



ESL Podcast 344 – At the Convention Center

GLOSSARY

convention center – a large building that is used for very large group meetings, with rooms for speaking, eating, dancing, and more

* The American Medical Association has its annual meeting at the downtown convention center.

presentation – speech; an opportunity to present information orally and visually to many people at once

* Do you get nervous when you have to make a presentation to your co-workers?

to make matters worse – even worse; a phrase used to show that what one is about to say is worse than all the things that one has talked about before.

* I had a horrible morning. I spilled coffee on my shirt, fell down the stairs, and couldn't get my car to start. Then, to make matters worse, I realized that I had locked my keys in my apartment!

to know (one's) way around – to be familiar with an area so that one knows where one is and how to get to where one wants to go

* Sanjay has lived in New York City for more than four months, but he still doesn't feel like he knows his way around.

foyer – lobby; the large, open space near the entrance of a hotel, theater, airport, or other large building where people can meet each other

* Let's meet in the hotel foyer at 7:00 and then we can decide which restaurant we should go to for dinner.

registration booth – a table at a conference or similar event where people can register (put their name on the participant list) and receive information and other materials

* The man at the registration booth said that the first presentation would be at 9:30 a.m.

speakers' room – a large room where the people who will make presentations can prepare and relax before and after their presentation

* I met the other presenters from our company in the speakers' room before our session and we went over the order of our presentations.

to point (one) in the right direction – to tell or show someone who is lost where to go, or in which direction he or she should go

* That tourist looks lost. Let's go point him in the right direction.



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hallway – a long, narrow room with many doors going into other rooms

* The hallway in their home has five doors: one for the bathroom, three for bedrooms, and one for the office.

ballroom – a large room that can be used for big dances or for conference events

* On New Year's Eve, we danced all night in the formal ballroom.

meeting room – a small- or medium-sized room where meetings are held

* Which meeting room did you reserve for Friday's staff meeting?

escalator – moving stairs that one stands on and is moved up or down to another floor of a building

* Because Felipe is in a wheelchair, he takes the elevator instead of the escalator.

landing – the open space at the top of a set of stairs where one can rest before moving into a room on that floor or going up or down another set of stairs

* Bill's office is right next to the third-floor landing.

to get (one's) bearings – to orient oneself; to look around and understand where one is after having been lost

* When the hikers got lost, one of them climbed to the top of a hill to look around and get his bearings.

to sweat bullets – to be extremely nervous, anxious, and worried

* Zoila's family members were sweating bullets in the hospital waiting room, waiting to hear how her surgery had gone.

to tick – to make a quick, repetitive tapping noise, often when referring to the second-hand on a clock

* The clock in the guest bedroom was ticking so loudly that it kept me awake most of the night.

nightmare – a bad dream; a scary dream

* When Kristoff was a child, he had nightmares about monsters living under his bed.

subconscious – not conscious; the part of one's mind that one cannot control and may not even be aware of

* Chirag is very competitive and even though he loves his brother very much, I think he has a subconscious desire to see him fail.



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COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

1. Which of these would be place to meet your co-workers at a convention center?
 - a) A foyer.
 - b) An escalator.
 - c) A hallway.

2. What does “to sweat bullets” mean?
 - a) To be very tired and sweaty from exercise.
 - b) To drop one’s gun and ammunition.
 - c) To be extremely nervous about something.

WHAT ELSE DOES IT MEAN?

landing

The word “landing,” in this podcast, means the open space at the top of a set of stairs where one can rest before moving into a room on that floor or going up or down another set of stairs: “There’s a great view of the Washington Monument from the fourth-floor landing of that office building.” The word “landing” also means the act of bringing a plane or spaceship from the air onto the ground: “All of the airplane passengers applauded the pilot for his smooth landing.” Or, “Where were you during the Apollo moon landing?” Finally, in slang, the verb “to land” can mean to get something or to accomplish something: “He landed a great job on Wall Street just one month after earning his college degree.”

to tick

In this podcast, the verb “to tick” means to make a quick, repetitive tapping noise, often when referring to the second-hand on a clock: “The branch moved in the wind, making a soft ticking sound against the window.” The phrase “to tick (something) off” means to draw a checkmark symbol (✓) next to something in a list to show that something has been completed: “Kyle made a list of things to buy at the grocery store and ticked them off as he found them.” The phrase “to tick (someone) off” is used informally to mean to make someone angry or mad: “It really ticks me off when cars drive through our neighborhood that quickly!” Finally, the phrase “what makes (someone) tick” means what makes someone behave a certain way: “I wish I understood what makes him tick, but Eli is such a mystery to me!”



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CULTURE NOTE

Many “professional associations” (organizations of people who work in a particular career), universities, and businesses have large conventions for their members to “interact” (communicate with each other) and learn new information. These conventions can be a lot of fun, but because they are so big they can also be “overwhelming” (confusing, so that one doesn’t know how to act).

To make the convention experience more relaxing and useful, try to read the “schedule of events” (a list of things that will happen, including when and where) and decide which “sessions” (programs and presentations) you want to attend before arriving at the convention. Also review the “participant list” (a list of the people who will be at the convention) and the “vendor list” (a list of the organizations that will be trying to sell their products and services at the convention) to identify the people whom you want to meet with while you are there.

Conventions are a good opportunity for “networking” (meeting and talking with people who may be able to help you professionally), so bring copies of your résumé (a piece of paper with information about your education and experience) and plenty of “business cards” (small, rectangular pieces of paper with your name, title, and contact information) to share with other people. Also bring a large “shoulder bag” (a professional bag that is worn over one’s shoulder) to keep all of your papers in, because you will “undoubtedly” (for sure) receive many convention papers that you want to take home.

The conventions often include free coffee, but you will probably have to buy food and “snacks” (food eaten between meals). The food at conventions is often very expensive, so you might want to bring your own food from home, if possible.

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



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COMPLETE TRANSCRIPT

Welcome to English as a Second Language Podcast number 344: At the Convention Center.

This is English as a Second Language Podcast episode 344. I'm your host, Dr. Jeff McQuillan, coming to you from the Center for Educational Development in beautiful, but today a little rainy, Los Angeles, California.

You can visit our website at eslpod.com. While you're there, take a look at our ESL Podcast Store that has additional premium courses you may be interested in. You can also download a Learning Guide for this episode to help you improve your English even faster.

This episode is called "At the Convention Center." We're going to go to a conference, or a convention. I'm going to talk about typical vocabulary associated with going to a professional conference. Let's get started.

[start of story]

I left my hotel early so I would arrive at the convention center in time for my presentation, but the bad traffic made me late. My presentation was supposed to start at 2:00 and it was already 1:55! To make matters worse, I had never been to this convention center before and I didn't know my way around.

I walked into the foyer and looked around. I was hoping to see a registration booth or the speakers' room, where I was sure someone could point me in the right direction. I walked down one hallway and found the main ballroom, but it was empty. I saw a sign for meeting rooms upstairs and went up the escalator. But when I got to the second floor, I didn't see anyone around. I looked over the landing, hoping to get my bearings, but that was no help. By this time, I was sweating bullets. The clock was ticking and I was late!

Then, I woke up. It wasn't the first time I had a nightmare like this, and I knew it wouldn't be the last. I wonder what my subconscious is trying to tell me? At least this time, I was wearing my pants!

[end of story]

Our story begins when I say "I left my hotel early so I would arrive at the convention center in time for my presentation." A "convention center" is a large building that is used for large group meetings. There's usually a place for people



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to sit; there is a set of large rooms where people can give “presentations,” or speeches – information about their particular topic. Convention centers can be found in almost every big city in the U.S., and probably in the world. They are places where business and professional groups come together for large meetings.

My story continues “but the bad traffic made me late.” There were so many cars, or some problems on the freeways that I wasn’t getting to the convention center at the time I thought I was. “My presentation was supposed to start at 2:00 and it was already 1:55,” that is, five minutes before two (2:00). “To make matters worse, I had never been to this convention center before.” The expression “to make matters worse” means the same as even worse. It’s a phrase we use to show that what you are about to say is worse than all of the other things you have talked about before. So for example: “I walked up to the beautiful woman, and I asked her for her telephone number; she looked at me and she laughed. To make matters worse, she threw her drink into my face!” She laughed, that was bad, but even worse was the drink she threw in my face. Fortunately, I had another shirt in the car!

I say that I didn’t know my way around. “To know your way around someplace” – for example, I know my way around Los Angeles – means you are familiar with an area, so you know where it is and how to get to the places you want to go. If you’ve lived in place for a long time, you probably know your way around it.

“I walked into the foyer and looked around.” The “foyer” (foyer) is the same as a lobby; it’s a large open space at the entrance of a hotel or a theater, perhaps even an airport. It’s a place where people can meet before going into the smaller rooms where the meetings and the presentations are.

So, I walked into the foyer, which is almost always the entrance of a convention center, and I looked around. “I was hoping to see a registration booth or the speakers’ room, where I was sure someone could point me in the right direction.” The “registration booth” is a table at a conference or a convention where people can register – that is, say “I want to go here,” or “I am here.” Normally the registration booth gives you a bag or a folder of information related to the conference. You will often get a badge (badge). A “badge” is a little piece of paper, usually put in plastic that has your name on it, and perhaps your organization. So, when I used to go to conferences for language acquisition as a university professor, they would have my name and then my university, and I would “wear” the badge, I would put the badge on me. You can either hang the badge around your neck, or sometimes you can use a little “pin,” a sharp object in the back of the badge to put the badge on your shirt.



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That's the "registration booth," the place where you "register," where you sign up for an event. The "speakers' room" is a special room for the people who are giving the presentations. A "speaker" is someone who gives a speech or a presentation. I thought if I went to the speakers' room, "I was sure someone could point me in the right direction." "To point someone in the right direction" means to tell or show someone who is lost where they need to go. You could even use this if you were asking for directions from someone; you could say, "Excuse me. Could you point me in the right direction of the bank? I'm interested in robbing it." That would be an example of pointing someone in the right direction – even if it's for the wrong reason!

The story continues, "I walked down one hallway and found the main ballroom." A "hallway" is a long, narrow room with many doors that go into other rooms. Not exactly a room, it's a long space, and there are doors that lead to other rooms – to smaller rooms, or to larger rooms. So, it's a way that you get from one part of the building to another in order to get to a different room in the building. We have hallways in houses sometimes; we have a hallway in most buildings, business offices, and so forth.

So, "I walked down one hallway and found the main ballroom." The "ballroom" in a conference center or a convention center or a hotel is a large room, usually one of the largest rooms that can hold many people. You can put many people in there for a dinner, for a speech, for dancing. The word "ballroom" is originally associated with dancing; in fact, there's an expression "ballroom dancing," where you dance formal dances like the Rumba and the Waltz.

I found that the ballroom was empty. I also saw a sign for meeting rooms upstairs, and so I went up the escalator. "Meeting rooms" are smaller rooms where you can hear a presentation or a speech. There are usually several meeting rooms in a convention center, small rooms that hold maybe 50 or 100 people, sometimes even smaller. The "escalator" is that machine – basically they are moving stairs. You stand on it, and the stairs take you up to the next level – the next floor. The other way of getting from one floor to another – from one level to another – is an "elevator," where you get in a little box, and the box goes up – straight up – and then you walk out of the box; the doors open and close. For an escalator, you just get on the stairs, and the stairs move and take you to the next level.

"When I got to the second floor," however, "I didn't see anyone around." So, I went up the escalator and I didn't see anyone. "I looked over the landing, hoping to get my bearings, but that was no help." The "landing" is an open space at the



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top of a set of stairs, usually where you can rest before moving into a room on that floor, or perhaps going up another set of stairs. So, you have a building with three levels – three floors. You walk up the stairs to the first floor and there’s a “landing,” a small space where you can stand, then you can, if you want, walk up to the next level. “Landing” has couple of different meanings in English; take a look at our Learning Guide for some additional explanations. The expression “to get your bearings” (bearings) means to look around and understand where you are after having been lost. “To orient yourself” is another way of saying this. You try to see “where am I,” that’s to get your bearings.

Well, by this time, I was late and so “I was sweating bullets.” The expression “to sweat bullets” means to be extremely nervous or worried about something. I was sweating bullets because I was late. “The clock,” I say, “was ticking.” “To tick” (tick) means to make a quick, repetitive tapping noise. Often, it’s the sound you hear on a clock – tick, tick, tick, tick, tick, tick, tick, tick, tick – as the second hand on the clock goes from one second to the next second to the next second. To say “the clock is ticking,” however, means that time is short – you don’t have very much time. In this case, I was late.

At the end of the story I say, “Then, I woke up,” meaning this was all a dream, this didn’t really happen. “It wasn’t the first time I had a nightmare like this.” A “nightmare” is a bad dream – a scary dream. “I wonder what my subconscious is trying to tell me?” I ask. Your “subconscious” is the not-conscious part of your mind, something that you can’t control, that you may not even be aware of, in fact, are usually not aware of – the “subconscious.” “At least this time,” I say, “I was wearing my pants!” Many people have dreams sometimes of walking out onto the street with no clothes on; that would be a nightmare.

If you’re interested in not having nightmares about your convention experience, if you’re going to a conference, take a look at our cultural note in this episode, where we talk about how to make your conference experience better.

Now let’s listen to the story, this time at a normal speed.

[start of story]

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[end of story]

The script for this episode was written by our own Dr. Lucy Tse, who's been to many convention centers throughout the world.

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

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