



ENGLISH CAFÉ – 54

TOPICS

Houston, who Americans trust, to get off one's soapbox, layover vs. transfer, blond vs. blonde

GLOSSARY

gulf – a body of water that has land on all sides except a narrow, small section
* We have to be very careful if we plan to sail into that small gulf.

oil well – a deep hole made in the ground for oil to come out
* Some people are worried about the oil wells in Alaska and the effects they are having on the environment.

metropolitan area – a large city with smaller cities and neighborhoods around it
* If you want to see the countryside, you'll need to drive outside of the metropolitan area.

port – a place on land on the coast where ships and boats can stop
* On our trip, the ship will stop at four different ports and we'll get a chance to see each city.

cargo – things that are carried on a ship, airplane, train, or car/truck
* The truck driver drove across six states to delivery her cargo.

to unload – to remove things from a ship, airplane, train, car/truck, or container
* When we arrived home after the long road trip, we unloaded all of our things from the car.

mission – an exploration into space
* Which country will attempt the next mission to the moon?

dome – a round-shaped roof
* The dome on that church is at least 200 years old.



ENGLISH CAFÉ – 54

occupation – job; profession

* What was your occupation before you decided to stay home to raise your children?

clergy – the people allowed to perform religious duties; the people who are the head of a religious organization

* The mayor called a meeting of the most influential clergy in the city to try and stop the street violence.

to get off one's soapbox – to stop telling other people what to do and how to think

* If you'll get off your soapbox for a minute we can talk seriously about finding a solution.

to hog the floor – not to allow other people to speak or get attention

* I don't want to hog the floor so I'll hand it over to Jessica, who has a few words to say.

layover – when traveling by airplane, a city where you must stop and wait or change airplanes before going on

* She couldn't get a direct flight from Austin to Pittsburg and had two layovers on the way.

transfer – traveling to or returning from the airport

* This vacation package includes your airfares and all of your airport transfers in each city.

blond/blonde – a man or woman (blond) or woman (blonde) with light yellow color hair

* I don't think you know Diana. She's the blonde standing over there by the door.



ENGLISH CAFÉ – 54

WHAT INSIDERS KNOW

“_____ is a four-letter word.”

When someone in the U.S. uses the term “four-letter word,” they mean those words in English that are “obscene” or “vulgar,” that is, foul language that you would not say in front of your mother or your teacher. We call these “four-letter words” even though some of them have more or less than four letters because many of the obscene words in English are one syllable, and many of them have four letters. Some of the less vulgar ones are “hell,” the very unpleasant place that some people believe bad people will go when they die, or “damn,” something you would say to curse someone or if something bad happens to you.

A popular expression that people use is: “(Something) is a four-letter word.” This means that this thing, whatever it is, is unpleasant, very bad, or causes you terrible problems. Some popular phrases are:

- “Love is a four-letter word.”
- “Work is a four-letter word.”

In these two examples, “love” and “work” actually have four letters.

But, we can also use this expressions with longer or shorter words, such as:

- “Trust is a four-letter word.”
- “Rejection is a four-letter word.”

Of course, “trust” and “rejection” have more than four-letters, but the idea and the joke is that these things have the same meaning as four-letter words: They are bad; they cause a lot of problems. So, some people may say: “English is four-letter word.”



ENGLISH CAFÉ – 54

COMPLETE TRANSCRIPT

You're listening to English as a Second Language's Podcast English Café number 54.

This is the English Café episode 54. I'm your host, Dr. Jeff McQuillan, coming to you from the Center for Educational Development in beautiful Los Angeles, California.

On today's Café we're going to be talking about the City of Houston, Texas. We're also going to talk about a recent survey that asked Americans who they trusted, and as usual, we'll answer a few of your questions. Let's get started.

If you haven't visited our website recently, be sure to go to eslpod.com. You'll find some interesting things, we hope, that you'll enjoy. You'll also find a copy of the Learning Guide for this episode of English Café. It contains all of the words we're going to talk about, additional vocabulary that we don't talk about in the podcast and additional notes about the topics for today.

Our first topic today is the City of Houston, Texas. Now Texas, the State of Texas, is in the middle of the United States at the very southern border. So, it's the state that is in the middle between the two coasts, between the two oceans, and Texas is located right on the border of Mexico. Texas, as a state, is very large; it was the largest state, I believe, until we got Alaska as a state.

The City of Houston is located in the southern part of the State of Texas. It's actually on the Gulf of Mexico. A gulf, "gulf," is a type of what we would call a part of the ocean, and it is, in this case, part of the Atlantic Ocean. The Gulf of Mexico is that area of the water that is between Mexico and the United States, basically.

Houston is known for a couple of things. If you ask the average American what is Houston famous for, the first thing is probably oil. Houston and other parts of Texas are famous because there are lots of oil wells. A well, "well," is a hole that goes into the ground that you can get oil from. You can also have a water well, where you get water. But in Texas, they have these oil wells, and so there are many companies that are related to the oil business.



ENGLISH CAFÉ – 54

Dallas is another city in Texas that you may know about. It's a little more famous because there was a famous television program on American television in the 1980's called "Dallas," maybe you saw it. That's another city in Texas that's north of Houston. But, Houston is actually the third largest area, the third largest city in the United States. In the area of Houston there are about five million people. The City of Houston has about two million people. We usually talk about both a city like Houston as well as the areas around it, the suburbs, we would call them, or cities that are close to it, and we refer to that whole area as the metropolitan area, "metropolitan." The metropolitan area is the big city plus all of the little cities that are close to it.

Well, as I say, Houston has about five million people in the metropolitan area. It's famous for oil. It's also famous because it is a large port. A port, "port," is a place, usually on a ocean, where ships come and they can unload their cargo. Cargo, "cargo," are things that a ship or a plane carries, usually things that people are going to buy. To unload, "unload," means to take them off of the ship and put them onto a truck or a train where they'll be transported. They'll be moved to another part of the country. Well, Houston has one of the largest ports, just like Los Angeles has a very large port. That is another reason why Houston is famous.

The third most famous thing about Houston is that it is the place where the Space Center, the home of our space program, is located. It's now called the Lyndon B. Johnson Space Center. Lyndon Johnson was a president of the United States in the 1960's. We sometimes just call him "LBJ" because those are his initials, the first letters of his names. His was from the State of Texas. The more common name that people call it, especially when we are talking about rockets and ships going up into space, is Mission Control - Mission, "Mission," Control. A mission is a trip that a spaceship makes. We say the spaceship has a mission, we mean that they are going on a trip. They're going to go up into space.

During the 1960's and 70's, every time there was a spaceship that went up, especially the Apollo Program - the Apollo Program was the name of the program that sent rockets, sent these spaceships up into space, and including to the moon. People would watch television and they would listen to Mission Control. And, the astronauts - the people who fly the spacecraft - they would talk to Mission Control, and usually they would just say the word "Houston." So, when they said, "Houston," you knew they were talking to the Space Center in



ENGLISH CAFÉ – 54

Houston. Perhaps the most famous quote from an astronaut is when Neil Armstrong landed on the moon - the first human to walk on the moon. And, when the ship landed - when it touched the moon - he said, "Houston, the Eagle has landed." Eagle, "Eagle," was the name of the ship. Of course, eagle is a bird that flies. So, most people know that quote, "Houston, the Eagle has landed." And again, he's talking to the Mission Control - the Space Center that controls the rockets and controls all the ships and their communication for the space program.

So, those are some things that Houston is famous for. Houston also has a very large stadium, and the stadium where they play sports is called the Astrodome. The Astrodome, and again that word, astro, "astro," is related to astronaut because Houston is home of the space program. A dome, "dome," is when you have a cover, usually a round cover on the top of a building. The Astrodome is a big stadium with a round cover on top, and that is located in Houston.

Our second topic today is a recent survey, what we would call a poll, "poll," where a company goes and asks people questions, gets their opinion on things. This particular poll was asking Americans how much they trust the following kinds of people to tell the truth. In other words, who do Americans think is telling the truth, and they gave them a list of different jobs, different occupations. An occupation, "occupation," is another word for a job. So, a doctor, for example, is an occupation; a lawyer is an occupation; I guess a podcaster would be an occupation - not a very good occupation, but an occupation!

They asked people how much they trusted people on this list, and I thought I would talk a little bit about it because it tells you a little bit about what Americans think of different professions, different occupations.

The top of the list - number one was, in fact, doctors. Eighty-five percent of people thought that doctors tell the truth. They are referring here, of course, to medical doctors, not doctors like me that can't do anything! The second most trusted group, or occupation, was teachers, so I feel pretty good about that! Of course, if you don't trust me telling you that results of this poll, then maybe that...that doesn't mean anything to you. I could be lying! I could say that teachers are number two and you may be getting false information.

Number three on the list is scientists. Seventy-seven percent of people thought scientists tell the truth. Next was police officers - interesting - 76 percent. There



ENGLISH CAFÉ – 54

are often many complaints about the police, especially in big cities like Los Angeles. We've had many problems with the police department, but in general, Americans trust police officers, 76 percent. In fact, they trust them more than the fifth occupation, which is professors. Now of course, I used to be a professor. However, professors are more trusted than the sixth group, which is clergymen or priests.

Clergy, "clergy," refers to men and women who are leaders of religious organizations, especially churches, synagogues and mosques. A church is a name we give for most Christian organizations. A synagogue, "synagogue," is where you will find Jewish people - religious people, in a synagogue - those who are Jews. And, a mosque, "mosque," is where you find people of the Muslim religion, or those who follow Islam, and a leader of the mosque would be called an Imam, "Imam." The leader of a synagogue would be a rabbi, "rabbi." A clergyman, or clergywoman, would be a rabbi or an Imam or a minister. A minister, "minister," is the head of a Christian church. Some churches, like the Catholic Church, call their clergy priests, "priests." A priest is a religious leader in the Catholic Church, and in some other churches. The Anglican Church, the Church of England, also uses that word as does the orthodox churches, Russian and Greek Orthodox, for example. Those are different types of Christian churches.

Well, as I was saying, 74 percent of Americans trust clergymen and women. Right after that comes military officers - people in the Army and the Navy, people in the military who are involved in fighting wars, for example.

I won't go through the entire list. Some of the people on the bottom of the list...Journalists, only 39 percent of people trust the newspaper or the television reporters. Members of Congress, these are our representatives in government. Only 35 percent of people trust them to tell the truth. Lawyers at 27 percent, so not very many people trust a lawyer. A lawyer, "lawyer," is a person who is involved in legal matters, going to the court, representing you in a court where you have legal problems with the law. Another word for lawyer is attorney, "attorney."

And, at the bottom of the list was actors: people in movies, plays and TV shows. That's very interesting because here in Los Angeles, you can guess, we have a lot of actors. We have another word for an actor here in Los Angeles; we call them waiters because many actors who are not successful have to work other



ENGLISH CAFÉ – 54

jobs and waiting in a restaurant, being a waiter - the person who serves you in a restaurant - is a very popular job.

Now, let's answer few questions. Our first question comes from Alvin, "Alvin," in Hong Kong. Alvin wants to know the meaning of the expression, "get off your soapbox." Get off your soapbox, "soapbox." Well, soap, "soap," is what you use to wash yourself. A box, "box," is a square container, something that you use to put things in. So, a soapbox would be a box for storing or carrying soap.

This is actually an old expression. The meaning of the expression doesn't really have anything to do with soap or boxes. The idea was that in the old days, people would stand on top of a box in order to get people's attention, especially in a public park. If you wanted to give a political speech or give your opinion on certain topics and you wanted everyone to hear, you would want to stand up on top of something, such as a box, so people could hear you. One the things you are trying to do is to persuade or convince people of your ideas and you want them to agree with you.

The expression, "get off your soap box," refers to someone who is talking about their subject, their topic, trying to get other people to agree with them, but they're going on for a very long time. They're talking and talking and talking, and you are telling them to stop trying to convince you, stop trying to get you to agree with them, and that's when we would use the expression, "get off your soap box," especially for someone who has a very strong opinion about something and keeps talking about it all the time. This is also used when someone doesn't let other people talk, and they...we would say they hog the floor. To hog, "hog," in this case as a verb, means that you don't let anyone else use it. The floor just refers to the place where you are talking or the conversation that you are having. So, that's what the meaning of the expression, "get off your soap box." It means stop talking about your particular topic. Stop trying to convince me that you are right.

Our next question comes from Yoshiko, "Yoshiko," in Japan. Yoshiko wants to know the difference between the words "layover" and "transfer." A layover, "layover," is when you are traveling by plane from one city to another city, but you have to stop in a third city first. So, if you are traveling, for example, from Los Angeles to Tokyo you may have to stop in Honolulu, Hawaii, before you take another plane or continue on your plane to Tokyo. So, your stop in Honolulu, which I think you would really love, is called a layover. Usually you have to stop



ENGLISH CAFÉ – 54

for an hour, two hours, sometimes six or seven hours. You might say to someone, “I have a three-hour layover in Honolulu.” That means you have to stop in Honolulu for three hours and then your plane continues to Tokyo.

A transfer, “transfer,” refers to transportation once you get to the place where you are going by bus, by taxi, by car. Transfer refers to transportation between the airport to a hotel, for example, or from an airport to somewhere else where you are going. That would be a transfer.

Our final question comes from Satsuki, “Satsuki,” also in Japan. Satsuki wants to know the difference between two spellings of the word blond(e), “blond,” and “blonde.” Well, both of these words refer to the color of a man or woman's hair. It's a light, almost yellow color. That's someone who is blond. In the United States, the most current, the most common, use is to use the word “blond” for both a man and a woman. So, you could say, “She is a blond woman,” or “She has blond hair.” You would use that for a man's hair and for a woman's hair.

However, there's an older use, which is to put an “e” at the end of the word if it's a woman. So, if you say, “She's a blonde,” “She's a blonde woman,” or “a blonde-haired woman,” with an “e” that would refer only to a woman. So, without an “e,” “blond” can be a man or a woman; with an “e” can only be a woman, but that is becoming less common. It's more common, I think now, for people just to say “blond,” and not put the “e” at the end of the word.

Well, that will have to be the end of our words to you. Remember, you can email us at eslpod@eslpod.com if you have a question.

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

ESL Podcast's English Café is written and produced by Dr. Jeff McQuillan. This podcast is copyright 2006, by the Center for Educational Development.