

## 040 – Real English Conversations: Daily Rituals part 5

### Introduction

Hi English learners! Lori here, your teacher from [Betteratenglish.com](http://Betteratenglish.com). In this episode of Real English Conversations, you'll hear part 5 of my conversation with Kyla. This is the final part of our conversation about the book *Daily Rituals* by Mason Currey. In the last episode we talked about dealing with distractions and interruptions when you're trying to work. This time we talk about one of the biggest interrupters of all: email. We also talk about ways to structure your day to make it easier to do important things.

If you want to read along as you listen, you can download the full transcript, including a bonus vocabulary lesson at [betteratenglish.com/transcripts](http://betteratenglish.com/transcripts).

After the conversation I'll be back with three questions you can use for speaking practice. Oh, and one final note: I've marked this episode as explicit because near the end of the conversation I say a couple of mildly vulgar words. They're very common slang words that you hear all the time on TV, but I'm playing it safe and warning you anyway. You never know what someone might find offensive.

OK, let's get on with the conversation!

### Conversation transcript

Kyla: I was going to say, I guess, one **drawback** about the book actually is that so much of it is, there's not– there's not very many current **contemporary** people in it to ask about their rituals. It's, yeah, an awful lot of people from the last century before, before internet and so it would be– it would be nice to find, you know, the daily rituals of more people living now with the different forms of communication that we have now.

Lori: Right.

Kyla: Because of course there were several people that would have, you know, they'd have their hour in which they would make their phone calls to their agents or their phone calls to newspapers or, you know, when it was still there. Because you still had the communication that was required with the– the rest of the world. But I think it was probably much easier to schedule, “Okay, this is the time that I’m going to be on the telephone because this is when I have access to a telephone or...”

Lori: Right.

Kyla: You know, “This is the time of day when I **sit and write** my letters and read my letters,” which there’s no reason why we can’t do that now but I think it’s easier when you have a physical letter that you can put in a pile on the– on the bedside table or the coffee table and...

Lori: Right. And it’s– it’s also...there’s a limit there, you know. It’s self-limiting. You see, “Okay, I have five letters I have to answer...”

Kyla: That’s right.

Lori: ...and you know that it’s not like today with email where at any second, you can get more added to that pile and you never know when you’re going to get one.



**Overwhelmed by email**

Kyla: That’s– that’s right. You’re sitting there answering, it’s like, “I have five emails to respond to,” and by the time you’re done, there’s five more. [laughs]

Lori: Exactly. Or you send your answers and then the person replies right away with still more questions, and it never ends.

Kyla: Yeah.

Lori: So there– there was more of a sense of, like, these **finite** chunks of work that you could do in a given period than– than now where the bound-

aries between work and not work and yeah, it's just getting fuzzier and fuzzier all the time, I think.

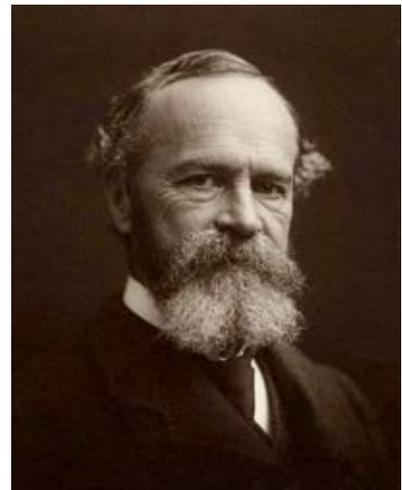
Kyla: That's right. Yeah.

Lori: But I agree. I agree with you that it would be great to hear some examples or read some examples of people living in our time dealing with the– the kind of problems we're dealing with every day. Yeah, very cool. Let me see. Was there something else? I guess my– my...I don't know if it would be my final question, but one question that I have for you is, if you have **picked up** anything from the book that you have started to apply to your own life, or that has somehow changed the way you approach getting your creative work done or your productive work done?

Kyla: One of the– one of the things for sure is, and I actually went and found the quote again because I thought it was a **brilliant** quote, and it's from William James. And he talks about what he calls the “effortless **custody** of automation.”

Lori: Whoah!

Kyla: I have really tried to do sort of the opposite of automating the creative process, but that's automating the **mundane** process. And I found a little bit of success and I think– I think it has grown over time and will continue to grow but sort of, like, we kind of have a routine in my household of, like, when dishes get washed and when they get put away and who does what. And I think it sort of making habits out of the mundane but other necessary things that have to happen and just kind of getting those things out of the way without having to think about them leaves you more time and more space to do the things that really matter, which, you know, is creative work or learning new things. And I think that was sort of, oddly enough, one of the things that I really took from that book, and it's almost the opposite of what the book was about in some ways. [laughs]



**William James knew how to get things done.**

# Better@ English

- Lori: I guess what I would say about that is, that maybe that's your way of kind of clearing the space that you need to then be able to, to take the time for yourself for your creative projects because you don't have all these **nagging** little to-dos left kind of unfinished.
- Kyla: Yeah, it's sitting at the back of the brain and, yeah.
- Lori: Yeah. It's hard to do this without getting into, like, David Allen **GTD** terminology and started talking about, like, **open loops**. [laughs]
- Kyla: [laughs] Yeah.
- Lori: Exactly. But there's really...I really think that's true that- that if you can, that's...maybe that's one of the things that's so great about setting aside those first hours in the morning for doing your really important stuff is, is that you don't have this feeling of all these other little unfinished things that are kind of nagging at you and making you feel a little bit guilty for taking that time for yourself.
- Kyla: That's right. Yeah.
- Lori: Because so much of what, at least for me, when I'm doing something creative, I often will end a session and- and feel like, "Well, I did put in the hours. I did do stuff. But I don't really have anything I would be proud to show anybody today."
- Kyla: Right.
- Lori: And that can make you feel, at least can make me, feel a little bit guilty that- that, "Oh..."
- Kyla: Yeah, like, you didn't **accomplish** anything.
- Lori: Yeah, and then, like, "Oh, **who am I to think** I should be able to sit here and spend this time doing this thing that I enjoy, that feeds my soul, when I have all this other unfinished stuff done that other people are depending on me for."
- Kyla: Right.

# Better@ English

- Lori: So yeah. To circle back, is, maybe that's kind of your way of getting all that **shit** taken care of and then you have this space and **peace and quiet** and in your mind as well as in your environment.
- Kyla: Yeah. No, definitely. I think that makes...yeah, that makes sense.
- Lori: Yeah. I hope so. [laughs]
- Kyla: [laughs] Kind of, yeah. Exactly. It allows for, sort of, not just– not just sort of, you know, nagging-doubt-free but guilt-free time to spend on creative process.
- Lori: Yeah. Because the nagging doubt is a freaking **bitch**, man, seriously.
- Kyla: Yeah. [laughs]
- Lori: The **self-loathing** and **nagging doubt** and fear and anxiety; all of that is bad enough. And then when you're feeling guilty for taking that time for yourself, you know, on top of all that? It's...whoa. [laughs]
- Kyla: Yeah. I– I feel the need to **high five** you. [laughs]
- Lori: [laughs] High five! [34:32] I'm high fiving. You can't see it now but I'm high fiving you. [laughs]
- Kyla: All right. [laughs]



**Everybody enjoys a good high five, even Obama!**

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## Final words

That's all for this time. I hope you've enjoyed the conversation. Remember that it's important to [practice speaking if you want to improve your English fluency](#). Here are 3 discussion questions that you can use to practice with your teacher, tutor, or your language exchange partner.

1. What are your biggest distractions, and how do you deal with them when you need to work?
2. What do you think about the current trend for people to be constantly accessible via social media, email, etc.?
3. What kind of environment and setting do you need to do your best work? Are you able to create that for yourself? If not, what would you need to change?

Make sure to download the transcript so you can read along to check your understanding. The transcript also has notes about the language we use in the conversation, and explains a lot of the vocabulary. You can find it at [betteratenglish.com/transcripts](http://betteratenglish.com/transcripts).

Until next time, keep on practicing your English. In fact, you can practice right now by leaving me a voice message or joining the conversation on the [Better at English Facebook page](#). You can find all the ways to get in touch at [Betteratenglish.com/contact](http://Betteratenglish.com/contact). Bye for now!

## Vocabulary and usage notes

### drawback

a disadvantage or problem

### contemporary (adj.)

In this context: existing or happening now.

### sit and write

The *sit and + verb* combination is very common in English. Other *sit and + verb* combinations include *sit and watch*, *sit and listen*, *sit and talk*, *sit and wait*, *sit and stare*. Compare to what you learned in part 3 of this conversation about *sit down and do something*. People often use the phrase *to sit down and do something* to talk about starting to do tasks that take a lot of time and attention, for example writing a long text, working on a drawing, answering a lot of email, etc. Usually you need to sit down to do these tasks, and the hardest part of doing them is forcing yourself to start.

### self-limiting

something that limits itself

### finite

having limits or an ending

### given

given means particular, already decided

### Let me see

A fixed phrase that is used as a filler when a speaker needs time to remember or think of something.

### to pick up

to learn or start doing something new without meaning to

### brilliant

very intelligent or insightful

## custody

Custody means *care, protection, or safe-keeping*. William James was talking about making habits out of everyday tasks and chores so our minds can be free to think about more important things.

The full quote is: “*The more of the details of our daily life we can hand over to the effortless custody of automatism, the more our higher powers of mind will be set free for their own proper work.*” In simple English, this means: “*If we make our everyday activities into habits, we have more mental energy for doing difficult things.*”

## Whoa!

Said with this intonation is an exclamation that shows you are surprised or impressed by something

## Mundane

Mundane things are the dull, unexciting things you do every day.

## nagging

Something that feels unpleasant for a long time and is difficult to stop. A *nagging doubt* is a feeling of doubt that you can't stop feeling. *Nagging* collocates very strongly with *doubt*. Adding the suffix *-free* adds the meaning of “without” So *nagging-doubt-free time* means *time when you don't feel nagging doubts*.

## GTD

GTD is an abbreviation for the extremely popular personal productivity book “Getting Things Done” by David Allen.

## open loops

In the GTD system, open loops are any jobs, tasks, activities, appointments or other commitments that you have not finished

## at least for me

This expression shows that you know your experience does not necessarily generalize to other people

## to accomplish

To finish something successfully, usually something you feel proud of

## who am I to think...

A fixed expression that shows you are not sure you have the right to do something. It can also be said about other people, for example: *Who is he to think he can tell me how to do my job!*

## shit

Informal and considered slightly vulgar. In this context, shit means *stuff*. The *stuff* here is unexciting household tasks and chores that need to be done regularly.

## peace and quiet

learn this as a fixed phrase. It means a state of not being interrupted by anything that bothers you.

## bitch

Informal and considered slightly vulgar. In this context, a bitch is something unpleasant or difficult that causes problems for you or is hard to overcome

## self-loathing

self-hate, usually because you are disappointed in or angry with yourself

## nagging doubt

You see that this phrase appears again. That is because *nagging doubt* is a very strong collocation. Other collocations you often see are *nagging worry*, *nagging feeling*, and *nagging suspicion*.

## high-five

High-fiving is when two people hold up their hands and slap their palms together. It's a gesture of congratulation, victory or celebration. Sometimes people who know each other well high-five each other as a greeting. Kyla wants to high-five Lori because she agrees with what she said and feels the same.