



ENGLISH CAFÉ – 34

TOPICS

News anchors, public school curriculum, Mark Twain, dictionary vs. thesaurus, shortened words (rehab, lab, mag, celeb), “apparent suicide,” feature presentation

GLOSSARY

to flip through the channels – to change the channels on a television, usually to look for a good program to watch

* He flipped through the channels so quickly, I couldn't see what programs were on.

remote control – something you use to change the channels on a television, usually a small object you hold in your hand

* I never need to leave the sofa to change the channels when I have my remote control.

newscast – a television news program

* Watching the newscast every evening helps me find out what's happening in the world.

spokesperson – someone who “speaks for” a group or organization; a representative of an organization who talks to reporters from newspapers and television stations

* The spokesperson for the company said that the new product won't be ready for sale for another six months.

chairperson – the head or leader of a committee

* You need to ask the chairperson of the committee to make that important decision.

to decentralize – to put the power or authority in different places or with different people, not just in one place or with one person; opposite of “to centralize”

* Countries trying to decentralize the mail service aren't having much success.



ENGLISH CAFÉ – 34

school board – a committee of people, usually elected, who help run a group of schools

* The school board decided to close the old school to make room for the new one.

federal – national; usually meaning the United States government

* The federal government announced today that people won't need to pay any taxes next year.

to mandate – to order or demand; something that must be done

* The university mandated that all students pay a fee for health care on campus.

standards – a list of things students should know when they finish school

* Some say that the standards are set too high; others say they're too low.

to exit – to leave or to complete

* Before workers can exit the training program, they need to pass the test.

K-12 – kindergarten through grade 12; elementary and secondary school

* He has been a K-12 teacher for 20 years. I guess he really likes kids.

to appoint – to name or to choose someone for a particular position

* The committee appointed her to be in charge of the new project.

humorist – someone who writes funny stories or articles

* Did you know that he is a humorist who writes for a popular magazine?

to interfere – to get in the way of; to make it difficult for someone else to do something

* When a husband and wife have an argument, it's best not to interfere.

rehabilitation – to make yourself better or stronger after being sick or hurt

* After his illness, he entered rehabilitation for three months before he returned to work.



ENGLISH CAFÉ – 34

synonym – a word with a similar meaning
“Wonderful” is a synonym of “great.”

antonym – a word with the opposite meaning
“Terrible” is an antonym of “great.”

homonym – two or more words that sound the same but mean different things
“Be” and “bee” are homonyms.

ENGLISH LEARNING TIPS

Many people find pronunciation to be very difficult when speaking another language. One of the most important things is to be relaxed, to stay calm. If you get nervous or excited when you are speaking English, your pronunciation will usually get worse. Do something to relax yourself before speaking, such as breathing in and out a few times to calm yourself down. If you have to give a presentation in front of a group of people, be sure to practice your speech many times so that you are very comfortable with it.

Some scientific studies say that the best way to be relaxed during a presentation is to do what is called “visualization.” To visualize means to picture or imagine something in your mind, to think about how it looks, sounds, and feels. When preparing your presentation, spend some time thinking about the people whom you will be talking to, and the place where the presentation will take place. Now picture or imagine yourself doing this speech or presentation very, very well. Imagine yourself being very successful and being very relaxed, with excellent pronunciation. Go through your speech or presentation in your head and see yourself being successful. This may sound strange to you now, but some researchers believe this is an excellent way to be more relaxed when speaking in front of other people.



ENGLISH CAFÉ – 34

COMPLETE TRANSCRIPT

You're listening to English as a Second Language Podcast's English Cafe number 34.

This is English as a Second Language Podcast English Cafe number 34. I'm your host, Dr. Jeff McQuillan, coming to you from the Center for Educational Development in beautiful Los Angeles, California.

Remember to visit our new website and take a look at the Learning Guide for today's podcast, which has a complete script of the podcast along with definitions and additional information. In today's Guide, we include some tips on improving your pronunciation which you'll want to read. Go to www.eslpod.com for more information.

On today's cafe, we're going to talk about news anchors, who they are and what they do. We are also going to go over what public schools teach and where they get their curriculum from. And as usual, we'll answer a few of your questions. Now, let's get started.

I was watching the news last night and I like to flip between channels. To “flip” means to change the channel on the television. Of course, you can do that real easily now because we have remote controls. We sometimes just call them the “remote,” that's the thing that you can hold in your hand and press the button to change the channels or to increase or decrease the volume. Well, I was flipping through the channels last night when the national news broadcasts were on. These are half-hour programs. There are three of them on three different television channels or television networks. And I noticed that some of them have different news anchors on their program, so I thought it would be interesting to talk a little bit about famous news anchors in the United States.

First of all, a “news anchor” is the person who reads the news, the main person or people who read the news on the news broadcast. We call those “the anchor” or “anchors,” if there are more than one. An “anchor” is a word that is also used for the thing that you, if you are on a boat, you drop it into the water. It's very heavy, it goes down to the bottom of the lake, for example, and it keeps you steady. The boat doesn't move because there is an anchor that is holding it



ENGLISH CAFÉ – 34

there. We also use that word as a verb: “To anchor” something can also mean sort of to control. This is the closer meaning, when we talk about the news anchor, the news anchor being the person who controls or is the main person in the news program, what we would call the “newscast” (all one word).

Well, for many years in the United States, the news anchor was a man, usually a white man, and an older white man. So, there would be a journalist, a reporter, who would become the anchor. The “reporter,” of course, is the person who goes out and talks to people, and on a news broadcast, usually, there are reporters in different parts of the city, or the country, or the world, and they film them talking about the problem. Well, usually, one of those reporters, after many years, can become a news anchor. Traditionally, the anchors, as I say, were always white men, usually older white men. The most famous news anchor in the United States, at least in the 20th century was probably, a man called Walter Cronkite, I think. And, Walter Cronkite is a name that every American knows because he was the news anchor for many years on one of the big television networks.

There used to be just three big television chains of stations or networks - ABC, NBC, and the oldest is CBS. Those are abbreviations for, I think, “American Broadcast Company,” the “National Broadcast Company,” and “Columbia Broadcast Company.” [Correction: “Columbia Broadcast System”] Anyway, Walter Cronkite was the anchor on the CBS evening news. And so, his name is very famous because everyone knows him. He retired, he left his job, maybe 10, 15, (maybe longer) years ago, but most people still know who he is; he's still alive. He was very well-respected; he was like an older uncle who would talk to people in the newscast. People felt a lot of confidence in him.

Well, in the last 20 years or so, things have been changing, but very slowly. Most of the news anchors for the three big network newscasts are still white, and they're mostly still men, but that is changing. In fact, there is now going to be a woman who is going to be the news anchor on the CBS evening news. After Walter Cronkite left, there was another news anchor, another man, Dan Rather, and he left last year. Now, the new news anchor will be a woman. For the first time, there'll be a woman as the news anchor on CBS evening news. So, that's sort of a change. One of the other news stations also has an anchor who is female. The ABC newscast has two people; one of them is a woman, Elizabeth Vargas, I think is her name. Sometimes, you will see the word “anchorman” or



ENGLISH CAFÉ – 34

“anchorwoman” as one word, and that, of course, is just the same as an anchor, or you could say “anchor person,” I guess.

You know that in American English, many of the old words that had “man” in it to represent men and women, many of them had been changed to “person.” So, for example, a spokesman, is a person who talks for an organization, who represents an organization, with the newspapers and television shows. The White House, President Bush, has a spokesperson, a spokesman, but we don't usually say spokesman anymore, unless we know it's just a man. Now, people will say spokesperson, so that you can use that word for both a man and a woman.

Many people don't like that change that has taken place in English the last 30 years, where we no longer use the word “man” to represent both men and women. Some people think we should just leave it, but most people nowadays will say “person” instead of “man.” So, another example would be “chairperson.” It used to be, you would just say “chairman” or “the chair,” but now people often say “chairperson,” especially if you don't know who is that person, if they are a man or a woman. If you know, then you can say “chairman,” or if you know it's a woman, you can “chairperson” [Correction: “chairwoman”]. So, “anchorman” has been kind of changed now to “anchorperson,” or just “anchor.”

Our next topic is talking again a little bit about schools in the United States. Public schools in the United States, as some of you may know, are very different than the system of schools in other countries. First, I should point out, I should tell you that the word “public school” means something different in Great Britain, in England, than it does here in the United States. In the United States, a public school is a school that the government operates, the government runs; they are in control. In England, the term “public school” refers to a private, what we would call here in the United States, a “private school,” a non-government organization runs or operates the school. But here in the US, a public school is a government school.

When I say a government school, I mean the local or city government is usually the one who operates or runs the school. American schooling is very “decentralized” compared to other countries. First of all, “central” - all in one place, in one area. “Centralize” is a verb which means that you put things in one place. To “decentralize” is the opposite, that things are put in different places. In this case, the power or authority is in different places. American schools are not



ENGLISH CAFÉ – 34

all the same; the federal government, the national government does not control the schools directly and they don't control the curriculum. The “curriculum” in a school is what the teachers teach - what they teach in history class, in math class, in science class - the actual lesson, the actual information - that's the curriculum.

Unlike in many countries, in many countries, there's one national curriculum and everyone in the country studies the same books at the same grades. That's not the way it is in the United States. Every little city has its own, what we call the “school district.” That's the government organization, the part of the government that takes care of the schools. Usually, there are a group of people, what we would call a “board,” that's a group of people who runs something, who organizes something. In a company, you have the “board of directors,” those are the 10 or 15 or 20 people who are the main leaders of the company. In a school district, you have a “school board,” and a school board usually 5-10 people who are elected; people vote for them, and they run the school. They have, in most cases, a lot of freedom to decide what they want to teach in their schools. The states have a lot of influence. The state of California, for example, has certain regulations and rules. But, there is still a lot of freedom in the school district itself.

There is no national curriculum in American education. There are some people who want a federally mandated curriculum. “Federal” means national, of course. A “mandated” is one that is...to “mandate” as a verb, means to order, to require someone to do something. So, a “federally-mandated curriculum” would be the government saying, the federal government, the national government, they would say to all the individual schools, here's what you have to teach, here are the textbooks that you have to use (the books that you use in school are called “textbooks”). But, there is no federally mandated curriculum. There are, what are called, “standards.” Most states have a set of standards and these are things that students should know when they finish each grade, but there isn't a list of books that schools have to use.

Now, you may be thinking, how do you know if everyone is learning the same thing in different schools? There have been some people who have asked that question here, and one of the results is that many states now have an exam, a state exam. So, everyone in that state has to take an exam, usually, in high school. These are called “high school exit exams.” To “exit” means, you know, to leave, to go out. So, in the high school exit exam, this is an exam that you



ENGLISH CAFÉ – 34

have to pass if you're going to graduate from high school. This is a fairly new thing. When I was in high school, there was no high school exit exam. I probably would have failed it, if there had been. But, a high school exit exam is now required in many states, including here in California. This is a new thing that has begun in the last maybe 5 or 10 years. So, it will be very interesting to see what that does.

Now, the school districts only control (the local school districts) usually from kindergarten, the very first level of school which usually begins at age 5, all the way up to high school, grade 12, that's what we sometimes refer to as K-12. And K...the letter K hyphen 12, the number, refers to elementary school, junior high, and senior high (or elementary school and high school), all the way up to grade 12. The colleges...the government colleges have a separate board, separate people who operate or run those schools. Those are almost always appointed, not elected. To "appoint" means that someone says you will be part of the board, and there's no election; people don't vote for it. Most colleges and universities, maybe all of the colleges and universities that are public, in the United States, have appointed boards. In talking about education, I always think about a famous quote from Mark Twain. Mark Twain (is his last name), you might know, is a famous American writer from the 19th century, from the 1800's. He was the author of one of the most famous novels in English, "Huckleberry Finn." He was also what we would call a "humorist," someone who writes funny things. One of his quotes was that, "I have never let my schooling interfere with my education." To "interfere" means to get in the way of, to stop you from doing something. "Schooling" is a noun here; it means going to school. So what he's saying is: "I never let going to school get in the way of me actually learning something." Meaning, of course, that schools sometimes don't necessarily teach us all that we need to know. Well, speaking of teaching, let's answer a few of your questions.

Our first question comes from Guilherme. I'm not sure if I'm pronouncing it correctly, Guillermo in Brazil. The question is a simple one: What's the difference between a dictionary and a thesaurus? Well, a dictionary, you know, is a book that has words and definitions. A thesaurus is a book of synonyms. "Synonyms" are words that have a similar or same meaning. The part of the word, -nym, means the same as a name. So, a synonym is a similar noun or a similar word. And that's what you will find in a thesaurus. You can look up certain words, certain ideas, certain concepts, and find similar words for them. This is sometimes very useful when you are writing. In English writing, you may know



ENGLISH CAFÉ – 34

that people like to have a variety in the vocabulary that they use. This is true of many languages, maybe most languages, that good writing is considered to have different types of vocabulary you use. So, sometimes, writers will use a thesaurus to try to think of a different word to express the same idea. For example, instead of saying, “He was great. He was very good,” you might see in a thesaurus, “He was fantastic,” “He was superb,” “He was stupendous.” These are all words that mean the same as “great.” Usually, there are less common words, so that’s also something that people may look for in good writing. So, a thesaurus can be very useful for that.

As I said, a thesaurus is a book full of synonyms. Sometimes, you will often find in a thesaurus what are called “antonyms.” An “antonym,” you can guess, is the opposite of a word. So, the opposite of “good” is “bad.” You’ll find words that mean the opposite. Finally, there are things that we call “homonyms.” These are very common in English. There are some languages where you do not have many homonyms, but in English there are many. A homonym is when you have two words that have the same pronunciation but different meanings. So, for example, the words “to,” “two,” and “too.” Those are all pronounced the same, but they have different spellings and different meanings. That would be an example of a homonym. The first part of that word, “homo-” means “the same.” So, whenever you see that in a word, it usually means part of the word is going to be the same or mean the same.

Our next question comes from Jola in Warsaw, Poland. The question has to do with abbreviated words, such as “rehab,” “lab,” “mag,” “celeb.” These are all short forms, informal, I should say, short forms for longer words. “Rehab” is short for “rehabilitation.” When someone, for example, is recovering from an injury, they hurt their leg, they go through rehabilitation, where they become stronger and they do exercises. Sometimes, that is just called “rehab.” They also use that word for someone who is an alcoholic and is going through a special program to stop drinking. “Lab” is short for “laboratory.” “Mag” is short for “magazine.” And “celeb” is short for “celebrity” or a famous person. The question is, is there a rule about when you can make words short? And the answer, unfortunately, is “no.” Certain words are abbreviated or shortened, but there isn’t a rule; it just depends on how people use them. It’s one of those things that you just have to do a lot of listening and reading, in order to know what these words mean. But, those are some of the more common ones.



ENGLISH CAFÉ – 34

Miki from Japan has a question about the use of the word “apparent.” “Apparent” has two different meanings; one of them is “obvious” or “very clear.” For example, “It was apparent that my friend was angry.” He was yelling, his face was red; those are signs that he is angry. So, it was obvious that he was angry because he was yelling or his face was red. That’s one meaning of apparent. Apparent can also have a very different meaning which is that something appears to be true, it seems to be true, but it may not be true. This is sometimes used as an adverb - “apparently.” Someone will say, “Apparently, there is no baseball game tonight. I was talking to my friend and he said that he didn't think the baseball game was tonight.” Apparently means it might be true, but I'm not sure; that's what I think. An expression that Miki asks about is “an apparent suicide.” Well, a “suicide” is when someone kills themselves, when they take their own life on purpose. An apparent suicide, however, is not an obvious suicide; it's a death that looks like a suicide, but we're not sure. Was it an accident? Or did the person actually want to fall off of the bridge and kill themselves? That's the meaning of “apparent,” the second idea of something that appears to be true - it seems to be true, but it may not necessarily be true. Thank you, Miki, for that interesting question.

Finally, we have a question from Santiago in Colombia. Santiago wants to know what the word “feature” means in the expression “a feature presentation.” Well, this is a phrase that you will see sometimes in a movie theater or when there's a movie on television. They'll say, “This is a feature presentation.” Basically, the feature presentation is the most important, the principal presentation. There may be a small movie, a short movie followed by a longer one. Well, the longer one may be called the “feature presentation.” Sometimes, we just say, “the feature” or the “feature film.” Same on television, when they have a feature film, they have...it's the most important one for that night. We often use that expression just to mean a popular, big movie on television. So, thank you, Santiago, for that question.

That's all we have time for. From Los Angeles, California, I'm Jeff McQuillan. We'll see you next time on ESL Cafe.

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