



TOPICS

Registering to vote and efforts to get out the vote; the G.I. Bill; growl, groan, and mutter; personnel and other collective nouns; to be fond of (someone/something)

GLOSSARY

election – the period of time when people vote for laws or for people who want to be chosen to work in important government jobs

* More than 60% of voters voted for a new law to make it illegal to talk on a cell phones while driving.

mandatory – required; not optional

* The meeting for all new employees is mandatory and anyone who cannot attend will have to talk to their supervisor.

to register to vote – to put one’s name on the official list of people who want to vote

* Since we just moved to Nebraska last month, we need to register to vote in this state if we want to vote in the next election.

to fill out – to write information on a piece of paper; to complete a form with one’s information

* Don’t forget to fill out this form with your name and contact information before you leave.

democracy – a type of government that the United States and many other countries have, where people decide who will represent them in the national government

* We learned about the beginnings of the American democracy in history class.

to get out the vote – to try to get more people to vote in important elections

* To help get out the vote, our group is visiting each house in our neighborhood to remind people of the election next week.

voter drives – voter registration drives; organized efforts to get many people to register to vote

* In college, I ran a voter drive to get more college students to vote.



ENGLISH CAFÉ – 161

soldier – a person who fights in the army, navy, air force, or marines; someone who is a member of the armed forces and who fights for and defends a country
* Many people believe that soldiers who are hurt in war should be taken care of by the government.

veteran – a soldier who had fought in a war; a soldier who participated in a war in the past
* Today, we honor our veterans for their bravery and service to the country.

benefits – good things that people, especially employees, get other than salary, such as insurance, paid vacation time, and opportunities
* The pay in my new job isn't that high, but the benefits are terrific.

economy – the financial system in a country, including all the things that are made, bought, and sold
* There are a lot of people without jobs when the economy is weak.

social legislation – a group of laws that help the people living in a country to have better living conditions
* This year, the lawmakers didn't pass much social legislation and were criticized for ignoring the needs of the poor.

growl – to make an angry, low, rough sound
* The dog growled as the mail carrier walked up to the house.

groan – to make a long deep sound when unhappy or in pain
* My children groaned when I told them that we would not be taking a summer vacation this year.

mutter – to speak quietly and unclearly, often when complaining about something
* The professor heard students in the back of the classroom muttering when she told them about their new 20-page assignment.

personnel – a group of people who work in a business or organization, such as a factory or office
* The personnel in this office are all required to attend training next week.



ENGLISH CAFÉ – 161

to be fond of (someone/something) – to have a great liking for someone or something; having a strong liking or affection for someone or something
* Carl is too fond of candy and cookies, and has gained 20 pounds in the past year.

WHAT INSIDERS KNOW

Absentee Voting

On Election Day, people go to “polling places” where voting machines are set up to “cast” (give; register) their vote. What if you can’t go to your polling place on that day?

Americans who cannot cast their vote at the polling place can request an “absentee ballot.” An “absentee” is someone who is supposed to or expected to be at a particular place but who is not there or cannot be there. An absentee ballot allows a person to cast his or her vote by mail.

A person who wants an absentee ballot must request it “ahead of time” (before the event). A ballot is mailed to the voter and he or she “marks” (writes or make indications on) their ballots. They may do this with a pen or pencil, or the ballot may be a “punch card” that requires the voter to push out a small square of paper next to the law or person they want to vote for. Then, the voter mails the ballot back to the state.

Absentee ballots are useful for people who are living “abroad” (in a foreign country), such as those “serving” (working) in the military. About half of the 50 states allow “no excuse absentee voting,” where no reason is required to request an absentee ballot so anyone can request one. In most states, voters may request “permanent absentee ballot” status, which means that the state will send the voter an absentee ballot every time there is an election.

Each state has different laws about when and how absentee ballots are counted. Many states count them on Election Day, while others count them within a few days after. Absentee ballots have become very popular in many states. In California, for example, about 25% of ballots cast since 1993 have been absentee ballots.



COMPLETE TRANSCRIPT

You're listening to ESL Podcast's English Café number 161.

This is English as a Second Language Podcast's English Café episode 161. I'm your host, Dr. Jeff McQuillan, coming to you from the Center for Educational Development in beautiful Los Angeles, California.

Visit our website at eslpod.com. You can download this episode's Learning Guide, an 8 to 10 page guide we provide for all of our current episodes that gives you some additional help in improving your English. You can also take a look at our ESL Podcast Store, with additional courses in daily and business English, as well as our ESL Podcast Blog, where several times a week we provide even more help in helping you increase your language proficiency.

On this Café, we're going to talk about how Americans register to vote and the things that people and organizations are doing to get more Americans to vote in the elections. We're also going to discuss something called the G.I. Bill, why that is important and what it is. The G.I. Bill was very important in giving Americans money to go to school after World War II, and we'll talk a little bit about why that was important in U.S. history. And as always, we'll answer a few of your questions. Let's get started.

As you probably know, this year is an election year in the United States. An "election" is a period of time when people vote for laws or for candidates. A "candidate" is someone who wants to be chosen to work for the U.S. or state government, or local government. This year, in 2008, Americans will vote for, among other things, the next president of the U.S., so I'm sure you have seen a lot of news stories about the elections.

In the United States, almost all U.S. citizens can vote. The only "exceptions," or times when you can't vote or are not allowed to vote, is if you are less than 18 years old, so children and teenagers can't vote; or if you have broken some important laws; or if you are what is called "mentally incompetent," meaning that you have some sort of mental disease that prevents you from being of normal intelligence. These are the only exceptions, everyone else can vote. Voting is not mandatory, however, in the U.S. "Mandatory" means required or not optional. It is mandatory in the U.S., for example, to go to school when you are between the ages of, I believe in most states, 6 and 16, but it is not mandatory (or required) to vote. There's no penalty – there's no punishment if you don't vote. Americans can choose whether or not they want to vote in any election.



ENGLISH CAFÉ – 161

They don't have to pay a "fine," or any money to the government if they don't. In some countries this is different; in some countries you're required to vote, but that's not true in the United States.

If you are an American citizen and you decide you want to vote in an election, the first thing you need to do is register to vote. To "register" means to put your name on an official list of people who are able to vote, we would say who are "eligible" (eligible) to vote. This is fairly simple or easy to do. In most states, you simply fill out a piece of paper called a voter registration card. To "fill out" means to write information on this card. You usually have to provide your name (your legal name), your address (where you live), other basic information. You have to, of course, be a citizen of the United States. Then you give this piece of paper to the government; you can mail it in. Sometimes you will find people who are collecting this information (these cards) even on the street in a busy area. We'll talk about that in a second. So you register to vote by filling out a voter registration card, and that card is different for each state. So if you move from one state to another, you have to fill out a new card for that state. There is no national voter registration in the United States; everything is done by the individual state.

It's easy to register to vote, because, in part, we want people to vote. The United States is a "democracy" which is a type of government where the people decide who are going to be the leaders of the country. Unfortunately, many Americans don't vote. They don't think it's important, they don't think that their vote is important.

Interestingly, if you look at the number of people who are registered to vote, what we would call voter registration, it's about 75 percent. That means three out of every four Americans is officially registered to vote in their state. But "voter turnout," or the number of voters who actually go and vote in an election, is much, much smaller. We use the expression "turn out" when we are talking, in this case, about people who actually go to vote, meaning they leave their house or their business on the election day, and they go to the place where they vote. The place where you vote is sometimes called the "polls" (polls). The polls are places where you can go and vote in an election. Usually they're a school or a church or a public building of some sort, and there are thousands, perhaps millions, of these "polling places," or places where you can vote in the election throughout the country.

Now it's also very popular for people to vote by mail, and in many states you can just send in your vote. We have this here in California. I don't have to go to the



ENGLISH CAFÉ – 161

local school or the local government building to vote. I can just write down my vote on a piece of paper that the government sends me and I can mail it, and as long as I mail it before the day of the election my vote will be counted – it will be included. So, voter turnout includes those who actually go to the polls and those who vote by mail.

Many organizations try to increase voter turnout by what are called getting out the vote drives, or get out the vote campaigns. To “get out the vote” means to try to get more people to vote, especially in important, big elections such as the president of the United States.

One of the efforts to get out the vote is called Rock the Vote. The word rock is from rock-and-roll, a type of music popular with many people, especially young people. Rock the Vote is an organization that was “founded,” or created here in beautiful Los Angeles, California to get young people interested in voting and in government. Rock the Vote often asks “celebrities,” or people who are famous in music, television, and the movies, to help get out the vote – to encourage, to ask younger people to vote. In the United States, those that are the youngest voters, between 18 and 24, usually vote less frequently than those who are older. Older voters tend to vote more regularly; you will see more older voters than you will see younger voters. So, Rock the Vote is an attempted to get younger people to vote as well.

Voter drives, sometimes called voter registration drives, are organized efforts to get many people to register to vote. Voter drives are often organized by political organizations, but sometimes they happen at universities and other places. During a voting drive, people typically stand on the street and ask other people whether they are registered to vote. If someone says no, then they ask that person to fill out a voter registration card, and that person will take their card any give it to the government so that the person is registered to vote. Voter drives are very popular usually in the months before a big or important election. I know here in Los Angeles many times when I am out shopping or out walking down a busy street someone will come up to me and say, “Are you register to vote?” And of course, I am, but if I were not, then they would ask me to fill out a voter registration card. It’s completely voluntary; I can say no, I don’t want to. But they try to get as many people registered as possible.

So, voting in the U.S. means registering in your individual state where you live, and then going to the voting polls – going to the place where you can vote. We would say the place where you can “cast your ballot.” A “ballot” is the piece of paper where you mark, or indicate, who you want to vote for. To “cast” just



ENGLISH CAFÉ – 161

means to officially give that piece of paper to the government so that it can be counted. So, you can cast your ballot either by going to a polling place or by, in many states, voting by mail. We do not have any Internet or email voting in the United States. That may happen someday, but we don't have it right now.

There are many controversies (many problems) sometimes in voting. If you go to the polling place, for example, and your name is not on the official list that can be a problem. You may think that you are registered. In some states you can register on the day of the election. In other states you can't; you have to register in advance, a month or two months before the election itself. Again, because the U.S. is what we call a "republic," it's a group of states that form the country; each state has its own regulations so it can be a little confusing.

Our second topic is something called the G.I. Bill. A "bill" is a law or something that becomes a law. People used to talk about American "soldiers" people who fight in the army or the navy in a country, as G.I. Joes. The initials G.I. refer to general issue, which was a term that was used in the military forces for things that were given to the soldiers. General issue refers to things that all of the soldiers got. Since all of the soldiers that very similar things – very similar clothing or uniform, this was called general issue; it was the standard type of equipment and uniform that was given to the soldiers. The term G.I. now refers to the actual soldiers in the U.S., or at least that's what it used to refer to.

The G.I. Bill has that name because it is a bill or law for soldiers in the U.S. The bill became a law in 1944 to help soldiers who were coming home (or coming back to the United States) after fighting in World War II. Since 1944 there have been other laws that are very similar to the original G.I. Bill that have been used to help soldiers coming home other wars, as well.

The original G.I. Bill gave money to war "veterans" (veterans), or soldiers who had actually fought in a war. Later, in 1966, the U.S. government began to give "benefits," things like money and opportunities, to soldiers who had served or worked in the army or navy even if they were not in a war.

The money that the soldiers received from these laws had to be used for specific purposes – a specific reason, something that you are supposed to do. The money was supposed to be used for things like education. In fact, many people associate the G.I. Bill with the idea that soldiers coming back from the war received money to go to college. And this was extremely important after World War II because the average person did not go to college, and college was very expensive for many people, and these mostly men that came back from the war



ENGLISH CAFÉ – 161

as soldiers were able to take that money and go to colleges. And this caused two things: first, the number of colleges and universities began to increase, and their size began to grow. This also allowed many more people to get a college education, which probably helped, indirectly, the economy of the United States.

So it was a good idea, many people believe, to give money to these returning veterans to help them further (or advance) their education. My own father, who fought in World War II, when he returned back to the United States in 1945, took advantage of the G.I. Bill. He received money from the government which allowed him to go to college and to graduate from college. He became a teacher.

Well, the G.I. Bill was used by millions of Americans to help them go to college. In fact about half of all of the World War II veterans used the G.I. Bill for education. After the Korean War, about 43 percent of those veterans used the G.I. Bill money for going to school. In the Vietnam War, it was about 72 percent of the veterans. Many of these veterans would not have been able to pay for a university education if the G.I. Bill had not “existed” (had not been a law). Another thing the G.I. Bill did was help millions of families buy their own home after the war. When the G.I. Bill was written, mostly only very “wealthy,” very rich families could afford to buy their own home. The G.I. Bill changed this; it gave those who were poorer the opportunity to buy a house. I believe that my parents bought their first house using money from this G.I. Bill. So many Americans, including my family, have benefited from this bill (this law) that the government passed as World War II was ending.

“Obviously,” or clearly, the G.I. Bill was a good thing for soldiers and their families, but as I mentioned before, it was also good for the U.S. “economy,” it was good for the financial system in the United States. When a country’s economy does well there are more jobs; people make more money. The G.I. Bill helped the U.S. economy because soldiers spent money on education, homes, and this money helped the economy. More importantly, the education that the soldiers received when they came back helped the U.S. economy, because we had better workers, more educated workers.

The G.I. Bill is what many people call one of the most “significant” or important pieces of social legislation in the 20th century. “Social legislation” refers to a group of laws that are designed to help people living in a country. The G.I. Bill was certainly one of those laws. Many Americans now, especially younger Americans don’t know much about the G.I. Bill. It was something that was well known to people of my generation since many of our fathers were in World War II



ENGLISH CAFÉ – 161

or the Korean War, and so we knew the importance of this particular law in our own lives.

Now let's answer a few of your questions.

Our first question comes from Anapaula (Anapaula) in Brazil. Anapaula wants to know the meanings of the words “growl” (growl), “groan” (groan), and “mutter” (mutter). All three of these words are related to making a sound.

“Growl” means to make a very angry, low, perhaps even a bit rough sound. Growl is something, for example, that a dog would do when a dog is angry. [sound of a growl] That's a growl. Humans can also growl, we use that word to mean that they're not very nice, that they're very angry; they have this low, angry voice.

“Groan” is a sound that you make when you're unhappy or in pain, so it's a little different. You may, for example, hurt your leg and then you groan [sound of a groan] because you hurt your leg. So, groan is related to either being unhappy or being in pain.

To “mutter” means to speak very quietly but not very clearly, usually when you're complaining about something. People often use the expression “he was muttering to himself.” He was complaining about something but he didn't say it out loud; he just said it to himself. [sound of muttering] That's to mutter. So, “growl,” “groan,” and “mutter.”

Masahiro (Masahiro), originally from Japan but now living in Germany, has a question about the word “personnel” (personnel) and other what are called collective nouns. This is a common question related to whether the verb should be singular or plural after collective nouns. Collective nouns are words such as “team,” “committee,” “staff,” “class” – these are all words that refer to a group of people, that's why they're called collective. A “collective” is a group of something.

In American English, collective nouns are usually singular and usually take a singular verb. However, there are a few collective nouns that take a plural verb, and “personnel” is one of those nouns that takes a plural verb. So you would say “the class is ready” (singular), or “the team is going to win” (singular). But with “personnel,” it would be plural: “the company's personnel are very helpful.” I should say that “personnel” refers to a group of people usually who work in a specific business or organization. The personnel here at the Center for



ENGLISH CAFÉ – 161

Educational Development include Dr. Lucy Tse and myself, and a few other people. That's personnel.

So personnel is plural, but normally collective nouns in American English are singular.

Finally, Richardo (Richardo), in Brazil also, wants to know the meaning of the expression "to be fond (fond) of someone," or "to be fond of something."

"To be fond of" someone or something means that you like them very much. You have a strong liking; we might say a strong "affection" for this person or this thing. "Maria is fond of dancing." "I am fond of reading." "My brother is fond of talking." If it's a action, something that you like to do, notice that the word ends in "ing." "I am fond of talking," not "I am fond of talk," or "I am fond of to talk." We use the "ing" form, what's sometimes called the gerund form. If it's a person, you just use that person's name. For example: "I am fond of my wife." I like her a lot; she's fond of me, too – I think!

You can also use "fond" as an adjective: "I have many fond memories of Minnesota." We are talking about things that are good memories, nice memories: fond memories.

If you are fond of ESL Podcast, and you want to ask a question or make a comment, you can email us. Our email address is eslpod@eslpod.com.

From Los Angeles, California, I'm Jeff McQuillan. Thank you for listening. Come back and listen to us next time on the English Café.

ESL Podcast's English Café is written and produced by Dr. Jeff McQuillan and Dr. Lucy Tse. This podcast is copyright 2008, by the Center for Educational Development.