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**ENGLISH CAFÉ – 87**

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**TOPICS**

Trouble with my car; Ask an American: Home Schooling; breakthrough versus to break through, to ride shotgun

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**GLOSSARY**

**to stick (something) into (something)** – to put something into something else, usually into a hole

\* Could you please stick that pan into the oven and set the timer for 30 minutes?

**ignition** – the part of a car that one puts a key into to make the car turn on

\* To start the car, just put the key in the ignition and turn it.

**to turn over** – to have a car's crankshaft (a part of a car's engine) make one circle when the key is turned in the ignition

\* When I turned the key, I could hear the engine turning over, but the car wouldn't start.

**jumper cables** – two long wires covered in plastic (one black and one red) that have metal ends so that one end is attached to a car that is running and the other end is attached to a car that has a dead battery, so that the second car's battery is charged and begins working again

\* Be sure to always keep jumper cables in the back of your car, just in case your battery dies.

**to home-school (someone)** – to teach a child at home instead of sending him or her to an elementary or high school

\* Melanie wants to home-school her children because she doesn't think that the public schools provide the education she wants for them.

**to be better off** – to be more successful, richer, or in a better position if one does something

\* Chelsea would be better off living in a cold climate because she's allergic to all the flowering plants in warm areas.

**primary** – main; principal; most important

\* Our primary reason for moving to Jacksonville was because Irma got a job there, but we also liked other things about the town.



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**character** – the things that are part of one’s personality; the things that make one different from other people; the qualities that make someone interesting, special, and unique

\* She’s beautiful, but how is her character? Is she honest, kind, and trustworthy?

**to mature** – to grow older, wiser, and more responsible; to begin to behave like an adult

\* Janine matured a lot when her mother died last year and she had to start helping her father take care of her brothers and sisters.

**to find oneself** – to realize that one is in a particular situation; to be in a situation that one didn’t expect

\* Geraldo woke up to find himself in a hospital bed with no memory of the car accident.

**to draw on/upon** – to use one’s knowledge, money, or past experience to help one do something

\* Raul drew upon his years of experience as an architect to build a toy house for his daughter’s dolls.

**diverse** – of many different kinds or types; not all the same

\* This park is famous for its diverse plants, including more than 200 kinds of trees.

**critic** – a person who says good or bad things about something to give his or her opinion about something, usually a book, movie, restaurant, or a piece of artwork

\* Let’s read what the film critics wrote about the new movies and then decide which one we want to see.

**to break through** – to make an opening and get access to a place where you couldn’t go before

\* Were you watching the news when the Germans broke through the Berlin Wall?

**breakthrough** – a major and sudden important development or discovery

\* The Wright brothers made an important breakthrough when they built the first airplane.

**to ride shotgun** – to sit in the front passenger seat of a car, next to the driver

\* Quincy always rides shotgun, because he gets dizzy and sick if he sits in the back seat.



## **WHAT INSIDERS KNOW**

### **Movies about School:**

#### **Ferris Bueller's Day Off, The Breakfast Club, Dead Poet's Society**

Many of Hollywood's movies about school have an “anti-establishment view,” meaning that they are about people who “rebel” (fight against authority) against the standard educational system. Some of the best known movies of this type are Ferris Bueller's Day Off, The Breakfast Club and Dead Poet's Society.

Ferris Bueller's Day Off is a “classic” or very well known and popular comedy that was filmed in 1986. It is about a high school student named Ferris who says that he is sick but is actually “playing hooky,” or not going to school when he should. His best friend and his girlfriend play hooky with him. The people who don't believe that he is sick try to “catch him,” or prove that he is lying. The three friends have many funny adventures that day.

The Breakfast Club is a drama that was filmed in 1985. In the movie, five high school students with very different personalities are sent to “detention,” which means that they are punished for doing something wrong by being told to spend all day Saturday in a room at school. The movie looks at how these five “strangers” (people who don't know each other) begin to fight and argue and then, later, begin to share their secrets and become friends.

Dead Poet's Society is a drama about young men at a “boarding school,” which is a school where students live while they study. An English teacher introduces the boys to the Dead Poet's Society, which is a secret club or organization for people who enjoy English literature. Through their experience, the boys develop strong friendships and learn to “go against the status quo,” or not do the things that people expect them to do.



## **COMPLETE TRANSCRIPT**

You're listening to ESL Podcast's English Café number 87.

This is English Café episode 87. I'm your host, Dr. Jeff McQuillan, coming to you from the Center for Educational Development in beautiful Los Angeles, California.

On this Café, I'll tell you a little about some problems I had recently with my car. We're also going to talk about home schooling in the United States as part of our "Ask an American" series. And as always, we'll answer a few of your questions. Let's get started.

Before I forget, let me remind you to visit our website at [eslpod.com](http://eslpod.com), and download a Learning Guide for this episode.

Well, I've had some problems with my car this past week that I thought I would tell you about. I went out to my car, which is parked in the garage next to my house, and I took the key out, meaning I took it out of my pocket. I opened the car and then I stuck the key into the ignition. We use the verb here "to stick" when you have something like a key that you are putting into a lock.

Well, I "stuck" (which is the past tense of stick) the key into the "ignition," which is what starts the car. The "ignition" (ignition) is like a lock – it looks like a lock – you turn the key, and as you turn the key the car should start. The motor in the car – the engine in the car, motor and engine are the same thing here – should start running. Of course, when I turned the key, the car did not turn over. When we say a car "turns over," we mean it starts – the motor or the engine starts to run – starts to work – starts to function.

The motor did not turn over. In fact, I heard the worst sound you can hear, which is nothing! Clearly, the battery for the car was dead. When we say the battery "is dead," we mean it doesn't have any more power in it. So, I had to take my wife's car, and I had to connect what we call "jumper cables," (jumper) cables, and these are wires that go between the battery of one car that is working and the battery of another car that is dead – not working.

I was able to start my engine – start the motor. It turned over when I had my wife's car's battery connected. I took the jumper cables off and I drove to the mechanic. The "mechanic" is the person that fixes your car, or should fix your car. When I gave him the car, he looked at it and said there was nothing wrong



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with the battery, that the battery was working just fine, and so was the rest of the engine.

So, I don't know if that was good news or bad news. It was good news because I did not need to spend more money on my car. It was bad news because I had to drive all the way over to the mechanic to have him tell me that nothing was wrong. This happens to me a lot, I have something that doesn't work – that breaks or breaks down, we would say, meaning in stops working, like a machine, a computer, a car. Then, when I take it to someone to get it fixed, it starts working again. So, that is the story of my car this week.

Today we're going to do one of our “Ask an American” series of episodes, where we listen to other speakers talk about a topic. They talk about it at a normal speed – at a fast speed – but we stop and explain what they are saying so you can understand it better.

Today's topic is “home-schooling.” In the United States, there are some parents who do not want to send their children to a regular school, but want to teach the children at home. So, the parent is the teacher. This might seem very unusual in some countries, but it has become very popular in many parts of the United States.

Normally, a child must go to school between the ages of six and, depending on the state, 16. But if the parent says that he or she wants to educate the child at home, that is possible. Some parents do not send their children to school because of religious reasons; they want the child to grow up with their own religious beliefs. Some parents don't send their children to school because they don't like the schools; they don't think they are very good. So, there are different reasons for people to home school. Notice we use that as a verb, “to home-school” means to teach your children at home.

There was a story about this topic recently on the Voice of America, and we're going to listen to a few quotes from students and parents about home-schooling. The story says that there are about 750,000 children who are taught at home in the United States. Some people think it's a good idea; some people think it's a bad idea.

We'll start by listening to a quote from a 13-year-old girl, who is taught at home. Here's what she says about being home schooled. Remember, she'll be speaking fast, but we'll explain it and listen to it again in a minute.



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[recording] I really like it, doing it here. I do think I'm better off here because I get a lot more one on one time.

The girl says, "I really like it, doing it here," meaning learning – being educated at home. "I do think I'm better off here because I get a lot more one on one time." Notice she says, "I do think." She could just say, "I think I'm better off," but the "do" adds some emphasis; it makes it stronger. She says she's "better off," meaning she is doing better than if she were in a regular school because she gets "a lot of one on one time," meaning that one of her parents can be with her, and there are just two of them. "One on one" is when you are with one other person. In this case the teacher – the parent – is able to help the child more; that's what this girl thinks.

Let's listen to that again:

[recording] I really like it, doing it here. I do think I'm better off here because I get a lot more one on one time.

Now we are going to listen to the parent – the mother of this girl – explaining why she has her child at home and teaches her at home:

[recording] Probably the primary reason that we home-school is the development of the character of our children; who they are becoming. Um – the academics are good; they get a really good education here. We can concentrate one on one with their learning style, and how they – how they process information.

The mother says, "the primary reason we home-school," meaning the main, or most important – "the primary reason is the development of the character of our children." "Character" here means how they think; how they act; their moral and ethical views on life; how they determine right from wrong. These are all part of your character. "Character" is also the word we use for someone in a novel or in a movie, a person, but here it refers the person's ideas about life, how they think about right and wrong.

The mother also uses a very common expression in English. She says, "um." When we are trying to think of what to say in normal conversation, you will often hear Americans use a sound like "um"; "ah" is another one. "Um," "ah," those are both sounds we make when we are trying to think of something else. Children often use that sound as well. You'll hear a little child talking, and he'll say, "Mom,



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um, I want to go to the store and, um, I want to buy some candy,” using that word “um,” or that sound “um.” Usually we spell it u-m.

The parent says that the academics are good. The “academics” means the subjects that the students studies. So, the student is getting a good education. The parents can concentrate one on one with their children’s learning style. “Learning style” is a popular idea in many schools in the United States, that different children have different ways of learning and everyone has a certain learning style. Some people may like to read the information; some people like to listen to the information, and so forth.

The mother says that they can concentrate on how their children “process information,” meaning how they think about information. Let’s listen again:

[recording] Probably the primary reason that we home-school is the development of the character of our children; who they are becoming. Um – the academics are good; they get a really good education here. We can concentrate one on one with their learning style, and how they – how they process information.

Not everyone thinks that home-schooling is a good idea. Next we hear from a university professor, who is going to talk about his opinion and the questions that he has about home-schooling; the doubts he has, the problems that he thinks might be present in home-schooling. He’s speaking on the telephone, so it is a little more difficult for you to understand him. But again, we’ll explain what he is saying after we listen to him. Here we go:

[recording] Well, one of the questions that I always ask myself is whether or not these children are – ah – able to begin to mature socially, so that when they find themselves in a diverse social setting – um – do they have some experience to draw on in order to function well.

Well, the professor has spoken. Let’s go back and see what he says. He starts by saying that one of the questions he always asks himself – one of the questions that he asks – is whether or not these children are able to begin to mature socially. “To mature” (mature) means to grow older; to become more sophisticated, in a way; to be able to act in a manner that is more like an adult. So, he is questioning whether these children are able to mature socially. And this is a common argument against home schooling, that the children, somehow, will not have the same ability to work with other people, to be sociable, and so on.



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The professor then says that when the students find themselves in a diverse social setting, do they have some experience to draw on in order to function well. The expression “to find yourself” means that you are in a situation, perhaps that you didn't expect or that is not one that you are used to. In this case, the situation would be “a diverse social setting.” “Diverse,” or “diverse” – either pronunciation is correct – (diverse) means a situation where you have many different kinds of people, people who come from different experiences.

The professor asks whether these students – these home-schooled students – have some experience to draw on in order to function well. The expression “to draw on experience” means to use as a model or as a guide. I'm going to draw on my experience as an ESL teacher in preparing these podcasts – I'm going to use that experience to help me with this new situation

Let's listen again to this critic of home-schooling. Someone who is against something is sometimes called a “critic” (critic).

[recording] Well, one of the questions that I always ask myself is whether or not these children are – ah – able to begin to mature socially, so that when they find themselves in a diverse social setting – um – do they have some experience to draw on in order to function well.

Notice the professor also uses “um” and “ah” when he is trying to think of something to say. So, it is something that people at every level use. The professor, also, does not actually talk about any research – any evidence – for his position; he just is giving his opinion. So, that's the story of home-schooling in the U.S.

Now let's answer a few of your questions.

Our first question comes from Felix (Felix) from Spain, from the Canary Islands. He wants to know the difference between the word “breakthrough” (breakthrough – one word) and “to break through,” where it is two words.

A “breakthrough” (one word) is a noun that refers to a sudden, important development or discovery. When, for example, when the British scientists Crick and Watson discovered the sequence of DNA – the genetic sequence in the human body – this was a breakthrough; it was an important, new discovery.





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The verb “to break through” (two words) usually means to make a hole in something; to get through something. You could break through the wall with a hammer, or if it were me, with my hand – with my fist. I would punch the wall and I would break through because I’m so strong, you see! For example, I bought a new compact disc – a new CD – but it was very difficult to me to open it. I couldn’t break through the plastic that was around it.

Our next question comes from Torsten (Torsten) from Germany. Torsten wants to know the meaning of the expression “to ride shotgun” (shotgun).

Well now, “to ride shotgun” means to sit in the front of a car next to the driver, so in an American car, it would be in the front right seat. “To ride shotgun,” this is a phrase that children sometimes use. Many children think that it’s better to be in the front of the car next to their mother or father or the person driving, so they’ll say, “I’m going to ride shotgun.”

The expression actually comes from the Old American West in the 19th century, when there were horses that were pulling what we call “stagecoaches,” which is a vehicle that had four wheels and people sat in it, and the horses pulled the stagecoach. It was like a little car, but with horses. There would be one person that would be in the front of the stagecoach with a shotgun. A “shotgun” is a long gun. The purpose of the person in the front was to protect people inside the stagecoach from people who may want to rob them – from thieves, people who try to steal their money. Now, however, it just means to ride in the front seat next to the driver in a car.

We hope this podcast was a breakthrough in your English. If you have a question for us, you can email us at [eslpod@eslpod.com](mailto: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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