

St Augustine's Centre, Halifax, UK
English for Life in the UK

Season 2 - Episode 16 - The Seasons and the Weather in the UK

March 2021

Mark Hello, and welcome to the podcast **English for Life in the UK**. This podcast is for those people who want to improve their English and at the same time learn more about life in this country.

Today, we're going to talk about the seasons and the **weather** and the **climate** in the UK, and I'm joined today by Christine and Phoebe. Christine - how are you today?

Christine I'm well, Mark, thank you. I was out earlier today and it was *so-o* cold. It looks warm, but today - and we're on 5th March - it was freezing, as I cycled down into town.

Mark OK. Good bit of weather vocabulary already! Thank you, Christine. Phoebe, how are you, today?

Phoebe I'm fine, thank you. A little bit tired - it's the end of the working week for me, so I'm happy for the weekend.

I imagine that it's not the first time we've heard about the weather on this podcast. I feel like, as British people, we love to talk about the weather. When someone asks how you are, I just feel like the weather always has a bearing¹ on your answer to that question. (*Phoebe laughs*).

Mark I think you're right, there. You're right there, Phoebe. And we certainly thought this is why this was a good topic to choose for a podcast episode. Because if you can learn to talk about the weather, then you can talk to almost anybody in this country, because everybody talks about the weather.

And I think Christine, you might kick us off² by actually explaining why that is - why is it people talk about the weather so much, in this country?

Christine Well - it's interesting, Mark - they say that the climate in this country is a 'temperate climate' - so it's a mild climate. That means there are no great extremes of very hot summers or very cold winters. Everything's fairly mild. And we do have seasons: we have spring, summer, and autumn and winter. But: it's very difficult to predict what the weather will be like in three weeks' time, for example, because it can change; it's very unpredictable, so suddenly you'll have a warm bit of ... a warm week, and then next morning, you'll wake up and it will be cold and everybody will comment on it.

¹ has a bearing = is relevant, has an impact, is a consideration as part of the answer

² kick us off = "start us off" ; from football, start of a game is "the kick off".

Phoebe I think, as well, Christine, the weather's unpredictable within the day! You know you can go outside in the morning, and you can - you know, be wearing a light jacket because the sky is clear - and then, by the time you come home, you need an umbrella and a raincoat and it's absolutely pouring down. We just never know.

Christine So true, Phoebe! So true!

Mark And I guess that's why people often talk about the weather, because you never quite know what it's going to be like, so it's a good topic of conversation. If you're in a country where the weather's the same every day for long periods of time, then it will be a bit boring talking about the weather, every day, wouldn't it? So ...

We should perhaps just explain **the difference between "weather" and "climate"**, because both of those words get used quite often.

The "weather" is usually used to refer to the short-term weather, what's happening just **from day-to-day with the weather, whereas the "climate" is more general**, it's what's happening over a longer period of time. So you talk about the climate of a country, you can talk about the climate in a season, you can talk about changes in the climate over time. Normally when you're talking from day-to-day, you talk about 'the weather'.

(4 minutes:06 seconds)

Christine And we thought we'd talk about the weather in the different seasons. So, we, in this country, we have spring, summer, autumn and winter and we have just started spring. Generally, most people would say the first day of March was the beginning of spring, and there are some signs of spring, already - I can see bulbs peeking up³; I've seen snowdrops, already, but there are some daffodils too.

But I don't see ... I mean a sign of spring is often birds start making nests - I don't know about where you are, Mark or Phoebe, but the birds in my garden are not interested in nest-making yet, but that will come.

Phoebe I've heard the birds ... erm ... in my garden, but I've not seen any nests - so I'll keep you posted⁴.

Christine Well, spring is the time when the weather starts warming up, at the end of winter, and it's known for showers in particular. Perhaps not so much in March, but more so, in April. That means you'll suddenly get a burst of rain that may only last for a few minutes or less than an hour.

³ peeking up = green shoots from the bulb pushing through the soil, to reach daylight; peeking would normally mean quick and secretive glances or looking, from a hiding place; a similar word would be "peeping".

⁴ keep you posted = will keep you up-to-date as and when things change.

Phoebe This happened to me actually, yesterday, Christine - I went outside for a short walk and I thought it looks lovely out there, I'll just put on my light jacket and two minutes later it started raining, and I had to run home. (*Laughter*).

Christine Typical. Typical spring. Sometimes it can be quite beautiful because when the sun's out and then it starts raining, you can see rainbows, which are very nice. And then, you know, the trees - the leaves will start to grow on the trees. And blossom appears on some trees, as well - it's ... it's quite a pretty time of year, I would say.

Phoebe So after, spring, comes my favourite season which is summer; not only because it has my birthday, which is in July - I would say summer is June, July and August and this is usually when it's the hottest in the UK.

Mark I've actually got some figures which I think are quite interesting, in terms of the number of hours of sunshine that you get at different times of the year. During the month of July, you would normally expect to get about 190 hours of sunshine through the month. But if you compare that with January: you only get 54 hours of sunshine during the month of January, so it just shows how, in the summer, you get considerably more sunshine. And also the average temperature: so in January, the average temperature is only 6 degrees - that's 6 degrees⁵ centigrade - which is the usual way we use for measuring temperature, these days⁶ - whereas in July, it's 20 degrees centigrade. So - shows there is a difference, although Christine's right, we don't have extremes of warm and cold, certainly the summer is warmer and there is more sunshine.

Christine And although I said we don't have extremes of warm and cold, we do quite often in the summer get .. can have very warm periods - where a "heatwave" - we call it - when there's a series of days when the temperature is over 30 degrees and that's not it doesn't happen every year, but it does happen quite often. And sometimes in the summer, you can get thunderstorms. Suddenly, after a period of warm weather, clouds will build and, you know, you have thunder and lightening, and sudden, very, very heavy rainfall⁷ that's just localised - it's just in one particular area. And that can cause - what they call - "flash floods". Suddenly, the rivers will come up, suddenly, the water can rush through the middle of a town. Can be quite dangerous.

(8:48)

Phoebe One of my favourite things about summer is how long the days are and I think this really changes in ... because Britain is quite far in the Northern hemisphere, so the sun will rise - and especially, if you live in Scotland, for example - like at 4.00 am, in the morning, the sun rises and we have these really long days. And I think it really changes

⁵ temperature degrees are usually shown by the symbol ° , so for example 6 degrees is 6 °

⁶ Previously and still occasionally seen, weather and climate temperature in the UK used to be quoted in degrees Fahrenheit.

⁷ rainfall - as here, this can be used interchangeably with "rain" as a noun, but more usually used in a discussion of **climate** - longer term and more generally: eg. "the recorded rainfall for that area is ... " etc.

the way we interact as communities and as households in summer, because we can stay outside for longer, we can socialise for longer, and we don't want to do that when it's dark, in winter, so I feel like they ... because of the big differences in the seasons, we really change our behaviour according to the seasons as well.

Christine (*quietly*) I think you're right there, Phoebe.

Mark And also, I guess we should say, the summer is the period of time, the season when the majority of people in the United Kingdom will go on holiday. People do have holidays at other times of the year, but the summer is the most popular time for people to go on holiday - that's on holiday in this country, or on holiday abroad.

Christine That's true. There are long school holidays.

Mark So - the next season is the autumn, and the autumn, I guess, is best known for the time when the leaves start to turn from green to orange and brown and yellow and then the leaves start to fall off the trees, and so actually, you may also hear this season referred to as "the fall". That is an American term: the Americans would often ... would more commonly talk about the season as being the fall. In this country, we usually call it the autumn. Weather in the autumn [is] very changeable, again. You can have some lovely sunny days, you can have some fairly warm days, but you can also have a lot of wind and rain. You can occasionally also have storms, as Christine was talking about earlier, during this time of the year.

Again, if we look at those figures that I was talking about earlier: then actually, in October, which would be kind of the middle of the autumn period there, we have 100 - just over - 100 hours of sunshine. So, if you remember, it was 54 hours in January; it was 190 hours in July, and it's 100 in October, so that gives you an idea. It is kind of in-between - the season ... the weather is changing as the season changes.

Christine Well, it's interesting you mention storms again - they can be different storms that arrive ... start to arrive, through the autumn and through the winter. They're storms that come in from the Atlantic Ocean and they can last for days, sometimes, and have really fierce, strong winds and huge rainfall and can cause flooding again. Not like the summer storms which are just short and sharp, they're big, long storms that can last for days and cover a whole wide geographical area.

(12:20)

Phoebe So then after autumn, as of December, January and February, we've got winter: the coldest of all the seasons and this is when we have the least light in the UK. As I said, we don't want to go out very much in these times, and some people - because of the lack of light - we can get a Seasonal Affective Disorder (which literally spells out the word SAD!). Because people feel affected by the weather and, you know, when it's sunny outside, we feel sunny, we feel bright and we feel energetic, but when it's dark outside, and it's cold and it's rainy - you can just hear in my voice, there, how it's changed when I'm talking about different weathers, it really does affect people.

- Christine And it's true, in the winter it can be so dark, and be so cold. Particularly, you know in the north of Scotland, it's like the sun just comes up and peeps up and then poof!⁸ before you know what's happened, it's set again.
- Mark I want to speak up in favour of winter because I think winter can be one of the most exciting times of year and that's partly because I really like snow and we do get, in the north of England, we usually get some snow each year. In fact, this year we had quite a bit of snow, didn't we? And certainly my grandchildren were out playing in the snow, making snowmen, going sledging. I think it's quite a magical time of year. And of course, it's also the time of Christmas and for those people who like Christmas and like celebrating and enjoying the activities that go on over the Christmas period, then I associate winter with that really nice time as well.
- Phoebe Yeah - I love the snow as well. I think it makes everything look peaceful outside. But one thing that makes me laugh so much about the UK when it snows is we just panic so much, and I just don't think other countries panic like we do, when the snow comes: the buses stop running, there's no cars, no one can go to work, or school and we just go crazy. But in other countries where they get snow all the time, you know, if we look at Canada, they would just laugh at us.
- Christine And ,,but, of course, you know, you're talking about the snow - the snow is delightful, it's lovely - it carpets the whole countryside: it's gorgeous, but sometimes when it arrives, it arrives in a blizzard which can be again, very dangerous. Several centimetres of snow can arrive in a matter of a few hours. Cars sometimes get stuck on the road.
- Mark I like that, the word "blizzard" [is] introducing that idea. So that's kind of like a storm, isn't it, but of snow. Very heavy snow falls usually with winds, as well, May be some of the other words: there is, of course - in the mornings - what you get is "frost", so very often in the winter, but also actually into the spring, where we are now - we still get frosts. Actually, you can get snow, of course, even late in the year - certainly in the north of England and up in Scotland. So "frost" is when the ground is very cold and usually it has a white-ish⁹ tinge to it, but it's not the same as snow, it's just frost there. And of course, the other thing that comes with snow is ice. So the water will turn to ice - and you will get icicles, which are the things that hang down from buildings and trees and other things, but again, they can be very beautiful.
- (16:13)
- Christine So - we've talked about the four seasons and how the ... how the weather changes and also how unpredictable the weather is but, of course, one of the focus - one of important changes that is happening to our climate is that it's getting warmer. And that's

⁸ poof! - not a literal word here - a noise to fill in, to indicate a very short time - as though in a magic trick, something happens in the time it takes "to blink an eye".

⁹ white-ish, you can add -ish to a colour to mean 'almost' or 'nearly' that colour .

not just happening to this country but it's happening across the world: climate change. The 10 warmest years that have ever been recorded in this country have all happened since 2002 - things are definitely getting warmer. Now, it doesn't necessarily mean that this country is going to get warmer - there might be warmer summers - but what is likely to happen is that there is more rain and more wind so that means more flooding. Of course, climate change is caused by the carbon in the atmosphere warming up the earth - that's putting it in very simple terms - so we're all trying to do things to minimise our use of carbon. The Government are investing in new kinds of industry - "green industry" it's often called - or green energy - but we all do things ourselves, to try to minimise our 'carbon footprint', as we call it. Try to create as little carbon as possible. I know I buy electricity from a company that only uses renewable sources. I don't know - what do you do?

Phoebe I have started eating a lot more vegetarian food - I rarely eat meat, because I know that the meat industry is not very good for the environment. I recycle as much as I can and I also like to buy things second-hand¹⁰, if I can.

Mark And I've tried to cycle more and use my car a bit less. That's one of the things I've been trying to do. We did do a separate episode specifically about **climate change**. If you want to hear a bit more of a discussion about that, then you can go to Episode 25, season 1.

Christine But one thing which is interesting, is that ...I think that because our weather is unpredictable, the fact that we talk about it so much. There are so many different weather expressions - I mean, OK, you can say "it's raining" but you can also say: "it's drizzling", or "it's chucking¹¹ it down", "it's pouring with rain".

Phoebe There's "drizzle", or it's like "a mist", you'd talk about "fine rain".

Christine Do you know? It's interesting, when I tell people in other parts of the world, that I come from the UK, and often they think of England and they think of London, and one of the first things they mention is "smog". They think London is very, very foggy and of course smog is a mixture of smoke and fog. Fog is when a cloud is low, and so you can't see very far, because of the cloud, and when it's mixed with smoke, it becomes "smog". And that used to be a huge problem in this country but things have changed since the 1950s with the "clean air"¹² legislation.

¹⁰ second-hand = pre-owned; pre-used; pre-loved; not "brand new" which items usually bought from suppliers or mainstream shops would be.

¹¹ chucking it down = chucking is an informal way of saying "throwing" so the image calls up a picture of buckets of water being thrown on us, from a great height.

¹² clean air = regulations on permitted emissions for industrial or manufacturing concerns and domestic households have been limited to using smokeless fuels in many areas

I remember when I moved from the farm in Scotland where I lived down to study at a university in England - I hung washing on the line - it came in all black! Not literally black, but it looked dirtier than when I'd hung it out.

(20:12)

Mark You mentioned Scotland there, Christine - the climate does change in different parts of the UK. And generally speaking you would say the further north you go, the colder it is, the colder the winters are, the summers are not quite as warm, although you do get the warm days up in Scotland as well, but generally speaking, that's true. London, in the South East of England is generally the warmest climate, although actually probably, the nicest climate is, probably, in the South West of England, down towards Devon and Cornwall there, in terms of the hours of sunshine and the least amount of rain and so on, would probably be that part of the United Kingdom.

Christine Yes, and also, the West of the country tends to get more rain than the East.

Mark And of course the fact that we do talk a lot about the weather means that we've actually used the 'weather language' to actually mean other things as well. So, for example, one of the ones, is you can talk about something "being a storm in a teacup" - very strange expression - so the idea there is it's something that's actually really rather small - it's not that important - but it's kind of been made to seem important because of the focus that's been put on it. So you could say, there's a big argument between politicians, about something, but actually, it wasn't that important, people would say : "it was just a storm in a teacup".

Christine I like the expression - "face like thunder" - which means it's dark and ominous, you know, threatening something - "a face like thunder".

Phoebe Yeah and you can use the weather to talk about your emotions, and talk about other people's emotions as well. Like, you can say somebody has a sunny disposition, or they have a sunny outlook on life - that would mean they're quite happy and jolly, and positive.

(Music) (22:32)

Language Support

Mark This is the part of the podcast where I choose some of the words and phrases from the episode and talk about them in more detail.

So, today, we've used a lot of vocabulary about the weather and I want to explain how some of these words can be used in different ways.

So let's take, as a start, "rain" .

So this can be used as a noun. You can talk about "the rain": "The rain was heavy"

You can talk about "the rain": "The rain was heavy"

You can use it as an adjective - in which case it's "rainy" - with a "Y" on the end. And you can talk about a "rainy day".

And then you can use it as a verb - "to rain". So you can say: "it rained yesterday" or using the "-ing" part of the verb, you could say: "It is raining".

The same works with snow. So you can say: "The snow is thick", (noun); "a snowy scene" (adjective); "it snowed heavily last night" (verb); or, "It was snowing yesterday" (the "-ing" form of the verb).

However, most of the other words for the weather can't be used as verbs and are just used, mainly, as nouns and adjectives. Here are some examples :

"The wind" - "the wind was strong" - that's clearly a noun - and then adding a "-Y" "a windy day" so that's the adjective.

But there is no verb - "to wind" - you have to use it with other verbs, including the verb "to be", so you can say: "it is windy today" - "it is windy" - or you could say: "the wind blew strongly", so that's using it as a noun with another verb.

Another example of that would be "sun" - "the sun is hot" (noun); "a sunny afternoon" (adjective);

but you cannot have "to sun" - you have to say "it is sunny" or with another verb, "the sun shines brightly".

And finally - let's choose "cloud" - you can have it as a noun, "the clouds were black". You can have it with a "-Y" as an adjective: "a cloudy day".

But you can't have it as a verb, "to cloud", so you have to use it with another verb - for example, you could say: "the clouds appeared".

Just to finish with a slight exception - as you so often find in English - you can talk about : "the sky clouded over" - so that is using it as a verb, but you'd have to have it as part of that phrase : with the word "over" - so "to cloud over" is one of those things we call a "phrasal verb" and it has to have the two words together, for it to work.

That's it for this week - I hope you've found that helpful. If you want to find out more about the transcript, about us as an organisation and how to contact us and how to support us with our work, then keep listening, for that further information. Otherwise, we'll be back with you in a few days' time, for another episode. So, stay safe and keep working at your English and goodbye for now.

(Music) (27:02)

You can find the transcript - that's the written version of this episode - on our website:

www.staugustinescentrehalifax.org.uk

And that's where you can also find links to all the other episodes, and the transcripts, so you can listen and read along at the same time. That's also where you can find out

how to donate, to help our work. We are a charity, supporting particularly, refugees, asylum seekers and migrants but also, all those in need in our local area and we would welcome your support, if you felt able to give it. If you follow on the website, the links to "**Get Involved**" and "**Donate**".

We also have an email address - that's **englishforlifeintheUK@gmail.com**

And we would love to hear from you - your thoughts on our podcast and ideas for the future.

We also have a Twitter account : **@EsolSaint**

and there is additional material on that site.

I'll spell out all those addresses:

So, the website: w-w-w-.s-t-a-u-g-u-s-t-i-n-e-s-c-e-n-t-r-e-h-a-l-i-f-a-x.org.uk

So that's the website.

The email is: **englishforlifeintheUK@gmail.com**

And that's "English for" spelt: f-o-r

And finally, the Twitter account: is : @ [at] [capital E] E-s-o-l- [capital S] -S-a-l-n-t

(Music) (29:34) Ends