

# Effortless English

## Thriving On Chaos

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"It is easy to understand why many teachers **revert** to textbooks or worksheets when things around them are in constant, **challenging motion**, but they must learn to be in motion, too. The students are being loud; they are **having a hard time** paying attention to each other; they are having a hard time paying attention to the teacher. We all know that telling students to turn to page 37 and answer the questions can **relieve chaos** and make the room quieter for a time. I've recently heard of a new **trend** of teachers using wireless **microphones** in an effort to keep students' attention and be heard above the other noise in the classroom. Education is not about who can speak the loudest. It's about the students and teacher wanting to listen to each other. A truly **personalized**, small school allows that to happen.

Another reason I look to my friend Tom Peters for ideas on how to deal with the **tough** moments is because he **entitled** one of his books "**Thriving on Chaos**". Tom told me it took him a long time **to land on** that word "thriving". But he was looking for a way of saying you must be ready for and enjoy the process of change. Our schools must be thriving environments, thriving on the chaos and on the beauty. We all need to re-examine our situations from time to time and make sure we are not **sticking to** old patterns in new situations."

--Dennis Littky

I like the phrase "Thriving on Chaos". As we all know, the world is constantly changing and its changing quickly. Science, education, travel, technology, and human relationships are **evolving rapidly**. Sometimes it can feel **overwhelming**.

In fact, many people do become overwhelmed by the **pace** of change. They may become **depressed**. They may **dig in** and become very **conservative** in an effort to stop.... or at least slow the change. Some people even become quite **bitter** about it. Others try **to keep up**, but can't.

Without a doubt, human societies have changed. Its no longer possible to

**revert:** v. go back to  
**challenging:** adj. difficult  
**motion:** n. movement  
**having a hard time:** idiom. experiencing a difficult situation  
**relieve:** v. cure, make better  
**chaos:** n. constant & unpredictable change  
**trend:** n. something many people are doing, something that is popular  
**microphones:** n. device that increases sound volume  
**personalized:** individualized, made for each person  
**tough:** adj. difficult  
**entitled:** v. named  
**thriving:** v. growing successfully, living and growing in a healthy way  
**to land on:** idiom. to decide to use, to choose (after considering many choices)  
**sticking to:** v. staying with, continuing to do or use  
**evolving:** v. changing with the environment, changing to survive or thrive  
**rapidly:** adv. quickly, fast  
**overwhelming:** adj. too much to handle (too much emotion, too much information. etc.)  
**pace:** n. speed, rate  
**depressed:** adj. very sad  
**dig in:** idiom. to resist change, to fight against change  
**conservative:** adj. doesn't like change or differences  
**bitter:** adj. very angry and frustrated for a long time (ie. months and years)  
**to keep up:** v. to stay equal with, to not fall behind

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**reasonable:** adj. intelligent, good  
**a recipe for failure:** idiom. something that will cause failure  
**to enhance:** v. to improve

**antithetical:** adj. opposite, paradoxical

**principles:** n. very general values or guidelines to live by

**inflexible:** adj. not easy to change

**limiting:** adj. prevent change, action, or growth

**adapt:** v. change with the situation, change to survive and thrive

**circumstances:** n. situations

**commitment:** n. a strong decision to do something, a strong loyalty

**respectful:** adj. showing politeness and courtesy

**adaptable:** adj. changeable, able to survive new situations

**society:** n. all people in a country or culture

**tumultuous:** adj. quickly changing, chaotic

**age:** n. time period, period in history

**reflection:** n. thought, deep thinking about the past or present

**theoretical:** adj. concerned with ideas

**abstract:** adj. with ideas only, not real or concrete, thought only

**debate:** n. discussion, argument

**concrete:** adj. real, solid, in the real world (can be seen, touched, etc.)

**grounded in:** idiom. connected to

**caught up in:** idiom. obsessed with, thinking too much about

**speculation:** n. theory, guessing

**tremendous:** adj. big

**advantage:** n. something that is helpful, something that helps

**consequences:** n. results, effects

**discover:** v. find, realize

**innovation:** n. creative change, change and improvement

**label:** v. name, call

**so-called:** idiom. called, named (by adding "so", you suggest that you don't agree with the name)

thrive by doing things the way they have always been done. "We've always done it that way" is no longer a **reasonable** explanation. In fact, it's an excuse that is a **recipe for failure**.

So how can we thrive on chaos? How do we not only survive these rapid changes, but learn to enjoy them? How do we use change **to enhance** our lives?

It may seem **antithetical**, but one of the key ways to thrive on change is to have a set of unchanging **principles**. A principle is not a rule. Rules are **inflexible**. They are **limiting**. They slow us down and make it hard for us to **adapt** quickly when **circumstances** change. Principles, on the other hand, are highly adaptable. A principle is a general value -- a **commitment** to something that is deep and meaningful. "I must always shake hands when I meet a new person" is a rule. If you meet a Japanese person and you have this rule, you may become confused. "I will try always be kind and **respectful**" is a principle.

Principles are easily **adaptable** to new circumstances because principles are generally not concerned with specific actions or details. There are many ways to show respect, for example. In the past, schools, companies, and individuals often focused on rules. The problem is, students, employees, **society**, and individuals have changed. The old rules don't work anymore. What we need to thrive in this **tumultuous age** are deep principles-- and the flexibility to change the way we follow them.

Another vital skill for this age of chaos is **reflection**. Reflection means thinking deeply about something-- usually yourself, your life, and your actions. Many people have been taught to first think, then act. But I think its better to do the opposite-- first act, then think. If you think first, it's easy to get lost in a **theoretical** world of **abstract** ideas. The education field is full of these kinds of people. They think, talk, write, and **debate**-- but its all theory-- all in their head. These people actually have no idea what is happening in the world and what would happen if they tried something new.

If you act first, however, you then have something **concrete** to think about. Your thinking is **grounded** in the real world. When you act first, its harder to become **caught up in speculation**. Another **tremendous advantage** to acting first is that actions often have surprising **consequences**. When we think, we often believe we have thought of every possibility. But then, to our surprise, we **discover** that lots of unexpected things happen when we actually try something new.

These surprises are the seeds of **innovation** and creativity. Unimaginative people often **label** the surprises as "failures"-- simply because the results were not as expected. But in the words of Tony Robbins, there are no failures-- there are only results. In fact, **so-called** failures are often more valu-

**reinforces:** v. strengthens, makes stronger

**discard:** v. to throw away, get rid of

**rigid:** adj. not soft and flexible, hard to bend, hard to change

**churning:** v. mixing

**hyper speed:** adj. VERY fast

**to stick to:** v. stay with, stay loyal to

**embrace:** v. hug, accept happily

**to enjoy the ride:** idiom. to enjoy the process, to enjoy the whole experience (not just the end result).

able than what most consider success. Failure gives you new ideas and new input. "Success" often just **reinforces** your old ideas.

And so, to truly thrive on chaos, we must act first and then think. We must also **discard** labels such as "failure" and "success" and instead think in terms of "interesting results", "possibilities", and "opportunities".

The time for **rigid**, rule-centered thinking was 100 years ago. In the **churning, hyper speed** digital age-- the only way to thrive is **to stick to** your principles, act without fear, and **embrace** interesting failures. Those who thrive on chaos are those who learn **to enjoy the ride**.

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