

Transcript

Welcome to Easy Stories in English, the podcast that will take your English from OK to Good, and from Good to Great.

I am Ariel Goodbody, your host for this show. Today's episode is an interview with Alastair Budge of the [English Learning for Curious Minds](#) podcast. You can find a transcript of the episode at [EasyStoriesInEnglish.com/Pioneers](#). That's [EasyStoriesInEnglish.com/Pioneers](#). There, you can also download the episode as a PDF.

Today I have something exciting to tell you about. You might remember a few months ago that we had an episode from another podcast, [English Learning for Curious Minds](#). Well, the host of [English Learning for Curious Minds](#), Alastair Budge, messaged me and asked if I wanted to work with him on a new project.

Alastair worked with his colleague, Emile, to write an eight-episode podcast series called *Pioneers of the Continuum*, and the idea was that every episode would be recorded by a different ESL podcaster. Alastair asked if I'd like to record one of the episodes, and of course, I said yes! I thought it was a brilliant idea.

The story is about a group of friends who build a time machine. In each episode, a different character travels through time in order to answer an important question. I love time travel stories, and I had a lot of fun recording my episode, so hopefully you'll enjoy it, too.

If you're excited to listen, then good news: the first episode of *Pioneers of the Continuum* comes out today! You can find it on your regular podcasting app. If you listen to lots of ESL podcasts, you might know some of the other stars of the show, such as Luke from [Luke's English Podcast](#), Andrew from [Culips English Podcast](#), Lindsay from [All Ears English](#), Tom from [Thinking in English](#), Anna from [English Like A Native](#) and Christian from [Canguro English](#). My episode is the sixth episode in the series and comes out on the thirteenth of June.

Pioneers of the Continuum is for intermediate and advanced learners, so if you're a beginner and you're listening to this, it might be a bit difficult for you. However, on the transcripts available at [leonardoenglish.com](#), you can highlight words to get translations in lots of different languages. That's really cool! Try it and see if you can understand. If it is still too hard, well, then you have something to look forward to when you're feeling more confident!

I invited Alastair onto today's episode to talk a bit about the project, and you'll hear our conversation after this. We had quite an informal talk, so it might be a bit harder than the usual language level, but I think it will be interesting for you to hear something less planned.

But before that, I just want to thank my new patrons: Stephan Pulver, Carolin Vanessa and Radek Bužek.

And a special thank-you to my Teacher's Pet patrons: Jana Švástová, Venus and Vera Kaufmann.

Alright, let's get on with our chat!

Interview with Alastair about Pioneers of the Continuum

Ariel Goodbody

Hi, Alastair, how are you?

Alastair Budge

I am wonderful. How are you?

Ariel Goodbody

I'm doing very well, thank you. You're all the way in sunny Malta, although apparently it's not so sunny from what you said before.

Alastair Budge

Strangely, it was not very sunny when you asked me just before we went on air, and I turned around and had a look and the sun has come out! So I retract my previous statement, it is now sunny.

Ariel Goodbody

Wonderful. Well, it's very hot here. But I actually closed the windows to make sure the sound is better, so we don't have loud children and lawnmowers outside. So I'm sitting in a dark cave right now, as you can see. Fortunately, the listeners can't.

So tell me a bit about this project *Pioneers of the Continuum*. You mentioned you worked with some colleagues on it. So where did the idea come from?

Alastair Budge

Sure. So as a bit of brief background to me: I have another podcast that I've been making for almost three years called *English Learning for Curious Minds*. And the idea behind that show was – or still is – I would really research a particular subject or person from history or interesting thing, and kind of tell that story in a neat 20 to 25-minute episode. And I have a huge amount of fun doing that.

But I've always wanted to try and do something a little bit more fictional. And I figured, right, I'll try to create a limited fictional audio drama, let's say. Someone used the term audio drama the other day and I've stolen it. So I wanted to create my own audio drama, and worked with a colleague, Emile, who did the majority of the script writing, actually, to create this eight-part series about a group of time-travelling friends.

And not to reveal anything about the story, or not to give away any spoilers: but the theme is of a group of people who decide to go back in time to a place and time of their choosing. And each episode is one person's story, really. So there is a different narrator in each episode and what they do is they tell the story of where they went, why and what happened. And as you might imagine, people have certain ideas about what they're going to find in the past. And the reality of what they find is slightly different to their expectations. So that's the kind of overview of *Pioneers of the Continuum*.

Ariel Goodbody

Yeah, awesome. Something that really stood out to me is, I think we're quite similar, but we're kind of opposites, in that we both are very creative, but I hate research. So I was like, I want to write stories where I can just make everything up. And there's very little research. But it sounds like you maybe have had a long-standing interest in history and research. And so you're kind of coming from that angle. Is that true? Have you always been interested in history?

Alastair Budge

Yes, I have. And I guess to kind of turn your point back on itself: maybe I take the easy route out, because there's so many people through history, who just have fascinating lives and fascinating stories, that you can see what has really happened, and weave that into an amazing story, because the story already exists. And it's just a case of trying to pick out the most interesting bits, and take the listener on a journey through that person's life, or the story of what happened in a particular place at a particular time.

But also I love fiction. I listen to a lot of fictional podcasts. And I read a lot. So this is my first foray into the world of audio fiction. I've learned a huge amount doing it. And it's been a huge amount of fun.

Ariel Goodbody

So what are the biggest or maybe the most surprising things that you've learned?

Alastair Budge

What I think I didn't appreciate enough before doing it is the difficulty of writing for audio. Because if you're writing for someone to read it, then you write in a very different way. And it took quite a long time for us to kind of figure out what's the right... Essentially, how to write things in a way that sounds a little bit like someone is actually talking. But they're also recounting something that happened in the past.

It's been a super interesting experience. When I have gone back through and kind of reviewed everything, there's certainly things that I thought, this could have been slightly different, or I wish that this was written in a slightly different way. I have that with all of my episodes anyway. It's something that I think anyone who works in podcasting struggles with, because it's not like writing a book where you can just go and kind of easily cross out a word or go back.

It's been a super interesting experience going through that and trying to grapple with this idea of, how can we get these characters to talk about things in a persuasive way? How can we get them to report speech in the best way? So yeah, it's been super interesting.

And in fact, I learned a lot when looking at the edits that you made, because I sent the draft of the episode that you were going to read – I sent it to you. And you came back with some amazing suggestions. And I was thinking, oh God, that's why Easy Stories in English is so good. That's why you do such a good job.

Ariel Goodbody

Well, you know, it's, I think, what you said about the difficulty of writing for audio. So interesting, because we're in a very... an interesting place culturally, where in the past, you had stories, and maybe there would be audiobooks, but it was very much like, okay, the narrator kind of throws away their personality, and they're just delivering the story, right? And then there was like, radio dramas, and they were very separate. But I think at the moment, we're kind of seeing the two cross over.

So there's lots of different points you can go to. You can have a complete audio drama, where there are characters, and there are sound effects, and everything is dialogue. Or you can have something like my episodes or this project where the person narrating is the character telling the story. But then they're also kind of speaking through other people in this story as well, at certain points. It is one of those things where you learn to write in a very different way.

And actually, I think it's been so useful for me as a writer in general to do podcasts, because so often now, when I'm editing, I'll just see something and I can just hear how it

sounds. And I think, ooh, *this* would sound better. And of course, you know, many writers... It's like a tip that people often give: read your own work out loud. But I think when you do it as a podcast regularly, you really internalise that.

So I think that's really exciting. Do you think you're gonna work on more projects like this in the future? And can I be involved?

Alastair Budge

Yes and yes, in short! It's been a super interesting experience so far. I think I would love to experiment more with slightly different formats. The kind of format that we did for *Pioneers of the Continuum* was on one level relatively simple, because you have one narrator per episode, and they are telling their story. Clearly, there's a line in terms of how complicated a production you can get, right through to some kind of Hollywood drama-style production. But clearly, we did not have the budget to do that.

So yeah, I'd love to experiment with more different kinds of formats, and kind of blend that audiobook versus audio drama versus podcast style. There are lots of ideas that I had for *Pioneers of the Continuum* in terms of the way in which characters would relate to each other, things like that, that I don't think I had the chance to develop enough in the script. But there's lots of ideas that I have for future series a little bit like this. And if people like it, then certainly we'll do more.

Ariel Goodbody

Yeah, there's definitely a lot that can change as well. This isn't a criticism, it's just an idea I had, of thinking, actually, it would have been cool if we recorded some drafts, and then listening to the other narrators and kind of hearing, oh, that's how they're doing this. Because obviously, that affects how you talk about your character, how you phrase things. But then, as you say, it gets more and more complicated. You start having to think about budget and things like that.

So I'm really excited. And actually, this has inspired me, and I'm thinking I should really try and do more collaborative storytelling. I think, unfortunately, I'm a bit of a control freak sometimes. And I can imagine it was a really big undertaking to do something like this and coordinate with so many people. So were there any really stressful parts in the process?

Alastair Budge

To be honest, the most stressful, or perhaps the most nerve-wracking, part was emailing a load of people and sort of thinking, am I just gonna get zero replies from people? Because that would change things.

Going back to the point you just made about, it would have been really nice to ask people to listen to other recordings and have a greater level of collaboration: I was pretty nervous about asking people for their time anyway. And I wanted to try and do it in a way that was as easy and as sensitive of people's time as possible. So I emailed people and said, look, this is probably going to take no more than an hour of your time. Because each episode is, I think... The shortest one's about 12 minutes and the longest is 20. So it's a relatively short amount of time. And I was very, very cautious about asking for more. Because everyone's busy, everyone's got busy working and personal lives.

So maybe I could have asked for slightly more collaboration. Who knows? But the most anxious part of the whole process was waiting for people to say yes or no.

Ariel Goodbody

I think you're absolutely right, in that it's good to start small with these things. Because I think, probably actually all of us involved... Obviously, we're all podcasters. But we have different levels of experience with collaboration. I think, for all of us, this kind of fictional collaborative podcast was something entirely new.

So it's better to have a simple goal, reach that, and then there's always room to expand in future. I'm really curious, kind of just thinking more generally about making podcasts... With your own podcasts... So I find for me, the writing process is the easiest part, the part I enjoy the most. And I do enjoy the recording as well. The thing I struggle with actually most is like, oh, is the room quiet enough, there's no aeroplanes flying overhead, have I rested my voice enough? Because I have a tendency to talk too much and then ruin my voice. And then I sound like [hoarse noise] when I'm trying to record. But the bit I really hate is rehearsing. And I realised pretty early on, I need to do a full run-through of every episode before I record it. Because if I don't rehearse it out loud, I'm not going to be able to give the story in a way that I find is good enough.

So I'm really interested to hear about your process generally, and then maybe if this project has made you reconsider or change anything.

Alastair Budge

So with my main, my original podcast, *English Learning for Curious Minds*, I don't do any kind of rehearsing, I guess at all. I had not really thought of that. The most time-consuming process for me is the research and writing. Because quite often/all the time, I'm trying to choose relatively meaty, large topics.

And there's always people who will write in and say, oh, by the way, you didn't mention this, or that, or this would have been a good thing to mention. And when you're talking about, for example, the life of Lewis Carroll, there's a huge amount of different things that you could mention. And you're trying to condense it down to a sort of 20 minutes-ish episode that tells the story of this person's life, talks about what may or may not have motivated them, talks about the chronology of what happened, and perhaps the legacy, if that person is no longer alive.

So trying to get the right balance of storytelling facts, and keeping the listener engaged, that's something that I spend most of my time trying to work on. I guess, because it's not a fictional story – the main podcast – I don't have to worry so much with delivery in terms of practising the narration, because I'm talking with a relatively flat voice. I'm talking as I'm talking to you now,

Ariel Goodbody

I will say, you do yourself a disservice. You call your voice flat, but you have a very relaxing voice, a very calm way of narrating, which I think a lot of people appreciate. So yeah.

Alastair Budge

That's very kind of you to say. So, I guess the point, I mean, the point I'm trying to make is that I'm not sort of trying to do different characters or things like that, which is one of the things that I hadn't really appreciated in terms of the writing of *Pioneers of the Continuum*. Lots of people actually messaged me and said, how is this character meant to be, how do I voice different characters? I don't have experience doing this. And those are very fair points. I just hadn't really... I hadn't properly appreciated how difficult that was.

Luckily, for my main show, I don't have to deal with that. But there is the additional work in terms of research. So if I have to talk about what's the hardest bit versus the easiest bit, the hardest bit is certainly the research and writing. The actual recording of it doesn't take me so much time. And then going back and listening to it again, that can take quite a lot of time because there are things that I know I could have said slightly differently, angles that I hadn't explored. So the main time-consuming element for me, I think, is trying to get that balance between fact and story right.

Ariel Goodbody

So you do a second audio draft? After recording you go back and rerecord? Or did you just mean redrafting the script?

Alastair Budge

No, after I do the first recording, I will quite often rerecord parts of it. Not the whole thing.

Ariel Goodbody

Okay, interesting! So I think for me, there's something about rerecording an episode that I just hate. Like, I don't know... Obviously, if there's like a massive error, I'll go back and fix it, but I try to do it so I only have to record once.

The joy of being self-employed and having your own business, your own creative project, is you can really decide, what are the parts that I love that are really important to me that I want to spend lots of time on, and then maybe the things where you find, you know, easier solutions.

That's really interesting. And I think we need to remember as well that we have an extra limitation of: we're creating podcasts for learners. So we have to think loads about the language we use, how quickly we speak. And I can imagine often when you're getting comments of people saying, oh, you forgot this, or you didn't mention this, is there also an element of sometimes, you just don't want to overcomplicate the language too much by bringing in lots of complicated historical concepts?

Alastair Budge

There are certainly some occurrences of that, yes, where if I'm talking about a particular historical period, and you need to explain how the British Parliament works in the 17th century, that is kind of a dry subject. And I tend to simplify those kinds of things to try to give listeners an overall understanding of what it is without getting completely into the nitty gritty of how a particular complicated thing works.

My philosophy about that is that people can always go and look up these things on their own, if they're interested. I am quite conscious of not getting too bogged down in detail, especially detail that's going to be complicated to understand from a non-native speaker's point of view – if you're getting into complicated, and kind of pointless, language, really.

Ariel Goodbody

That's something I always struggle with, where maybe I want to talk about the background of a story or what inspired me, and maybe it's something quite complicated. I was actually just working on a script yesterday, where I was talking about colonialism and the Inclosure Acts, which is this historical process in British history. And often with those kind of, I guess, heavier concepts... Words like colonialism tend to be quite international roots – they have a lot of cognates, at least in European languages. So sometimes, in a way, it can

be easier because I think, oh, if I explain the concept enough, a lot of listeners will be like, oh, it's that thing that we call this or whatever.

So what I've been really pleasantly surprised by is I have listeners from all around the world. My two biggest countries are Germany and Turkey, but it really is very spread out. Do you find you have more listeners from certain areas? Or is it very mixed?

Alastair Budge

So mainly Europe. So mainly... I'm going to try and get these countries right. The top one has always been Spain. I've got lots of listeners in Turkey, as well. Turkey, Germany, Poland, Italy, France, lots in Brazil. Strangely enough, lots in Iran as well.

Ariel Goodbody

Oh yeah, me too. Quite a lot in Iran.

Alastair Budge

So kind of all over the place, really.

Ariel Goodbody

And hopefully with *Pioneers*, it's going to go everywhere. That's the hope, I think.

Alastair Budge

That's the hope. Time travel is international, I guess. Time travel is international and everyone likes stories. So I wanted to try and create something that I thought listeners might like, even if it's a bit different to what they've been listening to before.

When I was trying to think about the kind of thing that listeners might enjoy... What I'm telling in *English Learning for Curious Minds*, anyway, is stories. They're just historical stories, or stories about a concept, they're real-life stories. And so it's not too much of a leap to go to something that is very fictional.

Ariel Goodbody

Yeah. And I mean, that's a really important thematic message, right? That we think of time as this very fixed, measurable thing. But of course, as human beings, we all understand our own histories through story. We create our own lives, and we understand time through the histories that have been told to us and the histories we tell ourselves. So I think it's a really relevant message right now, given everything with AI that's happening.

There was something I heard someone saying the other day of this idea that you can just... You know, 'in the future, we'll be able to upload our brain into a computer.' It doesn't work like that, because our brains don't have a neat history of everything that's happened. We're all just a bunch of stories, mixing together in our head. Sorry, I got really philosophical for a minute!

It's been really lovely talking to you. Is there anything else you want to talk about related to *Pioneers of the Continuum* or *English Learning for Curious Minds*? Or just generally.

Alastair Budge

One thing that touched on a little bit already but perhaps is worth elaborating is the power of story, really. Everyone who listens to your podcast, of course, knows full well that it's far easier to engage with English, to engage with a foreign language, if you are interested in what you're hearing about. And so anything that I or you can create that is interesting and

that captivates people, that gives people an excuse to spend time with English, is *de facto* a great learning tool. I know this from my own experience, through seeing how I have been able to motivate myself, or rather not be able to motivate myself, in terms of using different kinds of materials.

So my goal really is just to try and create interesting stuff that I think I would have been interested in, with the idea that other people would also be interested in similar sorts of things. That's all I'm trying to do: create interesting stuff, make it accessible to non-native English speakers, and hope people will enjoy it.

Ariel Goodbody

Yeah, fantastic. I think we have very similar goals in that way. And I'm really looking forward to seeing the feedback and the reactions we get from *Pioneers*. So tell us, tell the listeners, where can they find *English Learning for Curious Minds*? Where can they find *Pioneers of the Continuum*? You know, where's the best place to go for all of that.

Alastair Budge

The best place is your favourite podcast app. So, Spotify, Apple Podcasts, anywhere you listen to podcasts. Just search for *Pioneers of the Continuum*, which is the fictional series that Ariel and I have been collaborating on. Or if you want to hear just me, it's *English Learning for Curious Minds*, both on every podcast app.

Ariel Goodbody

And I'll just spell the word 'pioneer' because I realise it's maybe not the most common word for English learners. So it's P-I-O-N-E-E-R. I very often spell words wrong, so I made sure to do that correctly.

Fantastic. I look forward to listening to it. It's been really great to talk to you today, Alastair, and I really look forward to hearing about future projects as well.

Alastair Budge

Likewise, thank you so much again for having me on! And yeah, have a great day.

Ariel Goodbody

Yeah, you too! All right. Bye.

Alastair Budge

Bye.

Well I hope you enjoyed my talk with Alastair. It was really interesting to hear about someone else's creative process, and it's given me all sorts of ideas for future podcasts. Remember, you can listen to *Pioneers of the Continuum* right now on your favourite podcast app, or just go to leonardenglish.com where you can find links to the work of Alastair and his team.

If you enjoyed today's episode and want to be able to read my stories in a physical format, then good news! I have a book of ten short stories called, well, [Easy Stories in English](#). Get it on Amazon, Apple Books or Google Books, or go to EasyStoriesInEnglish.com/Book to find out all the places it's available. Thank you for listening, and see you in two weeks!