



## ENGLISH CAFÉ – 57

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### TOPICS

Woodstock Music Festival, Affirmative Action, hands-on vs. hand-off, to struggle, how to ask for a taxi, May I vs. Can I, to carpool

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### GLOSSARY

**gathering** – a meeting, usually for a social purpose or celebration

\* Every year, St. Louis has a gathering of the best jazz musicians in the country.

**overdose** – too much of a dangerous drug that causes someone to be sick or to die

\* The police don't know yet how the man died, but they think it was an overdose of sleeping pills.

**national anthem** – a country's official national song

\* You'll hear the U.S. national anthem played before every professional baseball game.

**shiny** – something that reflects light, usually a smooth surface

\* Is that Dr. Jeff McQuillan over there? I think I see the top of his shiny head!

**affirmative** – agreeing to or approving of something; positive; yes

\* If we get an affirmative response from the local government, we can move ahead with this building project.

**remedy** – something that corrects or fixes something that is wrong or that causes a problem

\* The only remedy we can see for fixing this mistake is to start all over again.

**to be admitted** – to allow someone to enter, enroll, or join a group or an organization

\* When will you find out if you have been admitted to the University of Arkansas?

**race** – a group of people with common physical features

\* On most government forms, you are asked to check a box indicating your race.



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**gender** – being male (a man/boy) or female (a woman/girl)

\* I want to make it clear that there will be no gender preferences when hiring for these jobs.

**ethnicity** – a group with the same social, cultural, and/or language background

\* Our next presentation will be about how race and ethnicity are portrayed in American movies.

**to reverse** – to go backwards; to change to the opposite

\* The vice-president of our club reversed his decision and we will now allow players under 18 to join.

**hands-on / hands-off** – being involved or participating (hands-on); not being involved or not participating (hands-off)

\* The old manager liked to be hands-on in the office, meeting with people every week, but the new manager prefers being hands-off unless there's a serious problem.

**to struggle** – to try to do something that is difficult to achieve; to physically fight with someone

\* He struggled with the tax forms for an hour but still couldn't figure them out.

**to call (someone) a taxi** – to get a taxicab for someone

\* Dan, would you please call Ms. Sanchez a taxi as soon as possible?

**May I... / Can I...** – a phrase to use when asking someone for permission to do something; "May I" is more formal than "Can I"

\* May I take your coat for you, and can I help you find your seat?

**to carpool** – to ride in a car with one or more other people to a specific place, rather than to drive alone

\* I started carpooling to work three times a week and it's saving me a lot of money on gas.



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### WHAT INSIDERS KNOW

#### Politically Correctness

“Politically correctness” is a term used for language that we use that is least likely to cause “offense,” or cause other people to be angry with you. We talk about being politically correct or “PC” most often when we are talking about racial or cultural groups in the U.S., but it can be used with any group. Most people see being PC as a way to give groups respect so that groups can get along with each other. Others believe that Americans try to be too PC and that they are too careful about giving offense. There has been some “backlash,” or strong negative reaction in the opposite direction. There is even a political talk show on American television called, “Politically Incorrect.”

Below are the politically correct or generally accepted terms for some of the major racial and cultural groups in the U.S. What is acceptable has changed over time. Terms acceptable 20 or 50 years ago are now no longer considered appropriate, and some of those are listed in the right-hand column below. We do not include “racial slurs,” or bad names used to insult a specific racial or cultural group. We also do not have the space to include smaller ethnic groups, such as Mexican American, Korean American, or Nigerian American.

<b>Generally Acceptable</b>	<b>Less Acceptable or Not Acceptable</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Native American</li><li>▪ American Indian</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Indian</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ African American</li><li>▪ Black</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Afro-American</li><li>▪ Negro</li><li>▪ Colored</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Latino (men) / Latina (women)</li><li>▪ Hispanic</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Spanish (unless from Spain)</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Asian American</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Oriental</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ White (American)</li><li>▪ Caucasian (American)</li><li>▪ European American</li></ul>	



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### COMPLETE TRANSCRIPT

You're listening to English as a Second Language Podcast's English Café number 57.

This is English Café episode 57. I'm your host, Dr. Jeff McQuillan, coming to you from the Center for Educational Development in beautiful Los Angeles, California.

On this Café, we're going to talk about one of the most famous music festivals of the 20th century in the United States, the Woodstock Music Festival. We're also going to go over a controversial political idea called affirmative action. And as always, we'll answer a few questions. Let's get started.

If you go to our website at [eslpod.com](http://eslpod.com), you'll find more information about this podcast, including today's Learning Guide. The Learning Guide contains all of the vocabulary that we talk about as well as definitions, additional definitions that we don't talk about on the podcast, a cultural note as well as the complete transcript for this episode.

Our first topic today is going to be what is, perhaps, one of the most famous music festivals in the United States, and that was the Woodstock Festival. A music festival is just another word for a music concert that has several different groups, usually one that lasts two or three days.

Woodstock, "Woodstock," all one word, is a town in New York, the state of New York. And, the Woodstock Music Festival was a rock and roll music festival. It took place in 1969, in the summer of 1969, and there were more than a half a million people there, mostly young people, teenagers, people in their 20s. And, the reason Woodstock is so famous in American popular culture is because it was the largest gathering, and maybe the most well known gathering of the hippie movement in the US.

A gathering, "gathering," is just when several people get together. Hippies, "hippies" - sometimes the spell the singular hippy, "hippy" - hippies were young people who wanted to go against the traditional culture, who wanted to do things differently. Remember that in the late 1960's and early 1970's the United States was involved in military actions in Southeast Asia, in Vietnam, in Cambodia, in Laos. And, many people were against that war, that action, so there were many



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protests. But there were also protests against more traditional ways of doing things. The hippy movement was one that represented this different way of looking at things, this different way of living.

There were a lot of people using drugs - illegal drugs - at the festival and that caused a lot of problems. Two people actually died of a drug overdose. An overdose, “overdose,” all one word, is when someone takes too much of a certain drug and it kills them. This is what happened at Woodstock. Two young people died of an overdose.

But, it was a very well known, famous event. In fact they made a movie a year later about Woodstock. It's called Woodstock - surprising, I know. Some of the most famous music groups, rock music groups at the time performed at Woodstock. In fact, I would say that most of these would be names that you would recognize or that would be famous. Two of the most famous groups were The Who, from England, and the guitar player, Jimi Hendrix, from the United States. The performance by Jimi Hendrix is still famous because he played the national anthem on his electric guitar.

The national anthem, “anthem,” is the national song. In the United States it's called the “Star Spangled Banner.” Banner is just another word here for flag, and the United States flag has stars on it. It has one star for each state in the United States, so there are 50 stars. The word spangle means a bright spot, something that you can see that is very, we would say, shiny, “shiny.” Something that is shiny reflects light. You can see it. So, Star Spangled Banner just means the flag that has these little stars that you can see. It is, as I say, our national anthem. Well, Jimi Hendrix played the Star Spangled Banner on his guitar, on his electric guitar, and gave it a very different feel than most Americans were used to and that became a very famous part of this Woodstock Festival.

Our second topic today is going to be about a political policy, really. We don't talk about politics very much on the Café, but I thought I would talk in general terms about one popular policy that has been around in the United States for more than 30 years, and that is the idea of affirmative action.

Affirmative, “affirmative,” is the opposite of negative. Affirmative is something that is positive. Affirmative action, then, means that you help someone who you have hurt, or you have injured, in this case. The idea is that groups in the United States that had been discriminated against for many years would receive help for



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various positions in the government or in the universities. Affirmative action, then, was a way of trying to provide a remedy for past discrimination. A remedy, “remedy,” is something that cures you, something that makes you better. We use that term when we are talking about medicine, for example. That is a remedy that makes you feel better. Here, we're talking about remedies for the injuries, for the wrong things that happened to people who were discriminated against.

Now of course, the United States unfortunately has a history of discrimination against African Americans - against black people, but also against many other groups – Asian Americans, Latino Americans, Native Americans or American Indians, and many people would include in this list, women. Well, affirmative action tried to correct the mistakes of the past, help in getting a job in the government or getting admitted to a university. To be admitted to a university means that you are accepted, you can attend that university. These affirmative action policies were usually based on someone's race, “race.” Race is the color of your skin, really. Gender, “gender,” gender is the same as sex, male versus female, man versus woman. You have to be one or the other, usually. Ethnicity, “ethnicity,” is the national group that you come from, so it could be French American, it could be Mexican American, it could be Japanese American - these are different ethnicities, different national groups. All three of these, race, gender and ethnicity, at some time were used in affirmative action policies.

Now, affirmative action was a popular political idea in the 70's, and in the 80's, somewhat. However, many people were against this policy. They felt that it resulted in what they called reverse discrimination. Reverse, “reverse,” is when you go backwards. It's the opposite of going forward. To reverse also means to do something to the opposite side or to the opposite, in this case, person. So, reverse discrimination means that people who are in the majority, mostly white people, white men in particular, would be discriminated against, and that was unfair, too. That was the criticism of affirmative action.

Today, affirmative action is still part of some government policies, some university policies. There are some places, such as here in California, where the people passed a law saying that you could not use affirmative action, especially in the university system. So, this has caused some changes. But, the idea of affirmative action is still one that most Americans are familiar with. It is, as I say, a controversial one. Americans don't like to think about racial issues. It makes them, I think perhaps, uncomfortable, and so this becomes a very controversial



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issue. Again, many people are opposed to it, are against it because they feel it is trying to correct a mistake in the past with another mistake. People who support affirmative action believe it is the right way to help people who have been discriminated against in the past and in the present. For more information on this idea of race and ethnicity in the United States, be sure to see our Learning Guide for today.

Now let's answer a few questions. Our first question comes from Fabio, "Fabio," in Brazil. Fabio wants to know the difference between the expression hands-on and hands-off. When we say something is hands, "hands," hyphen, on, "on," we mean that it is something that you are working with with your hands or something that you are doing personally. The opposite of hands-on is hands-off. Hands-off means that you are not personally or individually involved in some work or some project.

For example, if you are watching a teacher teach you how to cook, how to make food, you're in cooking school. This is something that I need because I'm a terrible cook. So, I go to cooking school, in the class I sit in a class and I watch the teacher in the front of the room demonstrate, show us how to cook something. I don't get to cook. I don't go into the kitchen, I just watch. So, this is a hands-off class, I don't get to be involved personally.

If I took a different class and I actually went into the kitchen and cooked myself as part of the class. That would be a hands-on class. So, hands-on is something that you are doing. You can think of your hands being on something; you're actually being involved in it. Hands-off is something where you are not involved in it.

A second question from Fabio has to do with the verb to struggle, "struggle." The verb, to struggle, means that you are trying to get free of something. You are trying to escape from somewhere or some situation. It is very difficult and you may have to fight to or somehow use violence to get away from the situation. So for example, if someone came up to you on the street and pointed a gun at you and said, "Give me your money." You might take your wallet out, and if you're stupid you might try to grab his gun, get the gun away from him so that he doesn't steal your money. I don't recommend this as a policy! But, if you did that, the two of you would struggle. You would struggle meaning you would fight, you are trying to get away from this person, or get the gun away from this person.





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We use the verb struggle, however, in a more general way to mean that you are trying to reach some goal, you are trying to do something, but you are having difficulty. We might say that a student is struggling in trigonometry or algebra or mathematics. They're having a difficult time. They're struggling. We sometimes use that verb for people who are poor and don't have enough money. They have to struggle to pay their bills. It's difficult. It is a difficult situation that they are in. So, thank you Fabio, for those questions.

Keiko, "Keiko," in Japan, has a simple question. The question is when you are in a hotel and you want the people at the hotel to get you a taxi, a taxicab, what expression do you use? Well, there are a couple of things you can say if you want to ask them to get you a taxicab. One is, "Can you call me a taxi?" "Can you call me a taxi?" Normally, this verb, to call, is one that we use when we are giving a name to something. But here, you are saying, "Would you call on the telephone," because we use that same verb for to telephone, "Would you call me a taxi?" - would you get a taxi for me.

Sometimes in big hotels there are taxi right outside the hotel. So, a polite way to ask this would be, "Could you call me a taxi, please?" or "Could you call a taxi for me, please?" those both mean the same thing. So, good luck on getting your taxi, Keiko!

Our next question comes from Rui Li, "Rui Li," two words, from China originally but now living somewhere in California. Rui Li wants to know the difference between the expression, may I and can I. If you are asking for permission to do something, if you are if it is okay to do something, should you say, "May I," or "Can I?"

Let us say that you are in a restaurant and you want the waiter or the waitress to get you more water. In that situation, you would probably say, "Can I get some more water?" or "Can you get me some more water?" To be more polite, to be more formal, you would say, "May I have some more water?" So, may is, in this case, more formal, more polite. Can is less formal, a little less polite. So, in talking to your friends or to your family, you would probably say, "Can I..." If you are asking your father if you could use his car, you may say, "Dad, can I use the car?" and your father would say, "No, you lazy kid. Walk!" But, if you are speaking to your teacher or perhaps your boss, or someone very important, you may use the expression, may I.





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Our next question comes from Susana, “Susana.” I’m not sure where Susana is from, but her question has to do with the word carpooling, “carpooling.” Carpooling, the verb is to carpool, means that you share a car ride with someone else, you go with someone else in their car together to some place. Usually we talk about carpooling when we are referring to people going to work. Some companies, for example, have programs where you don’t have to drive to work yourself. You can carpool with someone else. Someone else will come and pick you up and take you to work together.

In the United States, on many freeways and highways you will see a special lane, a special path, on the road that says, “carpool only.” And, this means that only cars that two people in them - at least two people, and sometimes three people - can use that lane. And, what the government is doing is trying to encourage people to use less gasoline so that there is less pollution and there is less traffic. So, they reward people. They say, if you use the carpool idea, if you have more than one person in your car, you can go in this special lane that will usually go faster, especially here in Los Angeles, it’s very important because we have so much traffic. So, carpooling is the idea of going together with someone else in their car. And, you will see special carpool lanes on many freeways in big cities in the United States because the government wants to encourage people to drive less.

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

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