of the road, such as speed limits, the need to use “turn signals” (flashing lights on a car letting others know when one is turning), and the need to stop at four-way “intersections” (where two roads intersect or meet).

Once applicants “pass” (receive a good score or grade on) the written test, they need to take the driving test. Usually this test is taken in the applicant’s own car. A person from the department of “motor vehicles” (cars and trucks) sits in the “passenger seat” (the other seat in the front of a car, not the driver’s seat) and tells the applicant where to drive and park. That person “observes” (watches) how well the applicant drives and determines whether the applicant drives safely enough to be given a driver’s license.

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



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**COMPLETE TRANSCRIPT**

Welcome to English as a Second Language Podcast number 663: Having Problems Concentrating.

This is English as a Second Language Podcast episode 663. I'm your host, Dr. Jeff McQuillan, coming to you from the Center for Educational Development in beautiful Los Angeles, California.

If you go to our website at [eslpod.com](http://eslpod.com) you can download a Learning Guide for this episode that will help you improve your English. You can also take a look at our ESL Podcast Store, which has some additional courses in English, and our ESL Podcast Blog.

This episode is called "Having Problems Concentrating." "To concentrate" means to focus your attention on something. Let's get started.

[start of dialogue]

Vagner: Aren't you supposed to be studying for the driver's test?

Liesl: I'm supposed to be, but I keep getting distracted. Reading this manual is deadly.

Vagner: I know, but if you don't study, you'll never pass the test. Try to focus.

Liesl: I've tried to keep my mind on the rules of the road, but I'm having trouble concentrating. My mind keeps wandering and I'm almost ready to throw in the towel for today.

Vagner: No, you can't do that. You have to buckle down and learn what's in this manual. I'm here to crack the whip.

Liesl: What's in it for you? What do you care if I pass the driver's test or not?

Vagner: You can ask me that? I've been chauffeuring you around since I got my driver's license and I don't plan on doing it for one second more than I have to.

Liesl: All right, all right, I'll study, but not because you're telling me to.

Vagner: Oh, yeah? Then why?



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Liesl: I want to see the look on your face the first time Dad gives me the car keys instead of you!

[end of dialogue]

Vagner begins our dialogue – he’s no relation to the composer – by asking Liesl, “Aren’t you supposed to be studying for the driver’s test?” He’s asking her whether she should be studying for the “driver’s test.” This is the test that you must pass in order to get a driver’s license in one of the states in the United States; it’s called the driver’s test. There are two parts: one is written, and one is, we call it, “behind the wheel,” meaning you actually have to go out and drive and show that you know how to drive.

Liesl says, “I’m supposed to be (that is what I am supposed to be doing), but I keep getting distracted.” “To be distracted” means that you are not able to focus, you are not able to concentrate. You focus on this, and then suddenly you do something else, and then a minute later you are doing something different; you’re not focusing on one thing. You might also say that loud music, coming from your neighbor for example, would be distracting. I know I find it distracting! Liesl says, “Reading this manual is deadly.” A “manual,” in this dialogue, means a small book that tells you how to do something. When you buy a new car it usually comes with a little book that tells you how to do all the different things you might want to do with your car; that little book is called the manual (manual). There are other meanings of that word, and those can only be found in our Learning Guide. Well not only, but definitely in our Learning Guide!

Liesl says that reading this driver’s manual is “deadly.” This is a somewhat informal phrase meaning really boring, very, very uninteresting, or very unpleasant, something that isn’t nice. Literally, “deadly” is something that can kill you, but here it’s being used informally to mean something that is very boring. Vagner says, “I know (I know it’s deadly), but if you don’t study, you’ll never pass the test,” you’ll never get a score on the test high enough to pass it to get your license. He says, “Try to focus,” try to concentrate. “Focus” also has other meanings, and they are also in this episode’s Learning Guide.

Liesl says, “I’ve tried to keep my mind on the rules of the road, but I’m having trouble concentrating.” “To keep your mind on (something)” is another way of saying to focus on something, to concentrate about one particular thing and not have your mind think about other things. We might say to not have your “mind wander” (wander), to think about this, and then that, and then something else, and then, you know, the girl you saw at the store today, and then your mother-in-law, and so on and so forth. What was I saying? Oh, concentration! So...let’s



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see...my mind keeps wandering, you see I keep thinking of other things. This morning I woke up, my throat hurt a little. I think it's just allergies; I think it's just something that's temporary, but...uh...it's made it difficult to concentrate.

Now, back to the dialogue: Liesl says, "I've tried to keep my mind on the rules of the road," I've tried to focus or concentrate on the laws and regulations about how you are supposed to drive. Most countries have similar laws and regulations, but there are differences. We call these "the rules of the road." Liesl says that she's having trouble concentrating. "My mind keeps wandering and I'm almost ready to throw in the towel for today." We just explained what it means if your mind wanders. "To throw in the towel" is an old expression, still used, meaning to stop trying to do something. The phrasal verb here is "to give up," to stop trying to do something usually because it's difficult. "To throw in the towel" is the expression.

Vagner says, "No, you can't do that. You have to buckle down and learn what's in this manual." "To buckle (buckle) down" is another two-word phrasal verb meaning to become very serious about trying to do something; to try to complete some job or some task, something that you need to finish without delaying, without stopping, without making excuses, saying oh, I can't do that because of this reason or that reason. This is an expression we use when something is perhaps very difficult but we need to complete it, we need to finish the task. Vagner says, "I'm here to crack the whip." This is another expression, "to crack (crack) the whip (whip)." "To crack the whip" means to make someone else do something, to be very controlling about what the other person is doing, to tell them to keep going, don't stop. Usually, this expression is used to mean that the person doesn't want to do the task and so you, as their boss or parent or supervisor, have to force them to do it. You have to crack the whip. A "whip" is something that is used – it's a long piece of leather, rope, or other material that's very thin, and it is used to hit an animal. For example, you may whip an animal to get it to go faster – to walk faster. It was also used for slaves, human beings who were property; they were also sometimes punished by being whipped. Notice it is a verb and a noun.

Vagner is going to crack the whip; he's going to make sure that Liesl studies. Liesl says, "What's in it for you?" The question "What is in it for you?" is an informal way of asking what benefit or what advantage are you going to get out of this particular situation. Why are you interested; what is it that you are going to get? Liesl says, "What do you care (why is it important to you) if I pass the driver's test or not?" Vagner says, "You can ask me that?" He's surprised that Liesl is asking him this question. He says, "I've been chauffeuring you around since I got my driver's license." "To chauffeur" (chauffeur) means to drive



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someone else from one place to another. If you have a lot of money, you may have a chauffeur; you don't drive, this person drives you where you want to go. We call that person a "chauffeur," and the verb is "to chauffeur." In this case, Vagner is saying that he has had to drive Liesl wherever she has wanted to go since he got his driver's license. So we're guessing that Vagner is older than Liesl. You can get a driver's license legally in the United States in most states when you are 16 years old, although in some states, such as California, it is a restricted license, meaning there are special rules that you have to follow until you are 18 years old, which is considered the age when you become an adult legally.

Vagner says, "I don't plan on doing it (meaning I don't plan on chauffeuring you) for one second more than I have to." This phrase is used to show that Vagner is very eager, he really wants Liesl to get her license so he can stop having to be her chauffeur. Liesl says, "All right, all right, I'll study, but not because you're telling me to study." Vagner says, "Oh, yeah? Then why?" She says, "I want to see the look on your face the first time Dad gives me the car keys instead of you!" "The look" would be the expression on your face, the way your eyes and your mouth and the rest of your face expresses a certain emotion. Liesl wants to see the look on Vagner's face the first time their father gives Liesl the keys to the car rather than Vagner. In many families, the son or daughter, especially the teenage son or daughter, does not have their own car. There isn't enough money for that, so they have to borrow, or use the car that their parents own. That's what Liesl is referring to.

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

[start of dialogue]

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Liesl: I've tried to keep my mind on the rules of the road, but I'm having trouble concentrating. My mind keeps wandering and I'm almost ready to throw in the towel for today.

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Vagner: Oh, yeah? Then why?

Liesl: I want to see the look on your face the first time Dad gives me the car keys instead of you!

[end of dialogue]

It's easy to concentrate on our dialogues; they're never deadly! That's because they're written by the wonderful Dr. Lucy Tse. Thank you Lucy.

From Los Angeles, California, thank you for listening. Come back and listen to us again on ESL Podcast.

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