

An Old Friend: Friend vs. Acquaintance

Some people, I think, really do see everyone they know as a **friend**. Do you? I don't. There are many people—some are colleagues, others are neighbors or old classmates—that I know, but I don't think we're friends. That doesn't mean that we're **enemies**—the opposite of friends—it only means that I know who they are. . . and we're not friends.

In the listening today, we're going to learn the word **acquaintance**, which is a word that we use to describe someone we know, but who isn't a friend. We'll also learn why it's a word we don't hear very often, and when to use the word.

Before You Listen to the Recording

Take a moment to think of people you know. It might help to make two lists on a piece of paper: write down people you think of as 'friends' on one list. And write down the names of people you *know*, but don't think are your friends on the other list.

Now start the recording.

After You Listen to the Recording

What do you think? When you look at your two lists, do you think one is a list of friends and the other is a list of acquaintances? Are there words for these two ideas in your language? Do you use the word 'acquaintance' or 'friend' for people you know only a little? Do you like the American 'way' of calling everyone a friend?

If the word 'acquaintance' is new to you, it might help to use it in a few sentences. Look at your list of acquaintances and try sentences like “Richard is a acquaintance of mine. I met him at work and we sometimes eat together.” The more you use the word, the more likely it is to stick in your memory!

Vocabulary

Friend: A *friend* is, simply, someone you *like*. (It's *not* the same as a 'boyfriend' or a 'girlfriend'.)

And, usually, a *friend* is someone who likes you, too. If there is someone in your life you can call when you need help, or when you're having a bad day, that person is probably your *friend*.

Enemy: Is there anybody you really don't like? Someone you would hurt if you could? Someone who would hurt you if he or she could? That person certainly isn't a **friend** of yours! They're an *enemy*. *Enemies* are people who don't like each other so much that they're ready to hurt each other. *Enemy* is also the word we use for 'the other side' in a war. If the 'Blue Team' is fighting a

war against the 'Red Team,' then the 'Red Team' are their *enemies*.

Acquaintance: An *acquaintance* is someone you know—maybe not *well*, but you know them—but you're not **friends**. You're not **enemies**, either. You just know this person. Because Americans seem to call everyone they know friends, the word *acquaintance* isn't common in American English. When we call someone an *acquaintance* it sounds like a soft criticism and we wonder 'why aren't they friends?'