

EPISODE 31  
LEVEL B2

READING COMPREHENSION



LEARNING AND ABILITY

'I wish I could speak French as well as you. You must have **a flair** (= talent) **for languages**. I've been learning French for years and I can barely communicate.'

'It's true, I can speak French **fluently** (= very well), but aren't you a bit too modest?'

'No, I'm really not **a fast learner**. Quite unlike my brother, who joined the course after a month because of an illness and he is already as good as the others.'

'Wow! He must be really a genius. But you are **brilliant** (= extremely good) **at** maths and I **don't have a head for figures**. To be honest, I'm absolutely **hopeless** (= very bad) **at** the subject and I'm sure I'll fail my exams.'

'I feel a bit better now. Maybe it's just that some people are **naturals** (= have a natural ability for sth) but some become good at a subject only if they are **genuinely** (= really) **interested in** it?'



More contexts for the new words:

- She always used to dress **with a flair**. (= an attractive or interesting way of doing something)
- He was the youngest lawyer in the office to make such **a brilliant career**. (= very impressive, successful)

### EXERCISE 1

Put the words below into two categories.

- a fast learner
- a natural
- have a flair for sth
- not to have a head for sth
- speak a language fluently
- to be brilliant at sth
- to be genuinely interested in sth
- to be hopeless at sth

POSITIVE	NEGATIVE



### EXERCISE 2

Add the missing prepositions, then answer the questions.

1. Do you think you have a flair ..... languages? Why/ why not?
2. Which subjects were you brilliant ..... at school?
3. Which subjects were you genuinely interested ..... during your studies?

### ENGLISH IN USE



One of the speakers in the dialogue above says '*I wish I could speak French as well as you*'; does that mean that he is good at French or not? What is '*I wish*' used for here?

You can use '*I wish*' to complain about the present situation, to express your dissatisfaction with the present state of things and, at the same time, to talk about your wishes and dreams concerning the present. So, in fact, it's just dreaming and imagining a situation which stands in contrast to the real situation.

To talk about the present situation, we need '*I wish*' followed by Past Simple/Continuous, e.g,

*I wish it **wasn't** raining! (= but it is raining)*

*I wish you **lived** in Warsaw. (= but the person doesn't live here)*

*I wish we **didn't have to** work so hard. (= but we do)*

'*I wish*' can be replaced by '*If only*', which is illustrated by another sentence from the text:

*'If only that was modesty!'*

'If only' is just a bit more emphatic than 'I wish', otherwise they have a similar meaning and function.

*If only you **were** here! (= but you are not)*

*If only my husband **could** speak English. (= but he can't)*

*If only she **didn't have** so many things to do. (= but she has a lot of work)*

## IDIOM CLOSE-UP



*A/ Is Sue a good student?*

*B/ Sure she is. She is really **QUICK ON THE UPTAKE**.*

If someone is **quick on the uptake**, they grasp things quickly and learn very fast.

## PHRASAL VERBS CLOSE-UP



1. When you **PICK** something **UP**, you learn a new skill or start a habit without intending to.

*During my stay in London I seemed to **pick up** new words quite easily.*

*She **picked up** a few German phrases while staying in Berlin.*

2. If you **WORK AT** something, you try hard to develop or improve something.

*Whatever French I know I have to really **work at it**.*

*If she **works at** improving her backhand, she could be a champion.*



### EXERCISE 3

Decide if the sentences below are correct or incorrect. Then correct the ones that have mistakes.

1. Successful relationships don't just happen – you have to work at them.
2. Children don't learn their first language from a textbook, but they pick it off from their parents.
3. Sam is really quick on the uptake when it comes to sports.

## NEWS



### BILINGUAL KINDERGARTENS

Due to insufficient access to public kindergartens and the shortage of skilled babysitters, more and more privately-run kindergartens are **springing up** in Warsaw. Their founders try to attract parents in numerous ways. A really popular method recently is to advertise your facility as a bilingual one. 'Two languages – twice the choice,' claims one of the ads. And they are right. Parents seem to be **flocking in droves** to such establishments, hoping to provide their **offspring** with chances for a better future. Rarely do they notice that what is advertised as a bilingual **curriculum** often turns out to be a monolingual one, with merely two English lessons a week. So be sure to read the small print before you make any vital decisions!

### GLOSSARY

- **springing up** – being created
- **flocking in droves** – coming in large numbers
- **offspring** – children
- **curriculum** – what is taught at school

## KEY TO EXERCISES

### Ex. 1

POSITIVE	NEGATIVE
a fast learner	not to have a head for sth
a natural	to be hopeless at sth
have a flair for sth	
speak a language fluently	
to be brilliant at sth	
to be genuinely interested in sth	

### Ex. 2

1. for
2. at
3. in

### Ex. 3

1. correct
2. incorrect – they pick it up
3. correct