#96 Challenge

Why we start, why we quit, and what keeps us going

LEVEL 4 | FREE TALK

PALLO!

ICEBREAKER QUESTIONS

1. **What's something you've always wanted to try but haven't gotten around to yet?**
2. **Is there anything that seems easy for everyone else but is weirdly hard for you?**

FREE TALK

highlight = key expressions

1. In 1923, a reporter asked British climber George Mallory why he wanted to climb Mount Everest, and he is said to have answered, "Because it's there." Other people take on challenges because they **have something to prove**, or just for a good story. **What usually pushes you to take one on: a point to prove, a story to tell, or plain curiosity?**
2. Daily challenges are everywhere: 30 days of no sugar, a 6 a.m. "miracle morning," or 100 days of English shadowing. Many people post daily proof in group chats, because on your own, it's easy to **fall off the wagon** by day three. **What's a challenge like this that you or someone you know has tried? How long did it last?**
3. They say it's never too late to start something new. People go back to school in their 40s, switch careers in their 50s, or run their first marathon at 60, and most were terrified before they **took the plunge**. **Who's the bravest late starter you know or have heard of, and what do you think finally made them go for it?**
4. Back in 2014, the Ice Bucket Challenge raised more than $100 million for the ALS Association with buckets of ice water. Today's challenges are **a far cry from** that: dance moves, song clips, and filters. **Design a challenge that could do real good today: what would people do, and why would it spread, even among people who'd say challenges are not their thing?**
5. A new diet, a new app, a new side hustle: another challenge pops up every week. When most of them **fizzle out**, people quietly move on to the next one, and some just roll their eyes: "Give it a week." **Has the word "challenge" lost its meaning, and what would something have to involve to earn the name again?**

KEY EXPRESSIONS

Slip a couple of these into your answers.

have something to prove need to show people what you can do	**fall off the wagon** go back to a habit you tried to quit	**take the plunge** finally do something big or scary
a far cry from very different from	**not someone's thing** something a person doesn't really enjoy	**fizzle out** slowly fail or stop

SAY IT BETTER

The professional line isn't a direct replacement for the everyday one; it's the same idea in a semi-formal, business style.

EVERYDAY		PROFESSIONAL
I like to challenge myself.	→	I enjoy **stretching myself**. ***Nuance:*** *Positive and modest; suits interviews and performance reviews.*
I couldn't keep it up.	→	I struggled to **maintain the momentum**. ***Nuance:*** *Common in project updates when progress starts to slow.*
They actually went through with it.	→	They **followed through** despite their doubts. ***Nuance:*** *Means "finished what was started"; praises reliability at work.*
It would spread fast if it helped people.	→	It would **gain traction** fast if it helped people. ***Nuance:*** *Used for ideas or products catching on; common in marketing.*
People lose interest pretty quickly.	→	The initial enthusiasm tends to **taper off** fairly quickly. ***Nuance:*** *Neutral and factual; handy when reporting falling interest.*

DEBATE: WHAT WOULD YOU DO?

Should schools scrap zeros and allow unlimited retakes?

1 WARM UP · No sides yet. Share your own story first.

1. Think back to your school days. **Which subject was your strongest, and which did you dread?**
2. Have you or someone you know retaken a test, like a driving test or a language exam? **What made the next try go better?**

2 SITUATION · Read aloud, one sentence each.

In American schools, each assignment and test is usually scored out of 100, and the average becomes a letter grade from A to F, with anything below about **60** counted as an F. That makes a single zero very costly: two scores of 90 plus a zero average just **60**, an F. In response, a growing number of school districts have adopted **equitable grading**, which aims to grade what students have actually learned, not deadlines, homework, or participation. Typical rules include setting a **50%** minimum score instead of a zero, accepting late work, and allowing unlimited test retakes. In a national survey of nearly **1,000** teachers by the Fordham Institute and RAND, just over a quarter reported a no-zero policy, and about **3 in 10** said students could retake tests without penalty. Supporters say a minimum grade keeps struggling students from giving up after a few bad scores. Yet **81%** of teachers said the no-zero rule hurt engagement, and critics warn of grade inflation and of students who work hard for one term, then coast. In 2025, San Francisco's school district put a plan on hold after a public outcry over reports that it would give a C for scores as low as **41 out of 100**. **Should schools scrap zeros and allow unlimited retakes?**

3 TWO SIDES · Everyone picks one. No need for equal sides!

A SECOND CHANCES

votes ☐

"One bad week shouldn't sink a whole semester."

A grade should show what students have learned, not when they handed it in. A safety net and retakes keep struggling students trying instead of giving up.

B REAL CONSEQUENCES

votes ☐

"In real life, deadlines and effort count."

Guaranteed points and endless retakes lower the bar and let students do the bare minimum and coast. Grade inflation also makes an A mean less.

Everyone speaks once before anyone speaks twice · Answer the last person **first**, then add your point.

4 FOLLOW-UP QUESTIONS · Ask one that could make the other side rethink.

ASK SIDE A

- If students get 50% for doing nothing, why would anyone hand work in on time?
- With unlimited retakes, what stops students from putting off studying?
- If grades keep rising, how will colleges and employers tell students apart?

ASK SIDE B

- If one zero makes a grade impossible to recover, why would a student keep trying?
- If a student masters the material late, why should the grade punish the timing?
- Adults can retake a driving test. Why shouldn't students retake a school test?

USEFUL LINE "That's a fair point, but…" *That's a fair point, but a 50 for doing nothing sends the wrong message.*

5 FINAL ROUND · Don't skip this part!

FINAL POSITION	"In the end, I'd **support / oppose** no zeros and unlimited retakes, because…" Did anyone switch sides? Why?	**BEST POINT**	"As the other side **rightly said**…" Name the best point you heard today.

KEY EXPRESSIONS

grade inflation grades rising without better work	**coast** get by with little effort	**the bare minimum** the least amount needed
a safety net protection if things go wrong	**lower the bar** reduce the standard expected	**a public outcry** strong protest from the public

Data: Chalkbeat (Aug 20, 2025), The 74 (Sep 17, 2025), CBS San Francisco (May 28, 2025).

PALLO!