



GLOSSARY

sketch comedy – several short, funny scenes (acts) by a group of actors and comedians

* Saturday Night Live is a TV show that is famous for its sketch comedy.

stand-up – a type of comedy where one comedian speaks informally and talks directly to the audience, usually from a stage

* The stand-up comedian was so bad that the audience started throwing food at him!

rowdy – noisy and disorderly; not calm

* When the teacher left the room, his students became rowdy and didn't do their work.

box office window – the place where tickets are sold for concerts, the theater, and other performances

* After we waited in line for more than two hours, the woman at the box office window told us that there weren't any more tickets!

cover charge – the amount of money that must be paid to enter a club, bar, or event for an evening

* This bar has the best music in town, but the \$9 cover charge is too expensive for us, so we usually go somewhere else.

two-drink minimum – each person must buy at least two drinks to stay at the club, bar, or event

* There is a two-drink minimum at that bar, but fortunately, the drinks aren't very expensive.

opening act – the first entertainment at a show or concert, before the main performer

* Felipe said that the band that played in the opening act was better than the main act.

comic – someone whose job is to make people laugh

* Valerie's favorite comic will be in town and performing this Saturday.

joke – a short and funny story that makes people laugh

* Cynthia is very bad at telling jokes because she always forgets the punch line.



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to fall flat – to not be successful; to not do what something was meant to do, such as when a joke doesn't make people laugh

* The salesman's presentation fell flat, and no one bought his product.

to boo – to shout "boo" in a loud voice to show that one does not like a performer

* When the audience started to boo, the actress was shocked and began to cry.

MC – Master of Ceremonies; the person who introduces performers or speakers at an event

* The MC was horrible! He forgot the names of most of the performers he was supposed to introduce.

heckler – someone who makes loud, rude noises to interrupt a performance or speech

* It was difficult to hear the speech because there were loud hecklers sitting in the back of the theater. The manager finally asked them to leave.

to do the trick – to do what something was meant to do; to be successful

* I had a horrible headache, but a glass of water and some aspirin did the trick.

to cheer – to shout loudly to show that one likes a performer

* Gabriel cheered so much at the basketball game yesterday that today, he can't even speak.

improv – improvisation; words or music that are created while the performer is performing, and not planned earlier

* All of Johanna's work is improv. Every time she's on the stage, it's a different performance.

to roll in the aisles – to laugh a lot

* They said that the comic was so funny that they were rolling in the aisles all evening.



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COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

1. Why did the hostess tell them that there was a two-drink minimum ?
 - a) Because she wanted to remind them to buy her at least two drinks each.
 - b) Because she can carry only two drinks at a time.
 - c) Because they must buy at least two drinks to watch the show.

 2. How did the MC get the hecklers to calm down?
 - a) He told some jokes.
 - b) He did a trick.
 - c) He booed them.
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WHAT ELSE DOES IT MEAN?

trick

The phrase “to do the trick,” in this podcast, means to do what something was meant to do or to be successful: “My car was making a lot of noise, but a quick trip to the mechanic did the trick.” Usually a “trick” is something that someone does to another person to make him or her believe something that isn’t true: “Is it true that the store is giving away computers to the first customer each day, or is that just a sales trick?” Or, “The children played a dirty trick on the teacher by telling him that his car was on fire in the parking lot.” A “trick” can also be an interesting or magical thing that someone does to entertain other people: “Grandpa has a trick where he seems to pull a coin from behind his granddaughter’s ear.” A “trick” can also be a good way to do something: “The trick to studying for this exam is to do all the problems at the end of each chapter.”

stand-up

In this podcast, the word “stand-up” means a type of comedy where one comedian speaks informally and talks directly to the audience: “If you’re shy and you don’t like speaking in public, you shouldn’t be a stand-up comedian.” A similar phrase, “to stand up for something or someone” means to support or defend something or someone: “It’s important to stand up for what you believe in.” The phrase “to stand somebody up” means to not meet someone who was expecting you: “Carina spent all afternoon getting ready for her date, but the guy stood her up and he didn’t even call her to apologize.” A “stand-up guy” is a trustworthy, reliable male friend: “Everybody likes Ben. He’s a stand-up guy.”



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CULTURE NOTE

In the United States, many people like to go to comedy clubs where they can spend an evening listening to comics and having a drink with their friends. Other people like to stay at home and watch “Comedy Central,” a cable TV channel that has comedy shows all the time. Generally there are two types of comedy: stand-up comedy and sketch comedy.

A “stand-up” comic stands alone on the stage and speaks informally with the audience, making jokes. Often the comic uses jokes that he or she has memorized, but sometimes the comic is performing “improv” comedy, meaning that he or she is thinking of what to say at the moment, without having prepared the jokes earlier.

A “sketch comedy” is performed by a “troupe” or a group of comic actors. They perform several funny, short “sketches” or scenarios for the audience. Usually the troupe practices these sketches before the performance and knows what they will be about, but they usually do some improv, too.

One of the most famous sketch-comedy troupes is “The Second City” in Chicago, Illinois. Many of the comics from this troupe have become successful actors and comics on TV and in movies. For example, many of them have worked as actors for the popular sketch-comedy television shows, Saturday Night Live, and Mad TV, both of which use a lot of improv.

Improv comics must be able to think quickly and creatively. There are many schools of “improvisation” or improv that help comics develop their improv abilities. Some of these schools are ImprovOlympic, The Playground, and ComedySportz.

Comprehension Questions Correct Answers: 1 – c; 2 – a



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COMPLETE TRANSCRIPT

Welcome to English as a Second Language Podcast number 242: The Comedy Club.

This is English as a Second Language Podcast episode 242. I'm your host, Dr. Jeff McQuillan, coming to you from the Center for Educational Development in beautiful Los Angeles, California.

Remember to visit our website at eslpod.com. We have some new things on the website, which we think you will be interested in and, of course, you can download our Learning Guide for this episode as well as take look at our new ESL Podcast Store.

Our episode is called “The Comedy Club.” Let's go!

[start of story]

On Friday night, I went with a group of friends from work to a comedy club. I don't really like sketch comedy, but I do like stand-up, and the comedian who was going to perform there was one of my favorites.

There were six of us and we were a pretty rowdy group. We stood in line outside, and when we got to the box office window, we paid the cover charge. The hostess showed us to a table right next to the stage and told us that there was a two-drink minimum. She took our drink orders and we waited for the opening act.

The first comic told a lot of political jokes and most of them fell flat. In fact, some of the people seated in the back started to boo him and he got off the stage pretty quickly. The MC came out and tried to get the hecklers to calm down by telling a few jokes of his own, and that did the trick.

The headliner finally came out and the crowd went crazy, clapping and cheering. He did some very funny improv and had us rolling in the aisles. I can't remember the last time I laughed so hard!

[end of story]

Our episode is called “The Comedy Club.” We use this word, club, in a couple of different ways. When someone says, “I'm going to the club,” they could mean that they are going to a dance club, which is a place where you can dance, often



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where there is a bar where you can buy alcohol. A club can also be a place for very rich people, who like to have their own restaurant and, often, a golf course. That can be a club, sometimes called a country club.

In this episode, we have a comedy club, and that is a bar that people stand up and tell jokes in. Comedy clubs are very popular in most cities in the United States. In Los Angeles, there are several very famous comedy clubs, and some of the most important comedians and comedic actors - or actors who make you laugh - come from these comedy clubs, or get their start - get the beginning of their career in the comedy clubs here in LA.

In the story, I go with a group of friends to a comedy club. I say that “I don’t really like sketch comedy.” Sketch, “sketch,” comedy are several short, funny scenes or funny dialogues and selections by a group of actors and comedians. So, these are comedy performances where there is more than one person, and it is something that is written in advance - there’s a script for it. Just like ESL Podcast, only funnier!

I say, “I don’t like sketch comedy, but I do like stand-up.” Stand-up, “stand-up,” is a kind of comedy where one comedian stands up and talks to the audience usually from a stage and they tell jokes. These jokes are almost always prepared; sometimes they’re not prepared. Sometimes they are what we call improv, “improv,” which is short for improvisation, “improvisation.” Improvisation is when the comedian or group of comedians begin to perform but they haven’t planned what they were going to do. They take suggestions from the audience and they make out of them, for example. That’s improv. The opposite of improv, or another kind of comedy, is stand-up, and stand-up is when the comedian usually has his jokes, or her jokes, written and performs them in front of the audience.

I say that the six of us in the group that I was with were “pretty rowdy.” To be rowdy, “rowdy,” means to be noisy. It is the opposite of to be calm. We use this adjective, rowdy, when we are talking about a group of people, often boys or men, who are very loud. For example, “The English soccer fans were very rowdy at the football game” - at the soccer game. I’m not saying that’s true; I’m just saying that would be an example of the word rowdy to describe a loud group of people.

“We stood in line outside” the comedy club, “and when we got to the box office window, we paid the cover charge.” The box office, “box” office, is a place where you buy tickets. Usually, it’s a place at the club where there’s going to be the performance. The box office window is just the window that separates you from



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the person working inside. So, it is a term that we use to mean the place where you go and get your ticket.

A cover charge, “cover” charge, “charge,” is an amount of money that you have to pay in order to go into a comedy club or a bar or a dance club for the event for that evening for whatever the performance is. Many dance clubs have cover charges. I think here in Los Angeles they are about 20, maybe 25 dollars, sometimes 15 dollars, and this is like the price of a ticket you have to pay in order to get into the dance club. Comedy clubs also have a cover charge; it's what you have to pay for the ticket to get into see the comedy routine or the comedy act.

“The hostess showed us to a table right next to the stage,” the place where the comedian stands and tells his jokes. The hostess “told us that there was a two-drink minimum.” A two-drink minimum means that before you leave you must buy at least two drinks, either a soda or a beer or other alcoholic beverage - you can't just say, “I want water.” So, this is sort of like an additional charge that you have to pay. So, you may pay 20 dollars to get into the comedy club, and then you have to buy two drinks before you leave. Usually, the drinks are five or ten dollars each, so you can see that they are making you spend a certain amount of money.

The hostess “took our drink orders and we waited for the opening act.” The opening act is the first part of a show or a concert before the main performer. So for example, if the rock group The Who were going to be performing, they might have another band that performs before them that is less famous - that is less well known - and they perform for a half hour or 45 minutes, and then the headline act, or the main act - the main performer - will come out and perform. That's true for a music concert, it's also true for a comedy club, where you'll have a less well known - a less famous - comedian - start the show, and then the main act, or the main entertainer, will come out.

“The first comic told a lot of political jokes and most of them fell flat.” A comic, “comic,” is a person who tells jokes; it's another word for a comedian. Jokes, “jokes,” are things that make you laugh, a short, usually funny story. In fact, they're always supposed to be funny. I try to tell jokes on ESL Podcast; most of them are not very funny. I'm not a very good comic, that's why I became a singer!

The comics tell different types of jokes; this comic was telling political jokes - jokes about political figures - “most of them fell flat.” The expression to fall flat means that a person tries to do something but it doesn't work. This especially is true for someone telling a joke. If you tell a joke and no one laughs, then the joke



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fell flat - it did not produce the result you wanted, which was, of course, to have people laugh.

I say that in the back of the comedy club, some of the people “started to boo,” “boo.” To boo means to make a sound that tells the performer that you don't like him or her (audio clip of booing). That's the sound I hear whenever I try to sing in public!

“The MC came out and tried to get the hecklers to calm down.” The MC, “MC,” stands for master of ceremonies. This is the person who introduces the performers or the speakers at the event, in this case, at the comedy club. “The MC tried to get the hecklers,” “hecklers,” “to calm down.” A heckler is someone who makes loud noises to interrupt a performance or a speech.

Sometimes when politicians are giving speeches, there may be some people in the audience who don't like what they are saying, and so they'll yell things - they'll either go “Boo,” or they'll say, “You're an idiot! Get out of here,” well, that's what I do! Politicians sometimes get hecklers. Comedy clubs get lots of hecklers - people who don't like the jokes and make these loud, rude, unkind comments or noises.

The MC told “a few jokes of his own,” meaning his own jokes, “and that did the trick.” The expression to do the trick, “trick,” means to do what something was meant to do - to be successful. Someone may say, for example, “I had a horrible headache. I took some aspirin and that did the trick,” meaning that was successful - it got rid of my headache. Well, the MC told some jokes to settle down - or calm down - the hecklers and it worked - that did the trick. That expression has some other meanings as well, take a look at our Learning Guide today for additional definitions of that phrase, as well as the expression - or phrase - stand-up.

“The headliner,” meaning the main performer, “came out” onto the stage “and the crowd went crazy, clapping (audio clip of clapping) and cheering (audio clip of cheering).” To cheer, “cheer,” means to shout loudly to show that you like the person; it's the opposite of booing. To boo and to cheer are opposites.

The main act or the main performer - the main comic “did some very funny improv” -improvisation - “and had us rolling in the aisles.” To be rolling in the aisles, “aisles,” means to be laughing a lot. If someone says, “I was rolling in the aisles when I was watching the movie,” they mean I was laughing. The idea is that you were laughing so hard that you fell on the ground.



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Well, I hope you are laughing so hard that you fall on the ground, unless, of course, you are in a subway or train - you shouldn't try to fall on the ground then! Now let's listen to the story, this time at a regular speed.

[start of story]

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[end of story]

The script for today's podcast was written by our very own comic here at the Center for Educational Development, Dr. Lucy Tse. (audio clip of laughter)

That's all we have time for. From Los Angeles, California, I'm Jeff McQuillan. Thanks for listening. We'll see you next time on ESL Podcast.

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