

# WEEKLY ENGLISH PRACTICE

## Philosopher urges us to rebel – by making friends

Geoffroy de Lagasnerie says focusing on friendships over relationships or family is a radical act in today's society.

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Building your life around close friendships rather than family or romance is a joyous and necessary act of rebellion, and governments should put in place “friendship ministries” to radically rethink the way society is organised, a key French philosopher has argued.

Geoffroy de Lagasnerie has published a manifesto for friendship, detailing his close friendship with two other writers. The 3 friends eat together in the evening, speak many times daily, wish each other goodnight and good morning every day and **sync** their schedules to make sure they prioritise friendship moments, **namely** meeting up for long chats. He described the friendship as the centre of their lives, “one long discussion that never ends”.

De Lagasnerie questions society’s “authoritarian” insistence on prioritising family structures and romantic relationships.

He describes in the book how the three men always spend their birthdays and special occasions together. “When we send people our Christmas photos or post them on social media, we get a number of messages from people who say they **envy** the chance to spend the festive

season with friends... **This raises the question:** why does friendship as a way of life seem so inaccessible, even to those who aspire to it?”

He said pure friendship, not just interactions with neighbours or work colleagues, must be constantly **nourished**. People don’t stay in friendships with people they don’t like, but many people do stay in a miserable romantic relationship long after feelings have died. Centring your life around friendship, rather than family or a romantic relationship, appeals to many, whether gay or straight.

De Lagasnerie, who is gay and has decided not to have children, told France Inter radio: “The book **stemmed from** a form of sadness and melancholy at how life is organised socially... the idea that life should happen in cycles: youth, studies, form a relationship, move in together, sleep in the same bed, have children... Those are institutional roles, but a lot of people feel **at odds with** that type of life and have other aspirations. My idea was to instead write an account of a life organised around friendship, to make friendship a space of counterculture against the institutional **norms** dominating our society”.

He said if friendship was better prioritised by society and governments, it would also end what he called the “horror” and “tyranny” of early morning culture. “I can’t get up early because I’ve been out with friends until 3am” would be seen as just a valid position as “I have to leave early to collect the kids”. The arts magazine *Les Inrocks* said the book made any solitary reader **long to** reach out and contact old friends.



Adapted from [this article](#)  
by ECP coach

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## Word list

**to sync (informal):** to synchronise; to cause to happen or operate at the same time

**namely:** that is to say; to be specific

**to envy:** a feeling of discontentment or resentment for other people's possessions, qualities or luck

**this raises the question:** this invites an obvious question

**to nourish:** to provide what's necessary for growth, health and good condition

**to stem from:** to come from; to originate from

**at odds with:** in conflict with; in contrast to

**norms:** rules or regulations

**to long to do s.t. :** to have a strong wish or desire to do s.t.

## Let's chat about that!

1. What's more important to you: friends, family or your partner? Why?
2. Who do you spend Christmas with? Why?
3. Would you read this book? Why / not?
4. Describe the characteristics of a good friend.
5. Tell us how important your family is to you.
6. Do you think "I've been out with my friends until 3am" is a good excuse to be late for work? Why / not?

## Pronunciation (6): Get to know your minimal pairs

The first piece of pronunciation advice was to **listen** to examples of authentic speech and to "shadow" – or copy short sentences or phrases, trying to **imitate sounds, intonation** and **word stress**. Tip number two was to **record yourself** doing this. Tip number three was to get to know the **International Phonetic Alphabet** (IPA). Tip four was to **use a dictionary** and tip five was to **practise** pronunciation exercises.

Here's **tip number 6**:

**Minimal pairs** are words that have almost the exact same pronunciation, but with one sound that is different, for example: **'ship'** and **'sheep'**. The difference between the /ɪ/ in 'ship' and the /i:/ in 'sheep' is the length of the vowel. This can be difficult to hear for many language learners, and comes up in lots of different words.

The first step is to be able to tell the difference between the sounds when you hear them. You can listen to some **common minimal pairs here** - can you hear the difference? Can **you** make the different sounds?

In 1922, a Dutch language learner (from Holland) wrote a very long poem about the difficulties of English pronunciation called **'The Chaos'**. The first two stanzas are below:

Dearest *creature in creation*  
Studying English *pronunciation*,  
I will teach you in my *verse*  
Sounds like *corpse, corps, horse* and *worse*.  
I will keep you, *Susy, busy*,  
Make your *head with heat* grow *dizzy*;  
*Tear* in eye, your dress you'll *tear*;  
*Queer, fair seer, hear* my *prayer*.

If you're having any problems pronouncing or understanding, ask your **ECP coach** to help!!

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