

Intensifiers: Fast Food

READING TEXT

Hamburgers, hotdogs, French fries, poutine, pizza, club sandwiches, doughnuts – are you hungry yet? Like it or not, fast food is a rather large part of our lives. We know that it is not very good for us, but it is not easy to resist; and whether or not we admit it, most of us eat fast food.

Why is fast food so popular? Let's start with a little anecdote.

London is a medium-sized, somewhat prosperous city in southern Ontario, about two hours by car from Toronto to the east or Detroit to the west. In the late 1960's, fast food was already quite popular there. Discount department stores had fairly pleasant low-cost restaurants. There were drive-in hamburger places where waitresses on roller skates brought orders out on trays that hooked onto car windows. A now-gone hamburger chain called Red Barn served "farmers' fries" and "cow burgers". The world's most famous hamburger chain, the one with the golden arches which has served billions - had not yet arrived in town.

One day in 1970, a great announcement was made: McDonald's would open its first restaurant in London. All over town, kids were extremely excited. McDonald's, which kids had only seen on visits to the USA, was actually coming to their home town! When the big day of the grand opening came the mayor made a speech. A high school band played, and a young boy's chest puffed with pride as the famous hamburger restaurant opened not only in his city, but in his very own neighbourhood.

There are, of course, many types of fast food outlets other than hamburger franchises. Pizza has spread around the world from its beginnings in Naples, Italy. Street vendors sell curry in Calcutta, barbecued pork in Hong Kong and sausages in New York. The most popular and widespread of all however are the American hamburger chains. We all know them: McDonald's, Burger King and Wendy's. Let's look at a few things which may explain why they are so popular.

1. RECOGNITION

The burger chains each have easily recognizable signs, which decorate every one of their restaurants as well as billboards, TV ads and even their delivery trucks. The power and influence of these signs is tremendous. Any parent of even pre-school children can tell you that kids recognize these signs very easily during car rides.

2. PREDICTABILITY

Not only are the signs the same worldwide, the look, the food and the operations of these places are the same wherever you go. The places themselves are similar. You get your condiments, napkins and straws from a central station. The chairs are all made of plastic, the floors are covered with tiles and the exterior walls are mostly windows.

The food of the big chains is essentially the same everywhere. While beef is not used in burgers in India, and there are kosher burger places in Israel, the “name brand” burgers, such as Big Mac or Whopper are essentially the same in Lost Angles or Lagos, Toronto or Tokyo.

They also function in much the same way. Customers approach a counter and read the menu that is posted high on a wall behind the counter. The customers choose what they want and place their orders with a counter-person. They also pay the same person, who goes to get whatever has been ordered and then places the food and drink on a tray if it is to be eaten there, or in a bag if the customers want to take it out. The customers take the food to a table, and even throw away the packaging after the meal.

3. MARKETING

Marketing is a big part of the burger chains’ success. They spend huge amounts of money on advertising, trying to lure their target groups into their restaurants. McDonald’s tries to attract kids with its clown mascot Ronald McDonald, its popular playgrounds and its special children’s meals, which always include a little toy. Wendy’s, with salad bars and witty TV ads featuring the company president, target an adult crowd, while Burger King’s advertising is usually somewhere in the middle.

4. THE FOOD

It is common to say that the burger chains’ food really isn’t very good, but they certainly are popular. Is it only the marketing, recognition, and predictability that makes them so popular? Here is something to think about. Our bodies evolved many thousands of years ago, before agriculture and civilization made food easily available. When food was really hard to find, those people who desperately wanted sugar, fat and salt were more likely to work hard to get those things, and therefore were more likely to survive, and to pass their genes on to future generations. Over thousands of years, this meant that most of us have a natural desire to eat fat, sugar and salt. It may seem a bit surprising, but the success of burger chains can be partially explained by Charles Darwin’s theory of evolution. The problem, of course, is that these things are now TOO easy to find, especially in fast food restaurants. People are eating too much fat, sugar and salt, causing a variety of medical issues, including obesity. A little moderation in the amount of fast food we consume is a good thing!

Find examples of INTENSIFIERS in the passage above.

Write a sentence with each of the following words and expressions.

- 1. **ANECDOTE** _____
- 2. **PROSPEROUS** _____
- 3. **DISCOUNT** _____

Intermediate 3 – Reading Exercise 4 – Intensifiers: Fast Food

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|-----|------------------------------|-------|
| 4. | DRIVE-IN | _____ |
| 5. | FRANCHISE | _____ |
| 6. | CHAIN | _____ |
| 7. | POUTINE | _____ |
| 8. | TARGET | _____ |
| 9. | TO RESIST | _____ |
| 10. | THE GRAND
OPENING | _____ |
| 11. | RECOGNITION | _____ |
| 12. | PREDICTABILITY | _____ |
| 13. | GENES | _____ |
| 14. | CONDIMENTS | _____ |
| 15. | MARKETING | _____ |

Answer the following questions.

1. Try to explain how the burger chains can serve food which tastes the same around the world. (The answer is at the end of these questions. Don't look yet!)

2. Do you like fast food?

3. Which fast food is your favourite? Why?

Intermediate 3 – Reading Exercise 4 – Intensifiers: Fast Food

4. Describe a local fast food from where you are from.

5. How often do you eat in a hamburger chain restaurant?

6. Just for fun, guess what percentage of Americans eats in a McDonald’s restaurant at least once a year? _____ % (Answer at the end of this text.)

7. According to the “Food” section of this text, why are hamburgers, French fries and cola so hard to resist?

8. What did you eat for lunch today?

9. Have your tastes in food changed since you were a kid?

10. If you were offered free poutine for lunch tomorrow, would you accept it? Why or why not?

Answer to Question 1:

The chains force their franchised and fully-owned restaurants to buy only from approved suppliers - who are given strict instructions on how to prepare the meat, bread, potatoes and drinks.

Answer to Question 6:

94%