



ENGLISH CAFÉ – 121

TOPICS

Convenience stores, eating and drinking noises, colleague versus associate versus fellow, to sign in versus to sign off versus to sign on versus to sign up

GLOSSARY

slushee – a thick, cold drink made by freezing soda or another sugary drink and ice, often sold in convenience stores

* On hot summer afternoons, she likes to buy a slushee from the convenience store near her house.

bulletproof glass – very strong glass that bullets cannot be shot through, often used to protect employees against robberies in banks and stores

* After the robbery, the bank decided to install bulletproof glass to protect anyone who works with cash.

armed robbery – an attempted or actual robbery where the thief has a gun and threatens to shoot it, or shoots it

* During our employee training, we were told that during an armed robbery, it is best to give the robber whatever he or she asks for.

taboo – something that people are not supposed to do for religious or cultural reasons

* In the U.S., it's usually taboo to ask other adults their age and how much money they make.

to chomp – to eat food noisily; to move one's teeth up and down noisily while eating something

* Kai likes to chomp on crackers while she is studying.

to crunch – to eat noisily, crushing hard food between one's teeth

* He likes to crunch hard candies instead of sucking on them.

to smack – to use one's lips to make a loud kissing noise, often while eating

* The little girl smacked her lips in pleasure while eating her ice cream.



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to wolf down – to eat something very quickly

* Polly had only five minutes before her class would begin, so she wolfed down a sandwich and then ran to the building.

to slurp – to drink something very noisily from a glass, spoon, or straw

* My mother taught me that it isn't polite to slurp while eating soup.

to dribble – to have a small amount of liquid fall out of one's mouth, usually while one is eating or drinking

* When the little boy tried to talk while eating, some milk dribbled out of his mouth.

colleague – co-worker; a person whom one works with, usually in the same office or business

* Are you friends with very many of your colleagues?

associate – a person with whom one does business, but who isn't necessarily employed in the same business or organization; a member of a law firm or other business

* Every December, she sends holiday cards to her closest business associates.

fellow – a student who has received a scholarship or a research or teaching position

* Have you met the new teaching fellow in the biology department?

to sign in – to register; to put one's name on a list to show that one has arrived or attended an event

* Please sign in by writing your name and email address on this piece of paper, and then go to the conference room.

to sign off – to end a radio transmission or television broadcast by saying goodbye or goodnight

* The news reporter signed off by saying, "That's all the news we have for tonight. Goodnight, everyone."

to sign on (for something) – to enroll or become a part of something; to enlist oneself, especially as an employee; to agree to participate in something or do something

* Zeb signed on to lead the marketing committee.



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to sign up (for something) – to agree to participate in something or do something, often by signing your name on a list

* Why did you decide to sign up for the school choir?

WHAT INSIDERS KNOW

Clerks

Clerks is a 1994 “comedy” (funny movie) written and directed by Kevin Smith. It is about two “store clerks” (the employees who make sales and take customers’ money in a store). The “main character” (the person whom a movie is mostly about) works in a convenience store and the movie is about the “comic-tragic” (funny and sad) things that happen to him that day while he is working at the store.

In one of the funny “scenes” (a part of a movie where things happen in one place), a customer wants to buy a package of cigarettes. Another man in the store shows this customer a picture of a smoker’s dirty “lungs” (the part of a body that processes oxygen), and the customer decides to buy “chewing gum” (a flavored, chewy thing that it put in one’s mouth for flavor but not swallowed) instead. People who hear the conversation “accuse” (say that someone has done something wrong) the clerk of selling death and they begin to throw cigarettes at him. Later, everyone “finds out” (learns) that the man with the picture of the smoker’s dirty lungs was actually a chewing gum salesman!

The movie was made with a very “modest budget” (with little money) of less than \$30,000 and was “shot” (filmed) in black and white in only 21 days. The director, Kevin Smith, had to sell his “belongings” (the things that one owns) and use his credit cards to get enough money to make the film. He was working full-time and slept very little while the movie was being shot. Because there was so little money, many of the director’s family members and even Kevin himself are actors in the film.



COMPLETE TRANSCRIPT

You're listening to ESL Podcast's English Café number 121.

This is the English Café episode 121. 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. If you go there, you can download an 8 to 10 page Learning Guide for this episode. You can also take a look at our ESL Podcast Store and our new ESL Podcast Blog, where we give you some additional help in learning English throughout the week.

In this Café, we're going to talk about convenience stores: what they are, where you find them, why they're such an important part of American culture. We're also going to talk about some eating and drinking noises, some of the vocabulary related to common, everyday activities like eating and drinking. And as always, we'll answer a few of your questions. Let's get started.

Our first topic, in this Café, is "convenience stores." A "convenience store" is a small store or shop that usually has long shopping hours; that is, they're open for a long time. Many convenience stores are open 24 hours a day. Convenience stores are small stores usually found at a gas station, for your car, or along a very busy street or busy road. The most popular and famous convenience store in the United States is a chain, that is, a collection of stores – there are lots of them – and this is called "7-Eleven."

7-Eleven was originally started, under a different name, back in 1927. Since that time, there have been lots of other companies that have started convenience stores. Some convenience stores are owned by individuals – they're not part of a larger company. Many of them are part of a large company, like 7-Eleven. 7-Eleven stands for "7 days a week, open 'till 11," I believe, was their original motto. 7-Eleven is now owned by a Japanese company, and you can find 7-Eleven stores in, I believe, 12 or 14 different countries, including Japan.

The things you buy at a 7-Eleven or at a convenience store are very similar. If you go from one store to another, you will find pretty much the same items – the same products for sale. They're a place where you can buy milk and bread, soda – what we might call "soft drinks." "Soft drinks" is another word for soda; Coca-Cola is a "soft drink." You can also find cigarettes; you would be able to buy coffee and candy bars.



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Convenience stores are famous now also for selling what some stores call a “slushee,” 7-Eleven calls them a “Slurpee,” and a “slushee” or a “Slurpee” are drinks that are made with ice and some sort of flavoring, and you can get them in any – many different flavors. But, a Slurpee or a slushee is cold and it’s good on a hot day, for example. It’s basically a kind of sweet drink with crushed ice. Slurpees are very popular – were very popular when I was growing up, back in the 1970s, as a drink that you would have during the summertime.

Convenience stores will also sell other things; they’ll sell magazines and newspapers. You can usually find doughnuts and maps at a convenience store. Convenience stores are not places where you want to shop for your regular food every day. That’s because the prices at convenience stores are higher than at a regular supermarket, but they are convenient. They’re easy to get to; they have a small parking lot that you can go in quickly, buy what you want, and get out quickly. So, they are places for snacks, places to buy food – maybe if you are on a long trip and you want to bring some food with you, or if you need to buy cigarettes or something like a Slurpee.

Convenience stores sometimes sell beer and wine, sometimes they don’t; it depends on which state you are in. In different states you have different laws. In California, you can buy liquor – beer and wine – at a convenience store. In other states, such as New Jersey or Pennsylvania, you can’t.

One of the problems of working at a convenience store is that it sometimes is not safe. Because these stores are often open 24 hours day, they are what we would call “easy targets” for armed robbery. A “target” is something that you are going for – something you are trying to hit, something you are trying to get. “Armed robbery” is when someone takes a gun and points it at you and asks you for your money. In some convenience stores, it’s become so dangerous that the store has put bulletproof glass. This is especially common if you go to a gas station in the United States, where there are often small convenience stores as well. The “cashier,” the person who takes your cash – takes your money – the cashier works behind a bulletproof glass. When we say it’s “bulletproof,” we mean you could shoot a gun and the bullet would not go through, this for the safety and security of the people who work there. You will also find bulletproof glass in most banks, or least a lot of banks especially in a place like Los Angeles, where there’s more crime.

Convenience stores also sell lottery tickets. Each state has its own laws about lotteries. “Lotteries” are when you buy a ticket, and if your ticket number is called



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– if you have the matching numbers, then you win a lot of money. Most people, of course, don't win any money, but they continue to buy the tickets!

Convenience stores became very popular in the 1970s and 80s, when I was growing up. They began to replace some of the smaller, family owned markets in many cities. You will see these convenience stores in movies and in television shows; they've become part of American culture. There's a convenience store in the television series The Simpsons called the "Quickie Mart," meaning you can go and get things quickly from there. Quickie Mart is not a real convenience store in the U.S.; you won't actually find any here, it's just in the cartoon The Simpsons.

Our second topic on this Café is a little unusual; we're going to talk about some vocabulary related to eating and drinking. I wanted to start with talking about some "etiquette," some rules that are common at U.S. restaurants and in homes, where you are having a meal with an American family. There are certain things that are taboo. When we say something is "taboo" (taboo), we mean that they are considered bad things – that you're not supposed to do them.

One thing that you're not supposed to do is to burp. "To burp" is to make a sound that comes from your throat. It's not a very nice sound; for example (Jeff makes the sound) is a burp – now you know! Other things that you don't do are talk with your mouth full. This is considered poor manners – bad manners – if you have food in your mouth to be talking at the same time, so people can see the food that you are chewing. People do it anyway, of course, but it's considered to be a little impolite. You're also not allowed to pick your teeth when you are sitting at the dinner table or at the restaurant table. "To pick your teeth" means to take your finger or some other object to remove food that's in between your teeth. You also don't normally lick your fingers while you're eating. The exception would be perhaps if you were eating fried chicken, which is often eaten with your hands, but normally that's not something you would do. To "lick" is to place your tongue on something.

There are lots of different verbs and sounds that can be made when you eat. I already mentioned that you chew your food. "To chew" means to bite up and down on your food. However, if you chew and make a loud noise – (Jeff makes the sound) something like that – that would be called "to chomp" (chomp). It's considered rude; it's considered impolite to make loud noises when you are chewing your food.



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Another verb to describe chewing is “to crunch.” For example, if you are eating something hard like a potato chip or a piece of candy, you could make a sound that we would call “crunch” (Jeff makes the sound). That is a crunching sound you just heard. A few other expressions related to this general topic: one is “to smack your lips.” “To smack” (smack) means to make a loud sound with your lips, usually when you are expecting to eat something good or you are satisfied after you have eaten something. “To smack your lips” would be something like this: “(Jeff makes the sound) Mmm, mmm, mmm. That was good!” That’s “to smack your lips.”

“To pop your gum,” is another sound that you can make with your mouth. “To pop,” usually gum, is to make a small bubble with gum, and then to burst it – to make it so that it produces a loud sound. You can do that outside of your mouth or inside of your mouth, depending on how good you are at chewing gum.

Finally, if you eat very quickly – you’re very hungry and you eat very quickly without really even tasting your food very much, we would say that you were “wolfing down” your food. “To wolf (wolf) down” (two words) means to eat something very quickly.

When it comes to drinking, there are a couple of sounds you may hear, but not know the verb in English. One of them is “to slurp.” “To slurp” is to make a loud sound when you are drinking. This is usually considered somewhat rude, somewhat impolite. An example of slurping would be (Jeff makes the sound). Earlier, we talked about 7-Eleven selling a drink called a “Slurpee,” that comes from this verb, “to slurp.” Another noise would be what you would make if you were using a straw. A “straw” is a long, usually plastic, tube that you use for drinking soda or some other drink. In order to get the liquid into your mouth, you have to suck through the straw, and that would bring the liquid into your mouth.

Finally, if you are very young, perhaps a baby, or even very old, sometimes you may do something called “dribbling.” “To dribble” means that there is liquid in your mouth, for example water that is falling out slowly. This is “to dribble.” So, when you come to Los Angeles and you want to go out and have a meal with us here at ESL Podcast, be sure you don’t chomp, or wolf down your food, no slurping, and please, no dribbling!

Now I’ll answer a few of your questions.



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Our first question comes from Priscilla (Priscilla) in Hong Kong. Priscilla wants to know the difference between “colleagues,” “associates,” and “fellows.” Let’s begin with “colleagues” and “associates.”

A “colleague” or an “associate” are the people you work with, usually in a professional setting at your business where you work. You can use either term, “colleague” or “associate,” to refer to someone you work with. For example: “I’d like you to meet my associate, Dr. Lucy Tse.” “I would like to introduce you to my colleague, Adrian Galeno.” These are people you work with, people in the same profession as you. You could also use “colleague” to refer to someone who works at the same university: “My colleague at the university.”

An “associate” is also used, more specifically, to mean someone who is an important member – a high-ranking member of a “law firm,” a group of lawyers. When you become part of the management, if you will, of a law firm, we call that “becoming a partner.” You are sometimes called an “associate.” This is also true for some consulting businesses, where you have different associates. I’m the Senior Research Associate at the Center for Educational Development – I’m one of the Senior Research Associates.

A “fellow” can just mean a guy – a man, a person. But here, it means, or can mean, someone who’s the member of an organization or a society. Usually this is a formal group of people who have the same professional interest. This is often a very exclusive group, where there are only certain members of it, often used for people who are involved in some sort of scientific research. We also use the word “fellow” specifically talking about a university student who is studying for a Master’s or a Ph.D., or has finished their Ph.D. and now is studying even more, working at a university doing research. We sometimes talk about a “research fellow”: “After she finished her Ph.D., she spent a year working as a research fellow at Harvard.” You can also be a research fellow if you are still in graduate school; it’s like a scholarship you get, instead it’s called a “fellowship.”

So, that’s “colleague,” “associate,” and “fellow.”

Rudi (Rudi) in Brazil wants to know the difference between the following expressions: “sign in,” “sign off,” “sign on,” and “sign up.” Well, these are four phrasal verbs in English, which are difficult to understand because the meaning doesn’t necessarily depend on the preposition. Phrasal verbs are often formed by taking a verb and adding a preposition like “on,” or “in,” or “about.” But, there’s no good rule to tell you what that would mean in different cases. You



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simply have to do a lot of listening and reading to hear these words – these phrasal verbs used, but I’ll explain these for you.

“To sign in” means, usually, you take a pencil or pen and you write your name on a piece of paper when you arrive at a certain place. In some workplaces, when you arrive you have to “sign in,” you have to go to a board or to a piece of paper and write your name and the time that you arrived. The custom here, in the U.S., is when you have a wedding, or a funeral when someone dies – both occasions can be sad! When you have a wedding or a funeral, there’s often a book that you are asked to sign, with pieces of paper, so that the person who is having the wedding – the people who are having the wedding or the family of the person who died knows who was at the ceremony, or at the get-together – the gathering.

“To sign off” can mean a couple of things. It can mean to end a communication – to conclude. If you are talking on the radio, for example amateur radio – ham radio – or commercial radio, and someone is going to “sign off” at 10:00; that means they’re going to stop talking – they’re going to stop broadcasting at that time. “To sign off” can also mean to approve of something – to formally approve of something. You might say, “Did our boss sign off on our new raises?” – did he approve giving us more money. No, he didn’t, of course! But, that’s what “to sign off” means, to approve formally or conclusively.

“To sign on” means to become part of something – to agree to become part of something. When politicians leave their government jobs, they sometimes “sign on” to work for a big company – a big corporation. We often use that term, “to sign on,” when we are talking about joining a group or joining a company.

“To sign up” means to agree to participate in something. It’s similar to “signing on,” but “sign on” is usually used for work environments – for work situations. “To sign up” means to agree to participate in some event. For example: “I’m going to sign up for the dance this week” – I’m going to say yes, I will be there. Sometimes you have a piece of paper where you write your name. Sometimes you just tell someone I’m going to be there: “I want to sign up” – I want to be part of this activity or this event.

When I got to work this morning, I “signed in.” When I finish this podcast, I’m going to “sign off.” When I agreed to become an employee at the Center for Educational Development, I “signed on.” And, when someone asked me to join a volunteer group of tutors, I “signed up.”



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If you have a question or comment, you can email us. Our email address is eslpod@eslpod.com. We can't answer everyone's questions, but we'll do the best we can to answer as many as we have time for.

From Los Angeles, California, I'm Jeff McQuillan, signing off from the English Café.

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