

# Better



# English

## Real English Conversations: skill or luck? Rock, Paper, Scissors.

### Introduction

Hi! Lori here, welcoming you to another edition of Real English Conversations here at Better At English dot com. Before we get into the conversation, I want to thank everyone who has submitted book recommendations – I've started listing them on the website and will continue to list them throughout the week. And I'd also like to thank everyone who has let me know how you feel about mild swearing in these casts. The verdict has been overwhelming: swearing it OK with you. Only one person has said it's not OK. In fact, many of you actually think that understanding the more vulgar, or "colorful" side of English would actually be useful. But I don't want to offend anyone, so here is what I'll do: if any of my casts contain vulgar words or provocative, semi-naughty topics, I will alert you at the beginning. That way you can choose not to listen if you don't want to. So here is my first alert: the following cast contains one very-mild-but-still-vulgar expression. So if that would be offensive to you, then I suggest you not listen any further.

OK, enough of my yakkin' – here's the conversation.

### Conversation Transcript

Lori: Have you ever played the game **Rock, Paper, Scissors**? [link to video demonstration of the game Rock, Paper Scissors <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MwAChQYRuFo> ]

Michael: Yes, umm, but I'm not very good at it.

L: You're not very good at it? Well, I was just reading that there was an actual competition, a world championship in Rock, Paper, Scissors, and that the UK, **the UK kicked America's ass** in the rock paper s...

M: Well that makes me proud to be British! That we... Rock, Paper, Scissors!

L: I mean, it's such a childish game -- I can't even imagine that that there would even be -- I mean that's like having the championship in **thumb wrestling**! [link to video demonstration of thumb wrestling <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IhWf2GG0aE4> ]

M: Nnn.. actually, no, I disagree. Because I think that thumb wrestling, with thumb wrestling there is a lot of skill involved.

L: Oh yeah, definitely. It's all in the technique

M: Abso- exactly. But with, with Rock, Paper, Scissors -- I could be completely wrong -- umm

L: Uh huh

M: But I think that **it's all down to** luck.

L: Uh huh.

M: Umm, or maybe that's just my excuse for being so bad at it. I always seem to lose and so I can **put it down to** bad luck, that I, I seem **to pick** the wrong one, but umm...

L: Yeah, well, in the, in the article that I was reading -- it was also on the BBC --

M: OK

L: Umm, in the article they were talking about the **tactics** and saying that -- they were comparing it to poker...

M: O-

L: ...actually, saying that...

M: -K

L: ...that they have to do a lot of hard work and spend a lot of time practicing and training, learning about tactics and body language, and that it's act...that they **bluff** so much, just like you do in poker.

M: I'm trying to imagine how you bluff making a fist or, you know, holding your hand flat, or making the scissors shape.

L: Yeah, they're actually that they have a special word for it; they called the bluffing they do **priming**, and that allows the players to sort of **fake a move**...

M: Oh, make it look like you...

L: And sort of **trick** their opponent into making the wrong, you know, making the move that they want them to make... with all the **subtle** body language and umm, you know, psychological tactics... so actually there might be **more to it than meets the eye**...

M: Mmm, well there, I **suppose** there must be...

L: ...with this Rock, Paper, Scissors thing.

M: Umm, but to be honest Lori, I think that the reason, umm, when you...telling me about this, I, I compare it to something like, umm, world championship **coin flipping**.

L: Mmm hmm. Oh right yeah, that it's...

M: **Heads or tails**.

L: Exactly.

M: I mean, OK, so there's one extra, I mean, so there's three sides that we've got to consider...

L: Well, I think...

M: ummm...but, no, that's amazing.

L: I think were going to have to **put it to empirical test**...

M: OK

L: And I think -- just **to do right by** my own country -- that I'm gonna have to challenge you.

M: [laughs]

L: ...to a Rock, Paper, Scissors contest...

M: **Oh goodness me**, I don't know whether I can...

L: ...fighting for the dignity of my own country.

M: ...possibly...you're only saying this 'cause I've already admitted I'm terrible!

L: Yeah, well, so am I. And you al-, you already kick my ass at thumb wrestling, we know that so...anyway

M: OK, we'll have to, OK we'll do that, we'll do that.

L: OK

I hope you've enjoyed this edition of Real English Conversations. You can visit the website, Better at English dot com for the full transcript and for a link to the original BBC article that inspired this conversation. I've also added a couple of short videos that demonstrate Rock, Paper, Scissors AND Thumb Wrestling. As always, I welcome your feedback about the show. You can email me at info at better at English dot com, or call the voice mail line at +1 (for the USA), 206 350 2283. See you next time here at Better at English dot com! Bye for now...

Link to BBC article

[http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk\\_news/6159658.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/6159658.stm)

## Vocabulary list

### Rock, Paper, Scissors

A two-player game played with hand gestures. Each player makes a rock, paper, or scissors gesture on the count of three. Rock beats scissors, scissors beats paper, paper beats rock. Sometimes adults use this game as a friendly way to settle a dispute.

### The UK kicked America's ass

To kick someone's ass is informal slang for "to beat someone at something." In this example, the UK beat the USA at Rock, Paper, Scissors.

### Thumb wrestling

Thumb wrestling is a child's game (but adults can play too) in which two opponents lock fingers and try to "wrestle" with their thumbs. The winner is the one who manages to pin the opponent's thumb down. (See photos).

### It's all down to luck

The expression "x is all down to y" means that x is caused by y, or that x is depends on y. Michael means that winning Rock, Paper, Scissors is a matter of luck, not skill.

### Put it down to bad luck

To put something down to x means to attribute it to x, to say that it is caused by x, to blame x for it. Michael means that he doesn't win at Rock, Paper, Scissors because he has bad luck in the game; he loses the game because of bad luck, not a lack of skill.

### To Pick

To pick something means to choose it or select it

## Tactics

Tactics are a strategic plan you have to win or achieve something.

## Bluff

If you “bluff” in poker, you pretend to have better cards than you actually have, to try to get your opponents to give up (fold). In general terms, “to bluff” means “to deceive someone by making them think either that you are going to do something when you really have no intention of doing it, or that you have knowledge that you do not really have, or that you are someone else”

## Priming

To prime something means to prepare it. In the Rock, Paper, Scissors game, if you “bluff” you are priming your opponent to make the wrong move.

## Fake

To fake something means to pretend. For example, you can fake a feeling or an illness, that is, pretend you have a feeling or illness that you don't really have. The Rock, Paper, Scissors players can “fake” a move: pretend that they are going to execute a different move than the one they actually make.

## Move

A move is an action you take in a game. In this case, the moves are forming your hand into the rock, paper, or scissors shape.

## Trick

To trick someone is to fool or deceive them, usually as part of a plan.

## Subtle

In this case, subtle (adj.) means “small and difficult to notice, but still important.”

## More to it than meets the eye

If there is more to something than meets the eye, it is more difficult to understand or involves more things than it seems at the beginning. At first it might seem that Rock, Paper, Scissors is a simple game of chance with no skill involved, but if you analyze it carefully you might find that being a champion player takes a lot of skill.

## Suppose

If you suppose something, you think it is likely, but you are not sure enough about it to say “I know.”

## Coin flipping

Michael compares Rock, Paper, Scissors to coin flipping (tossing a coin in the air and letting it fall down on its own – chance will determine which side it lands on). Coin flipping (or coin

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tossing) is often used as an example of a random event. He means that there is no skill involved in Rock, Paper, Scissors; it's a matter of chance just like coin flipping.

## Heads or tails

The two sides of a coin are called the "head" (front side) and the "tail" (back side). Usually the "head" side features the head or bust of a famous person.

## To put it to empirical test

If you put something to (a) test, it means you experiment to see if something is true. Empirical means real-world experience rather than theory or opinion.

## To do right by my own country

If you do right by somebody or something, it means that you do the right thing for them, to treat them well or do something that is good for them.

## Oh goodness me!

Oh goodness me is an expression used to show surprise, similar to "Oh my goodness"