



TOPICS

Gallaudet University, U.S. call signs for radio and TV stations, outfit versus gear versus equipment, pronouncing law and low, so versus very

GLOSSARY

deaf – unable to hear; without the physical ability to hear

* Many deaf people are very good at “reading” lips.

hearing-impaired – unable to hear or with very poor hearing

* I’m hearing-impaired, so I usually have to ask people to speak more loudly so I can hear them.

student body – the group of all the students who study at a school, college, or university

* Jack was elected president of the high school student body.

American Sign Language – ASL; a language that lets deaf people “speak” by moving their hands

* I know the alphabet in American Sign Language, but I don’t know any words.

to appoint – to officially put someone into an important position or job

* Professor Jenkins was appointed the dean of the department in 1998.

Board of Trustees – the group of people who lead a university or other organization, making important decisions and hiring the president

* The Board of Trustees has decided that the University should add a department for medical studies.

faculty – the professors, instructors, and other teaching staff at a school, college or university

* The students want to have a shorter semester, but the faculty thinks it should be even longer.

to change (one’s) mind – to change one’s opinion or idea; to have a different opinion, belief, or idea from what one had before

* They had planned to go to Anchorage for vacation, but then they changed their mind and decided to go to Honolulu instead.



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disability – not being able to use one’s body well; or not being able to do something physically that others can

* The Special Olympics is an athletic competition for children with disabilities.

to grandfather (someone) in – to receive a right or benefit that one wouldn’t normally receive, because one was part of an earlier version of something

* The company has decided that all new employees will receive dental insurance, and it grandfathered in all the current employees who have worked there for at least five years.

acronym – a word made from the first letter of each word in a longer phrase or name

* NATO is an acronym for the North Atlantic Treaty Organization.

unique – unlike anything else; one of a kind; different; without anything like it

* Carol wanted to look unique at the party, so she wore a yellow dress, even though she knew that everyone else would be wearing black.

outfit – the clothes that one wears at one time; pieces of clothing that are worn together

* Peggy Sue bought a new outfit for her interview.

gear – equipment and/or clothes needed for an activity, especially for an outdoor activity

* The scout leader packed all the gear for the trip: tents, sleeping bags, cooking supplies, and a medical kit.

equipment – tools and other things that are needed for an activity

* We went to the store to buy a new copier, fax machine, and other office equipment for the business.



WHAT INSIDERS KNOW

Helen Keller

Helen Keller was born in Alabama in 1880. When she was only 19 months old, a disease made her deaf and blind. This disability meant that she couldn't communicate with her family or other people. She was completely "isolated" (alone, without contact with other people) and wasn't able to "develop" (grow and become more mature) normally.

In 1888, Helen's mother "contacted" (communicated with) a teacher named Anne Sullivan. Anne came to Helen's home and began to try to communicate with the little girl. It took a lot of time and energy, but "eventually" (after a long time) she had success. Anne put one of Helen's hands under "running water" (water that is moving) and started making small movements on Helen's other hand. Eventually Helen understood that the movements that Anne was making were a way to talk about water. Helen soon began learning the words for many other objects. Later, Helen learned how to speak by touching the lips and throats of other people as they spoke. Then she learned how to read "Braille" (writing for blind people, made by putting bumps on a piece of paper instead of letters).

In 1904, Helen became the first deaf and blind person to graduate from college. Later she became a famous "author" (writer) and speaker. She wrote an "autobiography" (a book about the author's life) called The Story of My Life. Helen died in 1968.

Many books, plays, and movies with the title of The Miracle Worker have been made about Helen's life. A "miracle" is something that happens even though people thought it was impossible and could be only a work of God. Many people believe that Helen's success "in spite of" (even though something is true) her disabilities was a miracle. Many American children learn about Helen Keller in school and she is one of the most well known people in recent American history.



COMPLETE TRANSCRIPT

You're listening to ESL Podcast's English Café number 113.

This is English as a Second Language Podcast's English Café episode one-one-three (113). I'm your host, Dr. Jeff McQuillan, coming to you from the Center for Educational Development in beautiful Los Angeles, California.

Our website is eslpod.com. Take a look today and download the Learning Guide for this episode. You can also take a look at our new ESL Podcast Blog, where you can get the latest information and some additional help in learning English.

Our topics today are going to be Gallaudet University, a very interesting university here in the United States that you may not have heard of. We're also going to talk about radio call signs in the U.S., what they mean, and how you can understand them better. As always, we'll answer a few of your questions. Let's get started.

Our first topic is Gallaudet University. This is a university that is supported in part by the U.S. government. It's located in Washington, D.C., and has been around for about 150 years. The reason that Gallaudet University is so interesting is because it was the first school, and still the main university, in the U.S. for those who are deaf and hearing impaired. When we say someone is "deaf" (deaf), we mean that they cannot hear. Another term that you will hear is "hearing impaired." When someone is "impaired" (impaired) they can't do something as well as other people, so "hearing impaired" would be people who don't hear as well. We also might use the older expression "hard of hearing," meaning someone who has difficulty hearing. It's the only university in the world that is primarily for people who are deaf and hearing impaired. All of its majors – all of its classes are designed for people who are deaf.

The university started back in 1856, and the U.S. government decided to support it very soon after it started. One year later, it began to give money to the university. It's named after the first director of the university, Thomas Gallaudet. It's an interesting university, not a big university. There are only about 2,000 students at the university, both graduate students and undergraduate students. There are almost 200 sign language and professional study students in that group. There are also international students from other countries; about seven percent of the student body is from another country. The expression the "student body," means the group of students – all of the students are called the "student



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body.” Not your body – physical body – it means the group of students, the “student body.”

Gallaudet is a bilingual community, where you can hear English but you will also see a lot of “American Sign Language,” which is the special language that is used by the deaf and hearing impaired to communicate. Instead of talking, you use your hands and arms to communicate ideas. It’s not necessary to pass a sign language test in order to get into Gallaudet University as an undergraduate – as someone who’s getting a bachelor’s degree – though it is required for some of the graduate programs.

I actually know someone who went to and graduated from Gallaudet University. My sister-in-law’s sister is deaf, and graduated from this university, so it’s a very well known university, especially among those in the deaf community. It’s also well known because there was a controversy about Gallaudet College – or Gallaudet University, it involved the president of the university. Back in 1988 the president of the university decided to resign, and so the university had to “appoint,” or select, a new president. We use that verb, to “appoint,” when we are referring to some official position, usually a high position in an organization or in the government. The president appoints the members of the executive branch – the people who are the leaders of different parts of the government.

Gallaudet University appointed a new president. However the president was not, herself, deaf. Now, all of the presidents of Gallaudet College up to 1988 were hearing presidents, that is, they could hear, they were not deaf. There were many people in the student body, among the faculty – the teachers, we call the teachers, the university teachers especially, the “faculty” (faculty). There were many faculty members and students who wanted a deaf president to be head of the university, so there was some very public demonstrations.

Now, it’s important to understand that in American university culture, although there are political protests, just like at every university, probably, in the world, it’s not as an important an activity as it is in other countries. It’s very rare, for example, for the students to go on strike – to stop going to classes, to stop the university from functioning. It doesn’t happen very often in the U.S., but it did happen in 1988 at Gallaudet University. After a week of protests, the university decided to “change its mind,” to make a different decision, and hired a deaf president, the first deaf president.

Everything was fine until September of 2005 when this first deaf president – his name was Jordan – decided to retire. The university then had to pick a new



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president – to “appoint” a new president. The “Board of Trustees” at the university – the group of leaders of the university – announced they were going to appoint another deaf president. But there were many people in the deaf community at Gallaudet who didn’t like the new president; they said that she wasn’t fluent in American Sign Language – she wasn’t completely proficient in American Sign Language. Some people said she was, in some ways, “not deaf enough.”

This was, again, a big controversy. Once again, there were protests. The students closed the university, and finally the university, once again, changed its mind and appointed a different person. So, even though this person was deaf, they decided, among the university members, that she wasn’t part of or closely connected enough with what some people are now calling “deaf culture.” There’s an argument in the deaf community over what deafness really is. Most of us think of deafness as being something that is a “disability,” something that is almost like an illness; it’s not the normal pattern. There are people in the deaf community in the United States, however, who think that being deaf is simply different; it’s not a negative thing. And so, there’s this debate between these two groups within the deaf community, and this debate had some influence on the appointment of the president.

So that’s Gallaudet College, an interesting university – a unique university in the world in that all of its students, or almost all of its students are deaf or hearing impaired.

Our second topic today is radio and TV call signs. A “call sign,” sometimes called “call letters” are a group of letters that the government gives a radio station or a television station, or anyone who is transmitting radio signals over the air, we would say, out into the air – into space. They give anyone who has a license to do that call signs, or call letters, and each station has its own call sign, or call letters.

There’s an international organization that decides which letters are going to go to which countries, it’s called the International Telecommunications Union, and this is an international organization that has been around for many years. In the United States, the radio and TV stations all begin with the letter “W” or the letter “K.” In other countries it’s different; in Germany they use letters for their radio call signs between “DA” and “DR.” In Great Britain, they use the letter “G,” and so forth. So, every country has its own letter or set of letters. In the U.S., for our radio stations and our TV stations, we use either “K” or “W.”



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Now, when radio first started, back in the early 20th century, there wasn't any regulation – any organization in the government that was giving licenses, at least some of the early stations, so there was some confusion about what letters were going to be used. Finally, the government organization in the U.S., what we call the FCC (the Federal Communications Commission), decided that they would distribute the call signs based on geography, based on where the radio or TV station was in the United States.

Now, if you've seen a map of the United States, you probably know that in the middle of the United States there's a long river that divides the U.S. in two halves. This is the Mississippi River; it begins in Minnesota and ends down in Louisiana, in New Orleans. The Mississippi River, then, was the dividing line; it was going to divide the "Ks" and the "Ws." Everything that was east of the river – so the eastern part of the U.S. – would use the letter "W," and everything west of the Mississippi would use the letter "K."

Now, there were some stations that had already started and already picked a different letter – a "K" or a "W" – and these stations were grandfathered in. There's a verb to "grandfather" someone. You know a grandfather is your father's father, but the verb to "grandfather" means we are going to let you continue doing what you did before, even though we changed the law. For example, when I was 19 years old I could drink legally in the state of Minnesota, but a year later they changed the law so that only those who were 21 and over could drink. However, if you were 19 or 20 the day they changed the law, you were "grandfathered in," you were allowed to continue drinking, in that case. Not that I did very much drinking when I was in college, you all know that college students never drink! But, that was an example of being "grandfathered in."

The call signs in the U.S. all have four letters for the radio and TV stations, or almost all of them. In Minnesota, where I'm from, the Mississippi River divides the two big cities, Minneapolis and St. Paul, so you have stations that are both "K" and "W."

The letters that they use for the stations are sometimes designed to give you an idea about the station, where it is located for example. Sometimes the letters are "acronyms," that is they are letters that stand for other words. For example, there's a famous station in Chicago called WGN, it's one of the older stations that has three letters, and the "WGN" stands for "World's Greatest Newspaper," because it was owned by The Chicago Tribune, which is a newspaper in Chicago. In here in Los Angeles, there's a radio station called KUSC; it's the official radio station of the University of Southern California (USC). So



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sometimes the radio stations will have some connection in their call letters or call sign between who they are and what letters they use. Of course, once the letters are used by one station they can't be used by another station; all of the call signs are "unique," meaning they're individual, there's only one of them.

I've been talking about radio and TV stations; there are other types of radio or broadcast stations that also have licenses. In most countries there is something called "amateur radio," often called "ham radio." These are people who are just normal citizens who are interested in communicating with other people. And in most countries, you can get a special license, and if you get a license you are given your own call sign.

I was, and am still, an amateur radio operator. I got my first license, oh, 31 years ago – a long time – when I was, let's see, when I was one – no – when I was 13. I have the call sign K0BK, because in the United States we can use either "K" or "W"; we can also use "N," but that's not used for amateur radio stations. Ham radio stations also have numbers in addition to the letters, and the number is based on where you live, from zero to nine. Zero is in the upper Midwest, in Minnesota, for example, is in the zero part of the country, so my license was K0BK. I moved to California, but I have kept my old license – I haven't changed the number. Just don't tell the Federal Communications Commission that I moved!

Now let's answer a few of your questions.

Our first question comes from Alvaro (Alvaro), not sure exactly where Alvaro is from, I think he's from Spain. Alvaro wants to know the differences when using the words "outfit," "gear," and "equipment." Let's start with "outfit" (outfit).

"Outfit" always refers to clothing – things on your body: shirt, pants, a dress, and so forth. An "outfit" is normally the combination of the clothes on your body or a set of clothes on your body, usually that you put on for a specific purpose. For example: "Today I am going horseback riding" – I'm going to ride on the back of the horse – because, you know, here in the western part of the United States everybody rides a horse! So, I'm going to go horseback riding, but I need to put on my "riding outfit" – the special clothes I have, or the specific clothes I have for riding on a horse. Or you may be going to a party, and someone would say, "Well, what kind of outfit are you wearing?" This is something women or girls might say in particular. "That's a nice outfit" – that's a nice set of clothes, a blouse and a skirt for example, that is good for this specific purpose, the party.



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We also sometimes use “outfit” informally to mean a group of people who are related either in some activity or in some sort of business activity. “Dave is the brains of this outfit” – he’s the brains – the smart person in this group.

“Gear” (gear) is usually equipment, not clothing, for a specific sport. For example: “I’m going to climb mountains (I’m going to be a mountain climber) and I need my gear,” the specific pieces of equipment I need in order to climb a mountain – because, you know, here in the western part of the United States everybody climbs mountains! So, “mountain climbing gear” would be the equipment you use. Gear can also be, for example, if you are going skiing. Someone may say, “You need your ski gear,” the skis themselves, the poles, maybe special glasses, and so forth.

“Gear” is also used by engineers, people who build things and design things: “We need special gear to put up the new radio tower.” A “tower” is a structure that goes up very high in the air, often has an antenna on it. “Gear” also means a set of wheels that have what we would call “teeth” or “cogs” (cogs) that go together. For example, in your car you have a gear that helps change the speed of the car.

Now I said gear is not normally used for clothing, but sometimes you will hear that word also used to refer to specific kinds of clothing for a sport. For example, if you are playing hockey – ice hockey – you may have “hockey gear.” It’s not exactly equipment; it’s the things that put on your body to protect yourself, if you are crazy enough to play ice hockey like I was when I was younger – ice hockey, horseback riding, mountain climbing...

“Equipment” is a general term for a set of, or group of things used for a specific purpose, so it can also include this idea of “gear.” “Equipment,” for example, can be used to talk about things on your desk in your office. You have certain equipment: you have a copy machine, you have a fax machine. These are types of equipment. “Equipment” is often used to mean any kind of machine that you use to get something done, for a specific purpose. So, “outfit,” “gear,” and “equipment” are the three words we just talked about.

Francesco (Francesco) from Italia – from Italy – wants to know how we pronounce the words “L-A-W” and “L-O-W.” “L-A-W” is pronounced “law.” “Law.” “L-O-W” is pronounced “low.” “Low.” So we have “law” and “low.” “Law” is a set of rules that we follow in a society or country. “Low” is the opposite of “high.”

The vowel in the word “law” is very similar to the vowel in the word “all,” “call,” or “hall” – “law.” “Law.” “Low” is like the “O” in “go” or “toe” – “low.”



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Our next question – our final question for this Café comes from Japan, from Nozomu (Nozomu). Nozomu wants to know the difference between two very common words in English, “so” (so) and “very.” This sounds like an easy question, but we use these words very often and in different ways. I’ll talk about some of the basic differences.

You can say sometimes these two words mean the same thing. For example: “I am very tired,” you could also say, “I’m so tired.” They really mean the same thing. “So,” however, is a little more informal, perhaps a little more common in conversation. It’s also a little more emphatic – a little greater emphasis: “I’m so exhausted from climbing mountains, and then going horseback riding, and then playing hockey. I am so tired” – I am very, very tired is what I mean there.

There are some times, however, when “very” is more common and sounds better. “So” can be used in many of the places where we use “very,” but for a little more formal and perhaps a little safer usage, you can use “very” if you’re not sure which is right. I would say you can use “very” and not have any problems in terms of people understanding you or it sounding strange. But “so” is very common, at least as a substitute for “very,” especially in informal conversation.

People also use the word “so” the same way that we use the word “well”; it’s what we might call a “conversation filler” – I’m thinking of what I’m going to say. It’s also used to mean “then” when you’re telling a story: “So, I went to the store and I saw my friend Jill. So Jill asked me what I was doing at the store.” There, we use the word “so” as a way of continuing the story or saying the next the thing in the story.

So, if you have a question or comment for the English Café, you can email us. Our email address is eslpod@eslpod.com.

From Los Angeles, California, I’m Jeff McQuillan. Thanks for listening. We’ll see you next time on the English Café.

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