Real English Conversations: Discussing Daily Rituals 1

INTRODUCTION

Hi English learners! Lori here, your teacher from Betteratenglish.com. In this episode of Real English Conversations, you’ll hear me talking to Kyla, a fellow musician. We met up to talk about a book that we both really like. It’s called Daily Rituals, and was written by Mason Currey.

But as it turned out, Kyla and I had a lot more to talk about than the book. In fact, we didn’t even start talking about the book until several minutes into the conversation. So you’ll have to wait until part two for that. In this first part, you’ll hear us breaking the ice by talking about guitars and practicing and other things we have in common. This was a normal thing to do because it was the first time we ever spoke to each other.

You’ll be hearing lot of informal American English, including tons of phrasal verbs. I think the best way to really learn phrasal verbs is in context, so I’ve highlighted most of them for you in the transcript, along with the other vocabulary.

As always, you can find the full transcript, including a bonus vocabulary lesson at betteratenglish.com/transcripts.

OK, let’s get this conversation started!

CONVERSATION TRANSCRIPT

Lori: Okay, great. Yeah! It was really, really cool that you– you stepped up to the plate and got in touch about– about talking about this book.

Kyla: Good. Yeah! It’s kind of...it’s a– it’s a book that I– I’ve read. I have...I own a copy. And coming up with rituals, I’m always looking for better ways to work and better ways to be creative, so it’s a...yeah. It’s a — when I saw your post, I was like, “Oh! I love that book!” [laughs]
Lori: Oh! Yeah, great! Yeah, at that point, I don’t even think I’d read more than, like, a quarter of it, and I was like, “Oh! This is such a cool book! I really want to talk to somebody about it.”

Kyla: Excellent.

Lori: So yeah, but before we get into that, tell me a little bit more about what you’re doing with guitar.

Kyla: Well, I’m a…I was sort of trained as a classical guitarist as a kid and moved on, started playing electric in, like, some folk rock band in, you know, like, 15 years ago and just sort of…I’ve always been listening to metal so I think it was sort of natural that I got into playing– into playing metal. Now I play in a really, really proggy sort of a death metal band—

Lori: Oh wow.

Kyla: —called Molt. And we, after much strife, finally released an album a couple of years ago. But yeah, I mean, I’m always– I’m always striving to sort of streamline how I practice because I’ve always got, you know — actually, I just quit a job about a month ago to sort of start to…now I’m teaching myself Java and Python, and I’m working on...I’m actually working on writing an app to generate guitar practice exercises.

Lori: Oh!

Kyla: But yeah, so I’m just always– I’m always, you know, looking for ways to work, looking for ways to fit my practice time in the continual quest for speed. [laughs] I do have to thank you for your little…your post about using a 1-minute timer.

Lori: Oh yeah!

Kyla: I do that every day. That’s– [laughs] that’s really become– that’s really become a part of my– my practice regimen.

Lori: Oh, super! I’m glad that was useful.

Kyla: Yeah, that was– that was extraordinarily useful. [laughs]
Lori: Yeah, it’s – it’s one of the things about playing guitar if you’re trying to achieve, yeah, higher than average level of technical mastery is that — you find that unless you’re like one of these freaky people who seem to be just super, super gifted, it takes an inordinate amount of practice.

Kyla: Yeah. Yeah, it’s...and focused, focused practice.

Lori: Yeah, and not just kind of going over the scales or the things that you like to do that are easy for you. You have to sort of get into the edges, and push yourself into the areas where you’re not comfortable and where you start feeling like you suck, basically. [laughs]

Kyla: Yeah, exactly. [laughs]

Lori: ...which is not, like, a happy place to be spending a lot of time really. But that’s kind of what you have to do, I think.

Kyla: It is. It really is. You sort of have to accept, like, “Okay, I’m going to suck at this for a while.” [laughs] Like, “I’m just going to have to get used to that because eventually I will get better at it.”

Lori: Exactly.

Kyla: I think it is. You really need to be able to– to accept that. And I think, like, I’ve never...like, I have quite a few friends who are...who play lots of different instruments. And I’ve just never...like, I’ve just sort of never really been interested in learning other instruments, and someone pointed out once that, like, I’ve been playing guitar for so long that I probably just couldn’t handle, like, not being able to play something. [laughs]

Lori: Oh yeah.

Kyla: You know, I’ll pick up a new instrument, and you...and they’re like, “You just can’t handle that anymore!” [laughs]

Lori: Yeah, going back to that. That feeling of, like, totally sucking and being a beginner and not knowing how long it’s going to take you before you start seeing some results.
Kyla: Yeah, exactly. But it’s like, “Well, am I going to **devote** time to this? Or am I going to devote time playing the guitar even better?” [laughs] I think I’ll **stick with** the guitar.

Lori: Yeah. That’s one of the most difficult things that I’ve **run into** now. And really one of the main reasons that I’m not playing guitar at the moment is that, I’m exposed to so many things now that I want to be able to do, like, creative things and fun and interesting things. But they’re all things that you don’t get good at overnight.

Kyla: Yeah.

Lori: You know, it’s all things that are incredibly complex that take a lot of time and effort until you’re even just kind of **halfway decent**. And I find that as I get older, it’s becoming more and more important to really pick and choose what I’m going to focus my time and energy. Because it’s just not, you know, it’s not like I have unlimited hours a day to devote to drawing and learning to **code** and taking photos and training my dog and doing all these different things I want to do. Plus work...and I have relationships and all those things. So yeah, it’s just an interesting thought, I think. But yeah, to **circle back** a little bit to what—what you said in the beginning about you’re always looking for, like, routines, things to streamline your—your practicing and I think that’s one of the things that kind of drew me to the book, my—myself. And I guess I should probably mention the book we’re talking about is — “Daily Rituals” by Mason Currey. I think that was his name. [laughs]

Kyla: Yes. That would be helpful, wouldn’t it? [laughs]
FINAL WORDS

That’s all for this first part. I hope you enjoyed it!
In the next part of the conversation, we actually start talking about the book, *Daily Rituals* by Mason Currey. It’s a fascinating little book that describes the daily habits and routines of 161 creative people, everyone from Beethoven to Hemingway to Steven King. Some of the routines make a lot of sense, and others are completely crazy!
As always, you can find the transcript and vocabulary lesson for this conversation at betteratenglish.com/transcripts. Until next time, keep practicing your English.
In fact, you can practice right now by leaving me a voice message or writing something on the Better at English Facebook page. You can find all the ways to get in touch at Betteratenglish.com/contact. Bye for now!

VOCABULARY

to step up to the plate
(Figure of speech.) To voluntarily take action or accept responsibility, even if it feels difficult or challenging

Example: Thanks for stepping up to the plate and helping me clean the garage. I really appreciate it!

to get in touch (with) someone
To contact someone

Example: She tried to get in touch with him by phone, email and Facebook, but he never answered.

to come up with something
to think of an idea or plan

Kyla is always coming up with better ways to practice guitar.

to get into something
To begin talking about or discussing something specific

Example: Before we get into discussing the book, tell me about your guitar playing.
**to move on**
To change your ideas or behavior

Example: Kyla started learning classical guitar, but later moved on to playing electric.

**metal**
This is short for heavy metal, a genre of hard rock music.

**proggy**
Prog or prog rock is short for progressive rock, a genre of rock music. Proggy is an adjective to describe this type of music.

**strife**
Disagreement and conflict. Sometimes means strenuous effort.

Example: After a lot of strife, Kyla’s band finally released an album.

**to strive**
To make a (usually great) effort to do something

Example: She strives to be a little better at guitar every day.

**to streamline**
To make something easier, simpler, or more efficient

Example: Kyla wants to streamline her guitar practice routine so it will be more efficient.

**quest**
A (usually) long and difficult search for something

Example: Many learners are on a quest to speak English like a native speaker.

**speed**
Here Kyla is talking about playing fast, technical pieces on her guitar
regimen
A strict system of action designed to produce a result. Often used to describe routines related to diet, exercise, and health

Example: Many world-class musicians follow a strict practice regimen.

extraordinarily
From the adjective extraordinary. Extremely, exceptional, beyond what is normal or expected.

Example: Doing speaking practice exercises every day has been extraordinarily useful. I’m much more fluent now!

freaky
Very rare, odd, or unusual

Example: He has the freaky ability to remember every meal he’s ever eaten in perfect detail.

inordinate
Unusually large or excessive

Example: To progress from good to truly great usually takes an inordinate amount of practice.

to go over something
To review something that you are trying to learn or understand

Example: I need to go over my notes before I start writing this article.

to suck at something
To be very bad or unskilled at something (slang, sometimes considered vulgar)

Example: She is good at reading email, but sucks at answering. She hardly ever replies.

scales
A musical exercise involving playing a series of notes up and down

Example: All musicians need to practice their scales, even if it’s boring.
to get used to something
In this context: to learn to be comfortable with something

Example: When she first started jogging it was difficult and painful, but now she’s used to it.

to point something out
To direct attention to something

Example: My teacher pointed out that I say “like” too much. I honestly hadn’t noticed!

to (be able to) handle something
To tolerate

Example: If you want to succeed as an author, you need to be able to handle rejection.

to pick something up
In this context: to begin learning a new skill

Example: Picking up a new instrument is a nice way to try new things.

to devote
To use something (in this case, time) for a specific purpose

Example: Natasha devotes an hour a day to exercise.

to stick with something
To persevere or continue to do something (the opposite of “give up”)

Example: Instead of picking up a new instrument, I think I’ll stick with guitar.

to run into
In this context, to encounter something unpleasant

Example: It is hard to stay motivated when you keep running into problems.
**halfway decent**
Informal expression meaning: somewhat good

Example: I’m not great at Photoshop yet, but I’m halfway decent. At least I don’t suck!

**to find**
in this context, to discover, learn or realize something through one’s experience

Example: These days I find it takes longer to learn something than it did when I was younger.

**to code**
To write code used for computer programs

Example: Claudia is great at coding. Some day she will probably work for Google.

**to circle back**
In this context: to return to an earlier topic. Often used to say “let’s talk about this topic in the future.”

Example: Can we circle back to what you mentioned earlier about Henderson report? I still have some questions.