



ENGLISH CAFÉ – 149

TOPICS

U.S. zoning laws; how to become a TV or movie screenwriter; unless versus if, in versus at for locations, persecute versus prosecute

GLOSSARY

zoning law – a law about how one can or cannot use the land; a law that regulates where homes and business can be located

* Jim wanted to build his new house on that hill, but the zoning laws say that no homes can be built on that land.

urban sprawl – a city that grows very quickly without any plan for that growth

* The urban sprawl in the past 10 years has turned this town into a big city with no central downtown area.

mixed-use zoning – laws allowing certain areas to be used in more than one way

* The land developers are trying to get mixed-used zoning for this building so they can put in a shopping mall on the first floor and apartments on the upper floors.

high-density neighborhood – a place where many people live in a small area of land

* It's rare to find parks and other open spaces in high-density neighborhoods.

exclusionary – not allowing certain people or groups to enter, join, or participate; preventing certain kinds of people or groups from being included

* Why do people want to join a club that has exclusionary rules against women and minorities?

affordable housing – housing that people can pay for even if they don't make a lot of money; homes that people with average incomes can afford

* The mayor said in his speech that he will work toward building more affordable housing for working families.

strip club – a business where women dance without wearing any clothes for customers to watch

* The families in the neighborhood didn't want a strip club on their street.



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adult shop – a store that sells videos, magazines, and products related to sex
* Many adult shops have the letters “XXX” to indicate that their products are for adults only.

screenwriter – a person who writes scripts (the words actors say) for television shows or movies

* How many screenwriters does it take to write a half-hour comedy for TV?

show business – the entertainment industry; the businesses related to television, movies, and the theater

* Maria’s parents wanted her to become a teacher, but she is a talented singer and dancer and had dreams of being successful in show business.

blindly – without knowing; without questioning; without seeing or noticing

* Curt was late for school and rode his bicycle blindly down the hill without seeing the angry drivers who had to stop to let him pass.

agent – someone whose job is to act for someone else; someone whose job is to find the best jobs and best pay for the person he or she represents, such as for an actor or a singer

* Hiram wrote a book and is now trying to find an agent to represent him to book publishers.

unless – except if; only if

* I’ll be playing in the soccer match on Sunday unless it rains.

to persecute – to treat a person or group of people in an unfair or unkind way, usually over a period of time

* My people were persecuted for centuries for our religious beliefs.

to prosecute – to try to prove in court that a person has committed a crime or to say in court that someone has committed a crime

* It’s not clear right now whether the state has enough evidence to prosecute him for bringing people illegally across the U.S. border.



WHAT INSIDERS KNOW

Parts of a Screenplay

When most people think of a screenplay, they think of the “lines” or words that the actors say. It’s true that the “dialogue” (lines between two or more people) is normally the main part of a screenplay. However, a screenwriter also has to include important information about the “scene” (a short section of a show or movie that takes place in one location) for the actor and “director,” who will manage the actors and “crew” (staff) for the show or movie.

A screenplay includes many “screen headings,” which is the information placed before anything else in a new scene. A “heading” is usually the information at the very top of a page and appears on every page in that document or section of a document. The scene heading tells whether the scene takes place “indoor” (inside a building) or “outdoor” (outside). It also gives the specific location for the scene, such as a hospital room or a park. Finally, it has information on whether the scene takes place during the day or at night.

A screenplay also includes scene descriptions. These descriptions include information on the characters’ appearance, what they are doing, and how they are doing it. The descriptions also include things like how the actor should say his or her line, and even what sounds, other than the actors’ words, the audience will hear during the scene.

How much “direction” (guidance; management) a screenwriter gives “varies” (differs) from one screenwriter to another. Some screenplays provide a lot of “context” (information about a situation) and some very little. It’s usually up to the actor or director to “interpret” (make meaning) the screenplay, which may “turn out to be” (result in) a very different “vision” (idea; image) from the screenwriter’s!



COMPLETE TRANSCRIPT

You're listening to ESL Podcast's English Café number 149.

This is English as a Second Language Podcast's English Café episode 149. I'm your host, Dr. Jeff McQuillan, coming to you from the Center for Educational Development in beautiful Los Angeles, California.

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On this Café, we're going to talk about U.S. "zoning laws," or laws about how we can and cannot use the land here. We'll also talk about how to become a TV or movie screenwriter, which is a very popular career here in Los Angeles, especially. And as always, we'll answer a few of your questions. Let's get started.

Our first topic is a somewhat unusual one; we're going to talk about zoning laws. A "zoning (zoning) law" is a law about how you can use or not use a piece of land, usually in a city or a town. Most zoning laws are made by state, local, and city governments, not the national – or federal – government. Some common types of zones – and "zone" is just another word for area – include residential zones, which are areas for housing; commercial zones, which are areas in a city or a town for businesses; industrial zones, which are areas for manufacturing plants – for places where they make things; and agricultural zones, places where you grow food.

If large industries – large companies that make things – were allowed to operate in areas where people live, many people would probably be unhappy with the noise and pollution. In the U.S., especially, there is a very strong emphasis on protecting residential zones, making sure that people's houses – and remember, the typical American lives in a house, not an apartment – making those areas protected from noise and pollution that you get when you have a factory (a place where things are being made) or a lot of businesses. In other countries, it's very different; you may have businesses and apartments or houses that are very close to each other. But in the U.S., there's more of a separation that many states – many cities require between businesses and houses.



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Zoning laws help cities control how they develop – how they grow, making sure that the growth follows a certain plan. Some communities are planned in advance, so before anything is built there is a big plan. As you move farther west in the United States, or you move outside the major cities in the east and central part of the U.S., you will see more of the results of this sort of planning and zoning. Back many years ago, when the cities were being built in other parts of the country – the east and in the central part of the country – there wasn't a lot of planning. Now, when you build something new you have to make sure you are following the city's plan, and that plan is one that requires you pay attention to zoning areas; you can only put your business in a certain area.

Many cities have trouble, especially here in the western part of the U.S., with what is called “urban sprawl.” “Sprawl” (sprawl) is the process where a city grows very quickly without any plan for growth, so that the city just keeps growing and growing and growing, but there's no plan, and so the city gets very big and very wide. This has happened in some cities out in the western part of the U.S., and in other parts of the country as well. Cities with sprawl problems have very large suburbs, where people live far away from their jobs. This is especially true here in Los Angeles. Although it is a western city – a newer city – there wasn't a lot of planning done, so that many people live a very long distance from where they have to work. This, of course, causes traffic problems, and Los Angeles is famous for having lots of problems with traffic – too many cars on the freeways.

Some cities have very strict zoning laws. When we say they are “strict,” we mean there are very inflexible – that is, you can't change them; they say this is the way it is and there's no changing it. If a city makes the center of its city a commercial zone, this, of course, forces people to live in other parts of the city, in residential zones.

Many cities now have what is called “mixed-use zoning” so that the businesses and the houses or apartments or condominiums are together. In some buildings, there is a business on the first floor – on the ground floor, and then above it are apartments or condominiums. Just last week, I went to a new mall – a new shopping center here in Los Angeles, in a city next to Los Angeles called Glendale, and this was an example of a mixed-use shopping mall. So there were stores on the bottom of the buildings, just like any other shopping mall, but above them were condominiums and apartments where people lived. So, that's an example of mixed-use zoning; the city allowed businesses and residential purposes in the same area.



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Mixed-use zoning creates what is sometimes called a “high-density neighborhood.” “High-density” means that many people live in a small area. In the U.S. this is especially true in eastern cities such as New York, Boston, Philadelphia – cities where you have lots of buildings that have both businesses, usually on the bottom, and people living in apartments and condominiums on the upper floors of the buildings.

Sometimes zoning laws in the past have been “exclusionary,” meaning that they prevent certain kinds of people from living in that area. We’ve talked so far about zoning laws that separate businesses and residential, or housing, units – places where people live. Now, we’re talking about zoning laws that prevent certain kinds of people from living in a neighborhood. The word “exclusionary” comes from the verb “to exclude,” which is the opposite of “include.” For example, there are some towns that require that if you are going to build a house, it has to be on a certain area of land, what we would call on a “lot” (lot), that is very large. Well, the only people that could have enough money – that could afford to build a house would be very rich people. So, this is an example of an exclusionary zoning law, where only rich people have enough money to actually build a house because the law requires that you have a very big lot – a very large piece of land.

Zoning laws in the past, however, were mostly exclusionary based on someone’s race or skin color. This was quite common in many cities, especially here in Los Angeles many years ago. You couldn’t buy a house if you were African American or Asian American, or perhaps even Hispanic or Latino. These were areas where you weren’t allowed to live. This sort of zoning has been illegal for a long time. In most places, this was true beginning in the early 20th century, however these zoning laws unofficially became something that determined where people lived, and it separated blacks from whites in many cities.

Zoning laws that try to do the opposite, that try to include different kinds of people in an area are called “inclusionary zoning laws.” When a city, for example, creates a new area for houses, it may require that a certain percentage of the land be used for affordable housing. “Affordable” means that you have enough money to pay it, something that isn’t too expensive. Affordable housing, then, is less expensive housing. So the company that’s building houses, or building the apartment buildings, has to build some things that will be cheaper so that people who don’t have a lot of money can afford to live there.

Finally, another area where you will hear about zoning laws in the news, in the U.S. anyway, is when you are talking about certain kinds of businesses. For example, there are many zoning laws in most cities about businesses related to



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sex. A sex business could be, for example, a “strip club,” where mostly women dance without wearing their shirt, or with no clothes at all. That would be an example of a strip club. “To strip” is a verb that means to take off your clothes. So, strip clubs are often restricted to certain parts of the city. Usually, cities will separate place where families are living with children from these businesses, but the separation is often not very far. Zoning laws also usually restrict adult shops. “Adult,” here, would mean stores that sell pornographic material – sex-related merchandise, sex-related goods. These are usually restricted by most cities to certain areas. A typical zoning law might be that you cannot have an adult video store within a thousand feet of any house or apartment building, or a thousand feet from any school. That’s an example of a zoning law that would restrict where a business can operate.

Our second topic today is something completely different; we’re going to talk about a very common occupation – a very common job here in Los Angeles, a screenwriter. There’s sort of a joke here in Los Angeles that everyone is a screenwriter; everyone is trying to write something for television or movies. ESL Podcast has a screenwriter, Dr. Lucy Tse; she’s writing for our podcast. A “screenwriter,” then, is someone who words for the screen. The “screen” is the place where you show the movie. If you go to a movie theater, there’s a screen in front where you can see the movie on. Screenwriters are people who write, then, for movies and television usually. That thing that a screenwriter writes is sometimes called a “screenplay,” or it could simply be called a “script.” So, a screenwriter writes the dialogue for a television show or movie. But he or she also the instructions about where the story is and what the actors and actresses do.

Many people who are good at writing want to get into show business by becoming screenwriters. Many people who are very bad at writing also want to get into show business by becoming screenwriters! “Show business” is a term we use to refer to the entertainment industry – television and movies. Here in Los Angeles, show business is usually just called “the industry.” When we say “he’s in the industry,” we mean he’s in the entertainment business; he works for a movie or a television, or perhaps a record music company. That’s what we say here in L.A. “Industry” is a general word that refers to any kind of work, but in Los Angeles, if somebody says “the industry,” or “the industry,” they’re referring to show business – the entertainment industry.

Of course, many people want to become screenwriters, so there’s a lot of competition; it’s very difficult to get a television company or a movie company to actually take and buy your screenplay and make the movie or the TV show.



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To be a screenwriter, you have to be creative; you have to interesting ideas. You also need to be a good writer. You also have to understand there's a special kind of writing when you are writing for television and movies. You have to be familiar with the "format," the way the words are actually put on a piece of paper for the screenplay or the script.

Much of this information is learned by people in a school. A lot of people go to college to study to become a screenwriter, or someone who's in the movie or television industry. Here in Los Angeles, both the major universities – USC, the University of Southern California, and UCLA, the University of California Los Angeles – have film schools, schools where you can learn to become a actor, a director, a screenwriter, all the things related to the entertainment industry. Some of the other universities in the U.S. also have these special schools. In New York, New York University – NYU – has a very famous film school.

The most important part of being a screenwriter, however, is having a lot of contacts – that is knowing other people. Contacts are people that you know, and you need contacts in the companies that make movies and television shows. We call those companies "studios" (studios). A studio is company that makes films.

It's difficult, if you write a screenplay, to get someone to look at it. Some people don't have any contacts in the studios, so they submit, or they send their script – their screenplay – "blindly," meaning no one is expecting it, they just send it in to the company. This is a very difficult way to get your screenplay read and approved and purchased. Many screenwriters have what is called an "agent." An agent is someone who helps you find a place for your screenplay; an agent is someone who connects the screenwriters with the studios. Actors also have agents, people who handle the business side, people who negotiate for them, people who find work for them. Even in the U.S., most professional athletes – basketball players, baseball players – have agents, people who negotiate their contract for them.

As I said before, becoming a TV or movie screenwriter can be very difficult, but if you're good at it, or if you are lucky, there can be great rewards. You will see what you wrote being acted out on the big screen – that is, you will see people actually acting in your movie or television show. Here at the Center for Educational Development, we are hoping that one of the major, or important, studios will select some of our scripts to be made into a movie. I know Lucy would be very happy if one of her scripts became a major movie. So, if you work for a studio, call me!



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Now let's answer a few of your questions.

Our first question comes from Chris (Chris) in Germany. Chris wants to know the difference between “unless” and “if not.” “Unless” and “if not” have similar meanings, but they're not exactly the same. Let's start with “unless.”

“Unless” is used when we talk about only one thing that will bring a certain result – that will cause something to happen. “We will go on a picnic unless it rains.” This means we are going to go on a picnic, where you go and you eat food outside, but if it rains, we will not. So, we will go on a picnic unless it rains. That means if it rains, we will not go on the picnic.

We use “if not” when we mean that we are less certain about the possibility that what we are planning to do will actually happen. There's a greater likelihood – a greater possibility that what we plan on doing we will not do. For example: “We will go on a picnic if it does not rain.” This says that our plan is to go on a picnic, but it also suggests that we think rain is possible. For example, if it is not possible to visit your mother on Mother's Day, then you can send her a letter.

Pascual (Pascual) in Mexico wants to know how we use the prepositions “in” and “at” when we are talking about location, where something is.

We usually use “in” with a location that is defined, that has definite boundaries or borders. It's often something small like a room, or a city or state. You could say, for example, “She is in L.A. looking for the Center for Educational Development.” “At” is usually used to refer to a specific place, not an area or a region. For example: “She is at the L.A. International Airport.” That's her specific location. She is in L.A., meaning she is somewhere in the city; she is at the airport – that tells you more specifically where she is. Other examples: “I live in California, which is in the United States.” You could also ask, “How many rooms are there in the building?” Here's some examples with “at”: “Let's meet at the restaurant tonight” – a specific place. Or, “I'm at my desk right now, working” – that's exactly where I am.

Finally, David (David), from Germany also, wants to know the difference between “persecute” (persecute) and “prosecute” (prosecute).

“To persecute” someone is to treat someone or a group of people in an unkind or unfair manner, usually over a period of time. People have been persecuted because of their race, their religion, their political beliefs. To persecute someone



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usually refers to a larger group of people that are being discriminated against by another group of people, especially the government.

“To prosecute” is very different. To prosecute means that the government tries to prove or demonstrate to a judge or the court that a person has done something wrong – that they have committed a crime, they have done something illegal. The government prosecutes criminals. They arrest them – the police arrest them, then the attorneys (the lawyers for the government) go to court and they prosecute them. They try to get the court (the judge or the people who make the decision – the jury) to say this person is guilty has to go to prison. The noun from prosecute is “prosecution.” If you read in the paper “The prosecution will argue that the criminal is guilty,” the prosecution refers to the lawyers who are trying to prosecute the alleged, or supposed, criminal. Similarly, “persecution” is the noun that comes from the verb “to persecute.” For example, there was a persecution of Japanese Americans during World War II. They were discriminated against; they were put into prisons and camps.

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

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

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