



## ESL Podcast 654 – Talking About Sound and Volume

### GLOSSARY

**to turn (something) up/down** – to increase or decrease the volume, especially of music or television

\* Could you please turn the TV up? I can't hear what the reporter is saying.

**ear-splitting** – hurting one's ears because something is extremely loud and/or high-pitched

\* When Raffi heard an ear-splitting scream in the middle of the night, he immediately called the police.

**to concentrate** – to focus all of one's attention on one thing, without being distracted by other things

\* Patrizia is having a lot of problems in her personal life and that makes it difficult for her to concentrate on her work.

**to swear** – to insist that one is telling the truth; to very strongly state that one is being honest

\* I don't know who ate the last piece of cake, but I swear it wasn't me!

**volume control** – a small dial or knob on a radio, stereo, television, or other piece of electronic equipment, touched to make something louder or quieter

\* This volume control is really sensitive, so even the gentlest touch makes a big difference in how loud the music is.

**decibel** – a measurement of how loud something is

\* The noise in a typical library is around 40 decibels, but the noise created by a jet airplane taking off is around 120 decibels.

**high-pitched** – with a very high sound, more like a soprano woman's voice than like a bass man's voice

\* Why do so many cartoon characters have annoyingly high-pitched voices?

**squeal** – a loud, high sound, often made when one is very happy or excited

\* Their home is always filled with squeals of laughter.

**speaker** – the part of a radio, stereo, or television set that produces noise

\* We had a great time sitting right in front of the speakers at the concert last night, but today my ears hurt and it's hard to hear anything.



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**grating** – making an annoying, unpleasant sound; irritating; bothering someone; making someone angry and upset

\* The beeping sound at the grocery store every time someone buys something is really grating. I wouldn't want to work there.

**banging** – with a loud, heavy sound that lasts for a very short period of time, usually produced when two objects hit each other, or when one object falls

\* People say that bears are scared of banging noises, so it's a good idea to hit two sticks together when you're walking alone in the woods.

**hammer** – a tool with a wooden handle and a heavy metal top, used to hit nails and push them into a wall or a piece of wood

\* You'll need a hammer and a screwdriver to assemble this bookcase.

**thumping** – a loud, slightly muffled or distant noise caused when something falls or when two heavy objects hit each other

\* Whenever our neighbor practices the drums, we can hear the thumping noises in our home, even though we live one block away!

**to lift weights** – to try to build one's strength and/or the size of one's muscles by lifting heavy objects many times

\* Studies have shown that older people who lift weights a few times each week are less likely to break their bones in a fall.

**moderate** – of medium size or number; not too big and not too small; not too loud and not too quiet

\* We've seen a moderate decrease in the unemployment rate, but not as much as people were hoping for

**quiet as a mouse** – extremely quiet, not making any noise

\* Everyone became as quiet as a mouse, waiting to hear the important announcement.



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### COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

1. Why does Delilah want Josh to lower the volume?
  - a) Because she doesn't like his music.
  - b) Because she is getting a headache.
  - c) Because she needs to focus on something.
  
2. What does Delilah mean when she asks Josh to "keep the volume to a moderate level"?
  - a) She wants him to make the music quieter.
  - b) She wants him to turn off the music.
  - c) She wants him to let her touch the volume control.

### WHAT ELSE DOES IT MEAN?

#### **to turn (something) up/down**

The phrase "to turn (something) up/down," in this podcast, means to increase or decrease the volume, especially of music or television: "Lincoln turns up the volume on the radio when he drives on the freeway, because his car is really loud at high speeds." The phrase "to turn up" can also mean to arrive: "What time did Katie turn up at work this morning?" The phrase "to turn (one's) nose up at (something)" means to not like or accept something because it isn't good enough for oneself: "After living in New York City for three years, James now turns his nose up at our small town entertainment, like country fairs and rodeos." Finally, the phrase "to turn (something) upside down" means to look everywhere for something, creating a mess as one does it: "He turned the house upside down looking for his keys, but he still hasn't found them."

#### **moderate**

In this podcast, the word "moderate" means of medium size or number, not too big and not too small, or not too loud and not too quiet: "They want to buy a moderate-sized home on a quiet street." Or, "The weather report says to expect moderate rain today, so don't forget to take your umbrella." In politics, "moderate" refers to beliefs and opinions that are not too liberal or too conservative and can be accepted by most people: "Extreme candidates usually get more media coverage than moderate candidates." As a verb, "to moderate a discussion/meeting" means to guide a group of people as they discuss something, making sure that everyone gets an opportunity to speak, but that they stay focused: "A good manager knows how to moderate staff meetings effectively so that issues are discussed and decisions are made."



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### CULTURE NOTE

Most musicians are interested in producing the best, most “memorable” (easy to remember) music, but others want to be known as the loudest band in the world. There has been a lot of competition among bands for this “sought-after” (wanted very badly by many people) “title” (label; honor). Many bands “proudly” (with a lot of pride, feeling that one has done something well) claim to be the loudest band in the world.

In 1972, The Guinness Book of World Records (discussed in English Café 89) listed Deep Purple as the “loudest pop group” when its concert in London was measured at 117 decibels. Three of the people in the audience actually became “unconscious” (unaware of what is happening around oneself and appearing to be asleep, often because one has hit one’s head).

Other bands “have since” (since then) made music with even higher recorded decibel measurements, but the Guinness Book doesn’t award titles for “loudest band” anymore because it doesn’t want to be responsible for “hearing damage” (reductions in one’s ability to hear because one was exposed to very loud noises).

Nevertheless, bands continue to try to get louder and louder. In 2009, the band Kiss reached 136 decibels at a festival in Canada, but this was far above the allowed “limit” (maximum amount). Neighbors complained about the noise, and the band had to turn down the volume.

“Exposure to” (being in the presence of) loud noises can cause “severe” (very bad and serious) hearing damage and can actually be “painful” (causing discomfort). Bands know this, but they continue to play loudly anyway. In fact, the band AC/DC used to be known for playing its music “painfully loud.”

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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 654: Talking About Sound and Volume.

This is English as a Second Language Podcast episode 654. I am 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!

This episode is called “Talking About Sound and Volume.” It’s a dialogue between Delilah and Josh. Let’s get started.

[start of dialogue]

Delilah: Could you turn that down?

Josh: What?

Delilah: Could you turn your music down?

Josh: Oh, sure. Is there a problem?

Delilah: No, there’s no problem. I was just trying to do some reading and the ear-splitting music coming from your room made it hard to concentrate.

Josh: Sorry. I didn’t think it was that loud. I didn’t turn it up, I swear. The volume control is in the same place it always is, not one decibel higher.

Delilah: That may be true, but those high-pitched squeals coming out of your speakers are really grating. And what was that banging sound?

Josh: Oh, I was just using this hammer to fix my chair. I’m done.

Delilah: And what was that thumping noise?

Josh: Thumping noise? Oh, I was lifting weights and dropping them back down on the floor.

Delilah: I see. If you could please keep the volume to a moderate level, I would appreciate it.



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Josh: No problem. I'll be as quiet as a mouse – as I always am.

[end of dialogue]

Delilah begins our dialogue by asking Josh a question; really, she's making a request. "Could you turn that down?" "To turn (something) down" or "to turn (something) up" means to decrease, turn it down, or increase, turn it up. In this case, really we're talking about the sound – the "volume," how loud something is. You could also turn up the heat if you had, for example, an adjustable heater, but the phrase is most often used when talking about the loudness – the sound on a television, or a computer, or a radio, and so forth. There are actually several different phrasal verbs that come from "turn," you can find some of those in our Learning Guide.

Josh says, "What?" He can't hear Delilah because his music or whatever he's listening to is so loud. Delilah says again, "Could you turn your music down?" Josh says, "Oh, sure. Is there a problem?" Delilah says, "No, there's no problem. I was just trying to do some reading and the ear-splitting music coming from your room made it hard to concentrate." Here, Delilah is being sarcastic when she says, "No, there's no problem." In fact, she means yes, there's a big problem. She was trying to do some reading, but Josh had ear-splitting music on in his room. "Ear-splitting" is something that is so loud it hurts your ears. It's something that is so high in pitch, perhaps, that it is painful to listen to. Delilah says that she can't read because she can't concentrate. "To concentrate" means to focus your attention on something without worrying about or, we would say, being distracted by other things.

Josh says, "Sorry. I didn't think it was that loud (meaning as loud as you think it is). I didn't turn it up, I swear." "To swear" (swear) means to insist that you are telling the truth, to say very strongly I am telling you the truth or I will do what I say I will do. Josh swears that he did not turn it up; he did not increase the volume. He says, "The volume control is in the same place it always is, not one decibel higher." The "volume control" is, you can guess, the thing that you use to turn the sound up or down on radio, a television, an iPod, and so forth. Josh says that the volume control is in the same place it always is, not one decibel higher. A "decibel" (decibel) is a measurement of how loud something is. We talk about something being two miles from here; "miles" is a way of measuring something. "Decibel" is how we measure how loud something is. It can also be used to measure the strength of a radio signal for example, but the more common use is to talk about loudness. Decibels are in what we call a logarithmic scale, for the mathematicians out there. If you increase something by three



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decibels you've made it twice as loud. Josh says that the sound is not one decibel higher than it used to be. Decibels is almost always a comparison between one level versus another.

Delilah says, "That may be true, but those high-pitched squeals coming out of your speakers are really grating." "High-pitched" is a very high sound, like this, like a soprano. Or someone like me; a man who sings in a high voice is said to be singing "falsetto." The Bee Gees, for example, often sang in falsetto in the 1970s: "How deep is your love, is your love? How deep is your love? I really need to love." Pretty bad, huh? Yeah, they were! Well, Delilah is talking about high-pitched squeals. A "squeal" (squeal) is a loud, high sound. Sometimes it can mean that you are very happy or excited. You can have squeals of laughter. Or, it could be a very unpleasant sound coming out of a radio or a loud speaker. A "speaker," speaking of speakers, is the part of the radio or television or thing you hook up to your computer where the noise comes out. Delilah says that the high-pitched squeals coming out of Josh's speakers are really grating (grating). A "grating" sound is an unpleasant one, an irritating one, something that bothers you a lot. It might even make you angry.

Delilah also asks Josh, "what was that banging sound?" "To bang" is to make a very loud, often deep sound that lasts for a short period of time. When you take two things – two glasses, and you hit them against each other, we would say you bang them against each other, you make a banging sound. I have my cup of tea here – it's, um, English Breakfast tea today – and a glass of water, and if I bang them together [bang, bang, bang] they make a banging sound.

Josh says, "Oh, I was just using this hammer to fix my chair. I'm done (I'm finished now)." A "hammer" (hammer) is a tool that has typically a wooden handle, something that you grab onto with your hands, and it has a very heavy piece of metal on the top. You use it to hit nails; to push nails into the wall you use a hammer. Hammer, of course, was also a 1980s singer, M.C. Hammer, but we're not going to sing any of his songs today!

Delilah says, "And what was that thumping sound?" A "thumping" (thumping) is a loud sound, but one that you can't hear very clearly. It's usually something in the distance, but you can tell by the sound that it is a very loud sound and that if you were next to it, it would be very loud in your ears. Delilah asks what Josh's thumping sound, or thumping noise was. Josh says, "Thumping noise?" You should know, by the way, that "noise" is usually a word we use to talk about sound that we don't want to hear or unpleasant sound. The sound of my neighbors' children yelling and screaming and squealing; that's noise!





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Josh says, “Oh, I was lifting weights and dropping them back down on the floor.” “To lift weights” is to try to build your muscles by lifting very heavy objects. That’s what Josh was doing, and when he put them back down on the ground, what we would call the weights, well, that made this thumping sound.

Delilah says, “I see. If you could please keep the volume to a moderate level, I would appreciate it.” A “moderate” level is something not too loud, not necessarily soft, something in the middle. Not too big, not too small. Josh says, “No problem. I’ll be as quiet as a mouse – as I always am.” The expression “to be as quiet as a mouse” means to be extremely quiet, not to make any noise. A mouse, of course, is a small, little, typically white animal that because it is so small you would never hear it or rarely hear it. That’s not always true, however. Sometimes you actually can hear mice – mice being the plural of mouse, of course. We’re not talking about the mouse sitting in front of your computer that controls the cursor on your computer screen, that’s a different kind of mouse.

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

[start of dialogue]

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Josh: What?

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Josh: Oh, sure. Is there a problem?

Delilah: No, there’s no problem. I was just trying to do some reading and the ear-splitting music coming from your room made it hard to concentrate.

Josh: Sorry. I didn’t think it was that loud. I didn’t turn it up, I swear. The volume control is in the same place it always is, not one decibel higher.

Delilah: That may be true, but those high-pitched squeals coming out of your speakers are really grating. And what was that banging sound?

Josh: Oh, I was just using this hammer to fix my chair. I’m done.

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Delilah: I see. If you could please keep the volume to a moderate level, I would appreciate it.

Josh: No problem. I'll be as quiet as a mouse – as I always am.

[end of dialogue]

We hope you turn up your volume when listening to one of our scripts written by our very own 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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