

Greetings, everyone! My name is Laurence, and this is *English in Practice*!

## MUSIC

Welcome to the seventh episode of *English in Practice*. Our protagonist on this occasion is the English cook Nigella Lawson, who is famous for her saucy style of cooking, if you'll excuse the pun. She's a highly accomplished and articulate lady, and I hope you enjoy the excerpt that I have chosen.

Today's episode is dedicated to Sara from Italy, who asked if I could do an episode about Nigella Lawson. I would also like to greet Els from the Netherlands, Win Zaw Min from Myanmar, and Dorian to the *English in Practice* family. Thank you for liking the Facebook Page.

On another note, I now pay money to keep this podcast running, and so I have set up a PayPal link for donations. If you wish to donate, simply copy the PayPal link in the episode description into an internet search bar and type in the amount you wish to send over. I am only a university student and I run this podcast for free, so any donations would be greatly appreciated.

And as always, I would also appreciate hearing from you, so please don't hesitate to get in touch. The best means of contacting me is via the following email address: [englishinpracticepodcast@gmail.com](mailto:englishinpracticepodcast@gmail.com). Otherwise, you can message me via the Facebook page, 'English in Practice: A Podcast for Intermediate-Advanced Learners.' Feel free to like the page as well and to rate this episode on whichever podcasting platform you use.

For those who wish to download the transcript, simply visit my website: [www.jamesfable.com](http://www.jamesfable.com). James Fable is my penname – a pseudonym that I use for writing.

Lastly, I'm away quite a bit over the next five weeks, so in September I will only manage to upload two episodes. However, I'll make sure they are good ones.

Excellent. Let's move on and learn a little about today's protagonist, Nigella Lawson!

## MUSIC

Nigella Lawson was born on 6<sup>th</sup> January 1960 in Wandsworth, London, making her 60 years of age. Her mother's family owned the food and catering business J. Lyons and Co. and her father is a former Conservative Chancellor of the Exchequer, which is the formal title for the head of the treasury.

Nigella attended a few different private schools in London, then went on to study Modern and Medieval Languages at The University of Oxford. Following a few years of working for a publisher, Nigella became a journalist for the magazine *The Spectator* at the age of 23. Her work there initially consisted in writing book reviews, but after a couple of years she became a restaurant critic.

Even though Nigella had been familiar with quality cooking since childhood, by virtue of her mother, she only conceived the idea of writing a cookbook after seeing a dinner party host in tears because of an unset crème caramel. At the time, Nigella was enjoying success as a freelance journalist and wished to write 'the greatest novel of the 20<sup>th</sup> century', to use her own words. However, her now late ex-husband encouraged her to write a cookbook, saying that not everybody shared her thoughts on food.

That's how Nigella came to publish *How to Eat* in 1998, which sold over 300,000 copies in the UK alone. Two years later, she published *How to be a Domestic Goddess*, for which she won Author of the Year in the 2001 British Book Awards, fending off competition from J. K. Rowling and other exceptional writers.

Although these literary successes gave Nigella's career a great boost, the turn of the millennium was a difficult period for her, as her husband died in 2001 of throat cancer. Despite suffering from depression following the funeral, Nigella only took two weeks off from filming her show *Nigella Bites*, saying that she was 'not a great believer in breaks.'

Nigella has hosted several cooking shows, and one of the reasons for her enormous TV success is her flirtatious presentation style. While other cooks may describe a certain food

as ‘delicious’, for example, Nigella will likely call it ‘sensuous’ or something equally sexual. Combined with her stunning looks – Nigella was once, in fact, named as one of the world’s most beautiful women – it is perhaps little surprise that the media has dubbed her ‘the queen of food porn.’ Similarly, *The Guardian* wrote that ‘men love [Nigella] because they want to be with her. Women love [Nigella] because they want to be her.’ Whatever you think of Nigella’s looks, her simple approach to cooking and her saucy presentation style, there’s no denying that these have been the ingredients of a phenomenal career.

The following audio clip comes from an interview with Nigella Lawson on Q TV and was uploaded to YouTube by the channel q on cbc in January 2011. At the time of the interview, Nigella was near the end of her book tour in North America. In this new cookbook, which is called *Kitchen: Recipes from the Heart of the Home*, Nigella has written that ‘anything which holds true in the kitchen is just as true out of the kitchen.’ The interviewer has just asked if she has always held this belief:

**‘My mantra of “what’s true in the kitchen is true out of the kitchen” is something that I’ve grown to believe, because sometimes when I’m trying to explain to people about cooking, I realise that it could really be a self-help book about anything.**

**‘In other words, this notion, I s’pose, the predominant one – which is that when you cook or when you live, you have to have a basic understanding of what the requirements are or what the rules – the guiding rules or principles – are.**

**‘But beyond that you need just to be spontaneous – “to go with the flow”, err, you know, [as] we used to say in the nineties.**

**‘So, I do think that that’s true in cooking. And I first tried to express it as a view about what cooking is about, and then I realised that actually it was – it was what *living* is about.’**

So, how did you get on? Did you notice that Nigella sounds blocked up, that she is a little ill? If you watch the interview, you can see lots of tissues lying on the table in front of her

at one point. This cold intensifies her somewhat posh, southeast English accent, but I still find her voice euphonious.

I imagine this clip was of medium difficulty for most of you, since Nigella doesn't speak too quickly but does use some words that you don't hear all that often – such as 'mantra' and 'predominant'. I also enjoyed this clip, because it gives you an insight into how Nigella perceives life – or living, to be more precise. Undoubtedly, not everyone would share her view, but then the world would be boring if we all thought the same thing.

Let's move on to the analysis. Here comes the first fragment:

**'My mantra of "what's true in the kitchen is true out of the kitchen" is something that I've grown to believe, because sometimes when I'm trying to explain to people about cooking, I realise that it could really be a self-help book about anything.'**

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Let's begin with *mantra*. This is a word or motto that embodies a principle or guide to action. It's similar to a slogan, though a mantra is not associated with commercial purpose. For example, the mantra of a dieting group might be 'watch what you eat.' Or a runner's mantra might be to take the lead as soon as possible. A synonym of mantra is 'watchword', though only when this refers to a single word. And besides, *mantra* sounds much nicer.

If you still aren't sure how the term mantra fits into what Nigella says in this first sentence, that's probably because it only becomes clear in the next two fragments. In fact, it might have been better for her to say *maxim*, not mantra, as this describes a general truth or a fundamental principle. 'What's true in the kitchen is true out of the kitchen' is a statement that Nigella considers generally true, but it doesn't seem so much to be a statement that guides how she cooks. She goes on to explain the similarities between cooking and living, but on the whole I would describe this as a maxim and not a mantra.

The rest of the fragment, I believe, is relatively easy to follow. Nigella says she has grown to consider this ‘mantra’ true, because writing a cookbook is essentially a little like writing a self-help book. By that she means that there are so many similarities between cooking and living that to give cooking advice is also to give life advice.

Nigella begins to clarify this idea in the next fragment:

**‘In other words, this notion, I s’pose, the predominant one – which is that when you cook or when you live, you have to have a basic understanding of what the requirements are or what the rules – the guiding rules or principles – are.’**

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So, a *notion* is something between a concept and an idea; it is a conceptual idea, if you will. Take the sentence: ‘the notion of fighting for what you believe in is an old one.’ Now, fighting for what you believe in is not quite abstract enough to be a concept, yet nor is it quite concrete enough to be an idea. Therefore, it’s a notion.

Let me clarify this a little further. You could not, for example, reply ‘good notion’ to a friend who suggests that you go and get ice cream; you would have to say, ‘good idea.’ Similarly, in philosophy, we speak of the concept of moral responsibility, not the notion or idea of moral responsibility, since morality is very abstract. After all, some people argue that morals do not even exist. I hope that’s clear.

*S’pose* is short for ‘I suppose’, and *predominant* is a synonym of ‘prevailing’, ‘main’, ‘most common’. In other words, Nigella is saying: ‘I suppose the main notion of “what’s true in the kitchen is true out of the kitchen” is that when you cook or when you live, you have to have a basic understanding of what the requirements are or what the rules – the guiding rules or principles – are.’

Now, a *requirement* is something that is required, needed – a condition that must be fulfilled. For example, ‘the soldier did not meet the requirements for promotion’; that means the soldier did not fulfil the conditions necessary for going up a rank.

I imagine you know what a rule is, so let’s talk about *principles*. There are two main meanings of principle. One of these refers to moral or ethical standards. For example, a person of principle is someone whose behaviour is respectable, admirable. And if you base a decision on principle rather than profit, for example, then you prioritise the moral and ethical dimensions over making money.

The second chief meaning of principle, and it is in this sense that Nigella uses the word, refers to a basic truth, doctrine or assumption. For example, the principles of flying are weight, lift, thrust and drag. A book on the principles of economics would discuss topics such as distribution, consumption and finance. I think you get the picture.

Therefore, the guiding principles of cooking might be, for example, ‘fry your spices first’ or ‘use nutritious foodstuffs.’ Likewise, the guiding rules and principles of life might be ‘everything in moderation’, ‘be fair’, ‘trust your instincts’, etc. Nigella says that whichever you are doing, cooking or living, you need to know what these basic rules are.

In the third and penultimate fragment, she explains what the other essential ingredient of cooking and living is:

**‘But beyond that you need just to be spontaneous – “to go with the flow”, err, you know, [as] we used to say in the nineties.’**

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So, Nigella considers both cooking and living to consist in knowing the guiding principles and being spontaneous. *Spontaneity*, to use the noun, is the quality or state of doing things on impulse. Therefore, if someone is spontaneous, they decide to do things suddenly. For example, ‘Lisa went on a spontaneous trip to Italy last weekend.’ That means Lisa decided

suddenly, on impulse, to go to Italy for a weekend. She hadn't planned to go on holiday, but then she thought, 'Hey, why the hell not? I fancy some pizza and limoncello.'

*To go with the flow* is similar to 'spontaneous', though more colloquial. It means 'to go along with the situation, to accept the prevailing trend.' For example, 'Bennie wasn't keen on the idea of going to a nightclub. But all his friends wanted to, so he decided to go with the flow and join them.' Another example: 'Can't you just go with the flow for once, Sally? We always do things your way.'

So there you have it – that's how Nigella conceives of both cooking and living. She says that people used to say 'go with the flow' in the nineties a lot, though I expect people have been saying this since much earlier. It sounds more sixties to me, but I haven't been able to find much on the origins of this phrase.

Nigella actually misses out a word here, when she says: "to go with the flow, err, you know, we used to say in the nineties." She should have said: 'as we used to say in the nineties.' I think she missed it out simply because she was speaking so quickly and is slightly sick.

Here comes the final fragment:

**'So, I do think that that's true in cooking. And I first tried to express it as a view about what cooking is about, and then I realised that actually it was – it was what *living* is about.'**

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Here, Nigella essentially reiterates what she has been saying in the rest of her answer. She could also have said, 'So, I do think that's true in cooking', rather than, 'So, I do think that that's true in cooking.' Both are correct, though the first version, in which *that* only appears once, is a little more pleasing to the ear.

As Nigella explains, she first tried to articulate her idea – namely of how important it is to know guiding principles and yet also be spontaneous – as a view of what cooking is about, but then she realised it is what living is about, too. Her maxim of ‘what’s true in the kitchen is true out of the kitchen’ is a formulation of this belief.

Splendid. Let’s listen to the entire excerpt one more time. Here it comes:

**‘My mantra of “what’s true in the kitchen is true out of the kitchen” is something that I’ve grown to believe, because sometimes when I’m trying to explain to people about cooking, I realise that it could really be a self-help book about anything.**

**‘In other words, this notion, I s’pose, the predominant one – which is that when you cook or when you live, you have to have a basic understanding of what the requirements are or what the rules – the guiding rules or principles – are.**

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I’m not here to tell you how to cook or how to live your lives – in fact, I would never try to – but hopefully this episode has helped you to improve your English. Sara, if you are listening, thank you again for the request. I hope I did Nigella Lawson justice in this episode.

As mentioned at the beginning, any donations would be of great help to me. And of course, I would also appreciate hearing from you. Once again, the email address is [englishinpracticepodcast@gmail.com](mailto:englishinpracticepodcast@gmail.com). You can find the PayPal link for donations in the description.

That's all from me for today. I hope you have enjoyed this episode of *English in Practice*. There won't be an episode next week, but I shall upload one on some English sayings the week after. All the best. Over and out.

Watch the whole interview: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J43mo3vGOQI>

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