



## ENGLISH CAFÉ – 45

---

### TOPICS

Topics: Graceland and Elvis, Boston, to have a leg up on someone, flat out, seeing eye dogs, to trip up

---

### GLOSSARY

**to commit a crime** – to do something against the law

\* The main reason he committed a crime was because he needed a lot of money right away.

**criminal** – someone who does something illegal

\* After a two-month investigation, the police arrested the criminals responsible for robberies in this neighborhood.

**overdose** – when someone has taken a dangerous amount of a drug

\* It's not clear if he died of a heart condition or an overdose of drugs.

**estate** – a large house, usually with a lot of land around it

\* After her family lost their money, they had to sell their estate and move to another town.

**landmark** – a place that is important in history

\* After Jeff McQuillan dies, his house will be made into a national landmark.

**New England** – the northeastern part of the U.S. that includes the states of Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, and Connecticut

\* Do you think two weeks is long enough to drive around New England on our road trip this year?

**nickname** – a name for a person or thing that is not their real name

\* When I was young, my friends gave me the nickname "Red" because of my red hair.



## ENGLISH CAFÉ – 45

---

**to have a leg up on someone** – to have the advantage over someone; to have a better chance of winning in a competition

\* He has trained longer for this race than anyone else and should have a leg up on the other runners.

**flat out** – directly; bluntly

\* I'm telling you flat out that I'm not lending you my new car to take your girlfriend to the beach.

**blind** – unable to see

\* Even though there is no history of blindness in the family, both of her brothers were born blind.

**to guide** – to lead or show

\* The road is hard to see at night. Take my hand and I'll guide you.

**sight** – the ability to see

\* My sight is not as good as it was twenty years ago.

**impaired** – having a disability; to not have the ability to do something that others can, such as seeing or hearing

\* Don told me that he's hearing-impaired in his right ear and asked me to speak up when I'm seated to his right.

**to trip up** – to make a mistake

\* Every time I sing this song, I trip up on the words.



## ENGLISH CAFÉ – 45

---

### ENGLISH LEARNING TIPS

In the last learning tip, we said that there are two ways to “know” a language – learning and acquisition. Learning is conscious knowledge, such as memorizing grammar rules, while acquisition is unconscious knowledge, what you can use in speaking and writing without thinking about it. It is important to know that acquisition is much, much more important in everyday communication than learning is. You can be perfectly fluent in a language but never study or learn any formal grammar rules. However, you cannot be fluent in a language just by having a lot of learning; you must have acquisition.

It is also important to know that learning does not become or convert into acquisition. They are two **separate** systems of knowledge. Studying language rules will increase your learning, but never your acquisition. So how do you increase your acquisition? How do you acquire languages, not just learn them?

The answer is simple, so simple that some people can’t believe it’s true: You acquire languages by understanding what is being communicated to you. That is, when you listen or read something that you can understand, you acquire part of that language. Sometimes a picture or an explanation or your own knowledge of the world helps you figure out what someone is saying to you or what you are reading. The important thing to know is that you need to focus on **what** someone is saying (what it means), and not on **how** they are saying it (the rules they are using, and so forth). You do this through listening and reading English. The more you listen and read, the more acquisition you will have.



## ENGLISH CAFÉ – 45

---

### COMPLETE TRANSCRIPT

You're listening to English as a Second Language Podcast's English Café number 45.

This is English as a Second Language Podcast's English Cafe episode 45. I'm your host, Dr. Jeff McQuillan, coming to you from the Center for Educational Development in the beautiful city of Los Angeles, California. Remember to visit our website at [eslpod.com](http://eslpod.com) to get the complete Learning Guide, a eight to ten page guide to this podcast, which has the complete transcript, all the vocabulary words we're going to talk about, definitions, and tips on improving your English and more. So, go to our website for more information.

Today's Café - We're going to talk about Graceland, the home of the famous American singer, Elvis Presley. We're also going to talk about the city of Boston, what it's famous for. And as always, we'll answer a few questions. Let's get started.

I had trouble sleeping last night, in part, because I was woken up by a helicopter near my house. The Los Angeles Police Department uses helicopters to find people who have "committed," or done something wrong. "Committed a crime," we would say, or simply people they think are criminals. Someone who commits a crime, someone who breaks the law, does something wrong. And, although I live in a pretty safe part of Los Angeles, there are still sometimes helicopters at night that will wake you up with the loud noise when they are looking for someone, the police are looking for someone. There are some parts of Los Angeles that are not very safe and you might hear a helicopter every night. So, if you visit Los Angeles and you hear a helicopter every night, it's not a good thing, not, not good news. You might want to find another place in the city to stay.

Our first topic today is "Graceland," all one word. Graceland was the home of the famous rock singer, Elvis Presley. Most people would just call him Elvis, his first name. And this is a place that is located in Memphis, Tennessee. Now, Tennessee is in the eastern part of the United States, sort of in the middle of the eastern part of the United States. It is south of the state of Kentucky. It is the home of Elvis' home, his house where he lived, and where he died, back in 1977.



## ENGLISH CAFÉ – 45

---

If you read the news recently, you may have heard that the Prime Minister of Japan, Prime Minister Koizumi, and President Bush visited Graceland together. Prime Minister Koizumi is a fan of Elvis. He was even born, I think, on Elvis' birthday. And this is one of the first times, in fact, I think it is the first time that a President of the United States and a leader of another country have gone somewhere together other than the White House, or an embassy, or one of the presidential homes. This is one of the first times that the President and another leader have visited a place together in the United States, had a meeting there. But Prime Minister Koizumi is, is a big fan of Elvis, and wanted to visit the house.

Graceland is now open to the public. After Elvis died in 1977, they...a few years later they opened up and made the house a museum. Now, I say Elvis died in 1977, but there's a common joke in the United States that Elvis didn't really die, and many years after Elvis died, people would say that they had seen Elvis, and they would show you pictures of Elvis, saying that he did not die, he was still alive. I think he actually did die, but some people say, "I don't know."

Well, Elvis' Graceland is now a museum, and it's now a very popular place for people who are visiting Memphis to go. Many people just to go to Graceland. Elvis had lived in the house for many years and, as I said, he died there. He died of an "overdose." An "overdose," is all one word, is when you take too much drugs, too many drugs. We would call Graceland an "estate," and the word "estate" is used to describe someone's property, someone's land, usually that has a big house on it, and that there is a very large amount of land around the house, gardens, that sort of thing.

The home of Elvis is actually one of the government's designated national historic landmarks, meaning the government - the US government - says that this is a protected place. You can't buy it and, and destroy it, or take the house down. It's a national landmark, like the White House. Maybe even more important than the White House, I'm not sure. Anyway, Elvis is still very popular. In fact, there's now a satellite radio channel that plays Elvis music 24 hours a day, so if you really like Elvis Presley, you can listen to the all Elvis channel.

Well, if you are ever in Tennessee, or if you love Elvis and you want to visit his home, like the Prime Minister of Japan, you can visit there. They have a special parade, or a special ceremony, on August 16th, which is the anniversary of Elvis' death. Next year will be the 30th anniversary. I'm sure they'll have a large celebration, or ceremony, there on that day. Most Americans know about



## ENGLISH CAFÉ – 45

---

Graceland. I have never been there, but it is, as I say, very popular with many people. There was a music album called “Graceland” by the singer, Paul Simon, who is also a famous singer from the 1960s in the United States. He was half of Simon and Garfunkel. Sang very different kind of music than Elvis Presley, but one of his albums in the 1980s, I think, was called “Graceland,” and there was a song, “Graceland,” about him taking a trip there. So, if you like Elvis, you might want to listen to that song as well.

Our next topic today is going to be the city of Boston. Boston is in the state of Massachusetts. Massachusetts is located on the east - what we would call the east coast of the United States. It's in the northeast part of the United States, what we usually call “New England.” New England is the area in the northeast that would include the states of Massachusetts, Vermont, New Hampshire, Maine. I suppose Connecticut, Rhode Island also are part of New England. New England was the first place that the English - who came to the United States originally back in the 17th century, the 1600s...they came originally to New England, and to what we now call the state of Massachusetts.

So, Boston is a very old city in the U.S. It is known by a couple of different nicknames. A “nickname,” all one word, is a name that we give a person or a place that is not their real name. For example, Chicago has the nickname of the “Windy City,” Los Angeles is called the “City of Angels,” and New York is called “the Big Apple.” Well, Boston is called by a couple of different names. The most common one is probably “Beantown.” “Beantown,” all one word, Beantown. Beans are something that you eat, and it was very popular in Boston that they would make certain types of baked beans. Boston now has the nickname of Beantown.

Boston is famous for a couple of different things. Most people know Boston because it is the home, or was the home, of some very famous Americans, especially the former President of the United States, John F. Kennedy was from Boston, the Boston area. John Kerry, who ran for president back in 2004, was also from Boston, the state of Massachusetts. He was a, and is, a senator from Massachusetts.

Boston is famous for having a large Irish and Italian population. Many of the immigrants from Ireland in the 1820s and 30s came to Boston, and lived in Boston, and stayed in Boston. For many years, the politicians in Massachusetts, and still today are, many of them are, Irish-Americans. There're also a large



## ENGLISH CAFÉ – 45

---

number of Italian-Americans that live in Boston, and again, you can go to Boston and have good Italian food because there are lots of Italian-Americans who live there. Now Boston is-has a lot of different immigrants from all over the world, just like every big city in the United States. There's also a large African-American, or black, population in Boston.

Boston is famous for universities. The most famous university in the United States is Harvard. Harvard is located in the Boston area. Another very famous university is the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, or what most people would just call MIT. MIT is one of the best scientific universities in the United States. The other famous place for science in the United States would be here in Southern California, at a university called the California Institute of Technology. But, we don't call the California Institute of Technology, CIT. We call it simply Cal Tech. Well, getting back to Boston: MIT and Harvard, Boston University, Boston College, these are all famous universities in that Boston area.

Boston is famous for many Revolutionary War historical sites, the war between the colonies of England and England, back in the 18th century, 1700s, late 1700s. The area of Boston was one of the first places where there was military activity during the Revolutionary War, and it has some very famous landmarks, some very famous buildings and areas that you can visit. Finally, Boston is famous for having some excellent museums. The Museum of Fine Arts in Boston has some of the best ancient art collections in the United States, as well as other types of art. So, there's lots to do in Boston. There's a lot of things to visit, a lot of places to visit, a lot of things to do, some historical things, some cultural things and of course, the famous universities. Boston has a river that goes through the center of the city called the Charles River, and if you have a chance to visit Boston, it's a very nice area to walk around, the Charles River.

Harvard is also sort of interesting to visit. I, I've been to Boston and to Harvard. I didn't work there, but I was part of a conference that was there, and it's also a very nice area to visit. So, that's the city of Boston.

Now, let's answer a few questions.

Our first question today comes from Yoko, from city of Kyoto, Japan. And, Yoko wants to know the meaning of the expression “to have a leg up on” someone. What does it mean to have a leg up on your fellow worker or someone that you are competing against in a contest? “To have a leg up on” means to have the





## ENGLISH CAFÉ – 45

---

advantage, to be doing better than the other person. Or, you have some talent, skill or quality that allows you to do better, or to be better than someone else. Usually, it's when you have some sort of special talent, or perhaps even special information, and that allows you to compete, or to be in a contest against someone else and do a better job. You can also say that you "have a leg up on a job." For example, "I have a leg up on that job," means I have a special advantage that will help me get that job better than someone else. So, you can have a leg up on someone or you could have a leg up on a job.

Philippe, from Paris, France, wants to know the meaning of the expression "flat out." "Flat out," two words. Well, flat out is actually very similar to another expression, "straight out." "Straight out." Both "flat out" and "straight out" are somewhat informal ways of saying "directly." When you say, for example, "I told my friend flat out that I was not going to give him any money," that means I told him directly, I didn't try to go and tell him something that would make him happy. Usually, when we use the expression flat out or straight out, it's often when we are telling someone something that they don't want to hear. So, it's when you are giving someone information very directly and telling them exactly what you feel, or what your opinion is about something. "So, I told my boss flat out I was not going to work this weekend, and then he fired me," that would be a use of flat out. Or, you could have said there, "I told him straight out."

Manuel, in Columbia, wants to know the meaning of the, the expression he saw, "a seeing eye dog." A "seeing eye dog," three words, "seeing eye dog." A seeing eye dog is a dog that is specially trained to help people who are having difficulty seeing or who cannot see at all - people who are blind, people who cannot see at all are blind. We often now use the expression "sight impaired," "sight impaired." If you are "impaired," that means you are not able to do something. So, if you are sight impaired that means you aren't able to see, either you are completely blind or you have difficulty seeing. We also have a similar expression for those who have problems hearing--we say they are "hearing impaired."

Well, someone who is sight impaired, or someone who is blind, often will have a seeing eye dog to help them get where they need to go. And, in the United States, you will see the seeing eye dog usually has a-something that he or she is wearing, usually a red sign that tells other people that they are a seeing eye dog, people who can see, of course. And, if you have a seeing eye dog, you can go places that you may not be able to go if you just have a regular dog. For





## ENGLISH CAFÉ – 45

---

example, most restaurants here in the State of California do not allow you to bring a dog into the restaurant. You can't take your cat or your dog into the restaurant to eat, and that is for health-safety reasons. You want to keep the restaurant clean. But, the exception to this is a seeing eye dog. If you have a seeing eye dog, you can go into a restaurant with the dog. The dog guides you. "To guide" means to lead, and the dog is sometimes called a guide dog or a seeing eye dog - either expression is possible.

Our final question comes from Mohammed, in Iran. Mohammed wants to know the meaning of verb "to trip up." "Trip up" is a two-word verb, "trip up," which means to make a mistake, to make an error. "I tripped up on the last question," means I made a mistake on the last question. You can also use this verb when you are trying to get someone else to make a mistake. "I'm going to try to trip him up," I'm going to try to get him to make a mistake or to do something that they don't want to do. So, thank you Mohammed for that question. If you have a question, feel free to e-mail us at [eslpod@eslpod.com](mailto:eslpod@eslpod.com).

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 Cafe is written and produced by Dr. Jeff McQuillan. This podcast is copyright 2006, by the Center for Educational Development.