A man from another country arrived in the United States. He could not speak English, but was living with his cousin, who did. Through his cousin’s efforts, the man found a job. The man’s work kept him out of the house for most of the afternoon and night, so the man had to eat his lunch and dinner out.

Fortunately, there was a small diner near his job, so the man went there daily to eat. Unfortunately, as he did not speak a word of English, the man did not understand the menu listings. When the waitress came to take his order, the man could only stammer, and left, feeling frustrated and hungry.

When he returned home, he told his cousin about the difficulties he had, and his cousin offered to teach the man a magic phrase. The phrase would convert words into food, and allow him to eat. His cousin taught the man the magic phrase, which the man practiced throughout the day.

The next afternoon, the man returned to the diner, feeling confident. He picked up the menu, appeared to study it intently and, when the waitress came for his order, said, “Ham and cheese on rye, please.” A few minutes later, the waitress returned with a ham and cheese sandwich on rye. The man was delighted!

Pleased with his success at lunch, the man returned to the diner, more confident than ever, for dinner. He repeated the magic phrase and instantly, another ham and cheese on rye sandwich appeared!

This went on for almost two more weeks. By this time, the man was less thrilled with his use of the magic phrase. In fact, it didn’t feel so magical at all. He was getting
tired of eating ham and cheese on rye, and wanted to order something else. Finally, unable to bear ham and cheese on rye any longer, the man went back to his cousin.

“Please teach me a new magic phrase, so I can order something besides a ham and cheese on rye!” the man pleaded. His cousin felt bad for the man, and considered a moment. Then, a smile appeared, and he said, “I have a new magic phrase that will make you forget completely about ham and cheese sandwiches! Tomorrow, use this magic phrase, and you’ll be really surprised!”

Anxious to try out the new magic phrase, which he practiced all morning, the man waited for his lunch break. Finally, he went in to the diner and picked up a menu, thinking, “They’re all going to be surprised when I order today”. The waitress came to take his order, expecting the man to ask for another ham and cheese on rye sandwich. Instead, to her surprise, he said, “Please bring me a grilled steak”

The waitress, taking a moment to get over her surprise, asked the man, “How do you want your steak done?” The man paused a moment, looked stricken and replied, “Ham and cheese on rye, please.”