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TOPICS

Table manners in the U.S., Washington, D.C., easygoing, down to earth, to put someone in harm's way, to take a shot at someone, inquiry

GLOSSARY

to say grace – to say a prayer before eating a meal

* At dinner every night, my mother says grace before we begin eating.

forearm – the part of the arm that is between the hand and the elbow

* He has been lifting weights for several months and now, even his forearms look strong and muscular.

napkin – a square piece of paper or cloth used for wiping hands and lips, and for keeping clothes clean during a meal

* When I dropped my napkin on the floor, the waiter picked it up for me right away.

lap – the top part of the legs between the hips and knee when one sits down

* Every time the kids visit their grandfather, they want to sit on his lap while he reads them a story.

to slurp – to make a loud sucking sound when drinking or eating

* Leann's mother said to her, "If you don't stop slurping your soup, you won't get dessert tonight."

to burp – to belch; a loud sound that comes out of one's mouth when air is released from the stomach

* There was a very embarrassing moment during the concert when he opened his mouth to sing, but ended up burping into the microphone.

to chew – to take food between the teeth and for the teeth to go up and down on it to make the food smaller before swallowing

* She was in such a hurry she barely had time to chew her food!



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delicious – good tasting; tastes good

* The cookies that Dr. McQuillan made for the entire office were delicious!

mayor – the official elected leader of a city

* Many people thought that the mayor should be doing more to get the roads fixed after the big storm.

judicial – related to courts or judges

* The president and the judicial branch of the government often disagree about the laws of the nation.

veteran – a person who has been in the military, usually someone who has fought in a war

* I didn't know you were a veteran. Which war did you fight in?

easygoing – relaxed; tolerant; someone who does not get angry easily; someone who does not have strong negative opinions about most things

* Georgina is really easygoing so I don't think she'll mind if you use her car tonight.

down to earth – sensible; straightforward; someone who does not think that he or she is better than others

* Do you think that people from the Midwest are more down to earth than people from L.A.?

to put (someone) in harm's way – to put someone in a dangerous situation where they may get hurt

* You'll have to come up with a better plan because I refuse to put my workers in harm's way just to make the company more money.

to take a shot at (someone) – to try to convince or persuade someone to do something; to hit someone physically

* My sister wasn't able to convince my father to see the doctor, but I'm going to take a shot at him this weekend to try to change his mind.

inquiry – investigation; asking for information, usually done officially by the government or another organization

* I wonder if there will be an official inquiry into how this organization lost all of its money.



WHAT INSIDERS KNOW

Pig Latin

Pig Latin is language game played mainly by children in the U.S. Kids usually use Pig Latin for fun and also to talk to each other in front of adults so that the adults won't understand what they are saying. Adults, too, can sometimes use it to talk about private or sensitive topics they don't want very young children to understand.

The rules for changing standard English into Pig Latin are very simple.

- For words that begin with consonants, move all of the first consonant sounds to the end of the word and add “ay.”

Here are a few examples:

- ball → *all-bay*
- button → *utton-bay*
- star → *ar-stay*
- three → *ee-thray*
- For words that begin with vowel sounds (including silent consonant sounds), add the syllable “ay” to the end of the word.
 - eagle → *eagle-ay*
 - honest → *honest-ay* (because the *h* is silent)

A few Pig Latin words have become accepted and used in standard American English. Two of these words are “ixnay” and “amscray.” “Ixnay” comes from the word “nix,” a verb meaning to cancel or to put an end to something. If you and your co-worker are planning on leaving work early but your boss gives you extra work, you may say to your co-worker, “Ixnay on the plans. I have to stay late to work.” Another Pig Latin word you may hear is “amscray.” “Amscray” comes from the word “scram,” which is an informal word that means to go away or to leave somewhere quickly. If some neighborhood children are making trouble and loud noises outside your window late at night, you may say, “You kids better amscray before I come out there!”



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COMPLETE TRANSCRIPT

You're listening to ESL Podcast's English Café episode 58.

This is ESL Podcast's English Café number 58. 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 talk about table manners in the United States, how people eat their food. We're also going to talk about the capitol of the US, Washington, DC, and, as always, we'll answer a few questions. Let's get started.

If you haven't visited our website recently at eslpod.com, be sure to do that. We have some interesting and exciting new features on our website. You can also get the Learning Guide for this episode, which contains all of the vocabulary, definitions, a culture note and the complete transcript of the podcast. In today's Learning Guide we talk something that's very popular among children and is something that most adults know about, something called Pig Latin. It's a way of speaking English that I think you'll be interested in finding out about. That's in today's Learning Guide.

Our first topic today is going to be about what we would call table manners, "manners," in the United States, and manners are the way that you behave, the way you act. If we say someone has good manners, we mean they're polite, they do things according to the accepted rules of behavior. Table manners refers to how you are supposed to act when you are sitting at a table eating your dinner or your meal. I thought that I would go through a list that I found somewhere on the web about American table manners and talk a little bit about these customs we have. Many of them, maybe most of them, will be the same in other countries, but some of them, perhaps, are different. So, if you are going to be having a meal with a American family, here are some things you can expect.

The first thing is that many American families, as we've talked about before on the podcast, are very religious. Because of that reason, they often say a prayer before they start their meal. The prayer is usually called grace, "grace," so we say that people say grace. To say grace means to say a prayer, usually thanking God for the gifts of the food that you are about to eat. This is a common custom in many families, even sometimes when they eat in public in a restaurant. But



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often at home, for a family meal, we say grace, and that's a common custom in many families.

Some other customs you can expect at a(n) American dinner table: not putting your elbows on the table. It's considered rude to put your elbows on the table. Of course, some people still do it. I would say it's fairly common, but to be more polite, you don't put your elbows on the table. You can put your arms on the table, what we would call your forearm, "forearm." Your forearm is the part of your arm between your hand and your elbow. So, no elbows on the table!

We usually put the napkin on our lap. The napkin, "napkin," is that piece of towel or a piece of cloth that you use to wipe your face. It's also something you put on your lap. Your lap, "lap," is your legs, the top of your legs when you are sitting. At Christmastime, it's a common custom for children to go see Santa Claus and they sit on his lap, they sit on the top of his legs as he is sitting down. Except me, I don't...I don't usually sit on Santa's lap anymore. Last year, I think I did, but not in the future!

Americans also think it is impolite to slurp your food. For example, if you are drinking a cup of coffee or you are eating soup, it's not considered polite to slurp it. To slurp, "slurp," is easiest to define by doing it for you so you can hear what it sounds like (slurping sound). That is slurping and it's considered rude to do that, to make a noise when you are eating your soup or drinking something out of a cup or glass.

It's, however, acceptable now to slurp your noodles when you are eating. This is true for Italian food. If you are eating spaghetti, people will often slurp up the rest of the noodle that doesn't go into their mouth, they want to get it in their mouth. This is also true for many kinds of Asian cooking. This may be different in other countries, but it's okay to do that, but you, again, try not to make any noise.

It is also common that if you are sitting at a table or in a restaurant with friends that you wait until everyone has their food before you start eating. So, if you're in a restaurant and someone brings...the waiter brings food to two people and two people don't have food, the two people that do have food wait until the other two people get their food. Sometimes you will say to someone who has their food, "Don't wait for me; go ahead and eat," especially if it's something hot. But, that's the custom is to wait until everyone has their food, or everyone has gotten the food from the table if you are eating at home.



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It's also considered rude to burp at the dinner table. To burp is again one of those things that's easiest to illustrate by hearing it. The verb is "burp," burp (burp sound). That's a burp. That's considered very rude, impolite. If you do have to burp, and sometimes you do, you should say, "excuse me," and you should cover your mouth before you burp. I'm sure you didn't think you would hear me burping when you started listening to today's podcast!

It's also considered polite, at the dinner table, to keep your mouth closed when you are eating, not to chew, "chew," with your mouth open. To chew means to take your food in between your teeth, you move your teeth up and down so that you break down the food, you make it smaller so you can swallow it. So, it's considered impolite to chew with your mouth open. You want to keep your mouth closed.

There are some foods in the U.S. that you can eat with your hands. Usually you eat with a fork, spoon and a knife. Or if you're in an Asian restaurant or in an Asian house - Asian-American house - with your chopsticks, but there are some foods that you can eat with your hand. Pizza is something you can pick up with your hand and eat. Fried chicken, not any kind of chicken, but chicken that is fried, that is usually a piece of chicken with some flour on it that is put into oil, very hot oil, and fried. You can eat fried chicken with your hands. You can eat bread with your hands. You can also eat corn when it is on the cob. Corn on the cob, "cob," is corn that is still on the stick, and it's very popular in the summertime for people to eat corn on the cob using their hands. Whole pieces of fruit, like an apple or a banana, of course, you can also eat with your hands.

At the end of the meal, you want to thank the person, if you are in someone's house, who cooked the meal. The nicest thing to say would be, "Thank you for the wonderful meal," "Thank you for the wonderful meal. It was delicious." Delicious, "delicious," means it tasted very good. It was very good tasting. If you come to my house, you would say, "Thank you for the terrible" or "horrible meal. It was really bad," because that would be, of course, the truth. I don't cook very well.

Our second topic today is the City of Washington, DC. We often talk about different states and cities in the United States and give you some basic information about them. And today we're going to talk about the capitol of the United States, Washington, DC.



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Well, the first thing to know about Washington, DC, is what the D and C stand for. They stand for, or mean, the District of Columbia. The District of Columbia. The word Columbia comes from the name of the person who is thought to have come first from Europe to the new continent of America, Christopher Columbus. So, Columbia is a name that comes from Christopher Columbus. So, the District of Columbia is what DC stands for, and this was a name that was given by the Constitution of the United States to this capitol city. The capitol city is not in any state. It's its own, what we call, federal district or national district. This is true in other countries. Some other countries have the capitol separate from the provinces or states. It's its own separate legal unit, and that is the case in the United States. Washington was our first president and the capitol was named after our first president.

Now, it's confusing because we also have a state called Washington. Washington State is located on the border of Canada in the northwest part of our country. So, when people are talking about Washington, they sometimes refer to and then Washington State. Usually from the context of the conversation, you know if someone says Washington if they mean Washington State - the State of Washington - or Washington, DC. Sometimes we just call Washington, DC "DC," so you will hear both of those terms.

Washington DC is its own city, and technically it is run by the Congress of the United States. The federal Congress - the House of Representatives and the Senate - have authority in the District of Columbia. However, in the early 1970's Congress decided to give Washington, DC it's own leader - it's own mayor. A mayor, "mayor," is the leader of a city. And now, Washington has a group of elected representatives and a mayor. However, the people who live in Washington, DC - there are about 500,000 people there now - do not get to send a representative to Congress. They do not have a senator who votes for them. They have a representative, but that representative cannot vote in Congress. They can, however, vote for the president of the United States. Beginning in 1961, after the Constitution was changed, there is now a law that says that you can vote for the president if you live in Washington, DC, but you do not have a representative.

So, that is the legal basis of Washington, DC. For most people the interesting thing about Washington, DC - what we think about - is the famous buildings that are there. There are the Capitol Building, which is where the Congress is; the White House, which is where the president lives; and the headquarters, or home,



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of the Supreme Court, which is the top legal authority in terms of our judicial system. Judicial, “judicial,” means the courts, the law courts. So, all of the three parts of the U.S. national government are in Washington, DC.

Washington, DC is also famous for two other things - two other types of buildings. One is memorials. These aren't exactly buildings, but a memorial, “memorial,” is a statue or a small building that is built to remember someone. The most famous memorial is what we call the Washington Monument. And, the Washington monument is very famous. It's a tall...it looks like a tall stick, but it is a monument to Washington - doesn't look like him, however. We also have a memorial, or monument, to President Lincoln, who was president during the U.S. Civil War in 19th century. The Jefferson Memorial, again, Jefferson was a president, our third president. There also memorials to those people who have died in wars. The most famous of these is the Vietnam Veterans Memorial. A veteran, “veteran,” is someone who has fought in a war. The Vietnam Veterans Memorial is also very well known.

The other type of building that is famous in Washington, DC are the museums. And, as we talked about before on an earlier Café, we have a federal, or national, set of museums that are called the Smithsonian Museums. The Smithsonian Museums are a collection of museums - art museums, history museums. There's a museum for air and space, there's a museum for American Indians. There are museums for lots of different groups and types of art, and so that is also something that most people, when they go to Washington, will want to visit. That's a little bit about Washington, DC, and now, here's a little bit about your questions.

Our first question comes from Narong, “Narong,” in Thailand. Narong wants to know the meaning of the expression easygoing. When we say he is easy, “easy,” going, “going,” all one word, what do we mean? We mean that he is relaxed, that he is not excited; he's calm. It's also said of someone who doesn't get angry very easily, doesn't get upset very easily. Someone who is always calm and relaxed, we'd say that person is easy going.

Another expression Narong wants to know about is down to earth. Down, “down,” to earth. When we describe someone as down to earth, we mean that they are humble. They do not think they are, themselves, very important. They are easy to talk to. The opposite of someone who is down to earth would be someone who is full of himself, or full of herself. To be full, “full,” of yourself



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means that you think you are better than everyone else. You think you are more important than everyone else. You think you are great. So, that would be the opposite of being humble or down to earth.

Fabio, in Italy, has a question about the expression to put someone in harm's way. To put, or to place someone in harm's, "harm's," way means to put them in danger, to put them in a situation where they could get hurt, a dangerous situation.

Fabio also wants to know the meaning of the expression to take a shot at someone. To take a shot, "shot," at someone usually means to try to convince someone, try to get someone to agree with you, or try to talk to someone about something you may be having a problem with. You may say, for example, "I talked to my brother, but he doesn't want to come to the party," and you may say, "Well, let me take a shot at him." Let me try to convince him. The other common meaning of this expression is to hit someone, to punch somebody. This is different than the expression to take a shot at something. Someone may say, "Let me take a shot at writing this story." There, the expression means to attempt or to try. "I'm going to take a shot at it" means I'm going to try it, I'm going to attempt it.

Saeed, "Saeed," from the State of Texas in the U.S., he wants to know the meaning of the noun inquiry, "inquiry." An inquiry - sometimes pronounced inquiry - is a investigation. The word comes from the verb to inquire, "inquire," which means to ask, to ask about something, to investigate something. "I'm going to inquire where my friend is." I'm going to ask about where my friend is. The noun, inquiry, is usually an investigation by the government or by some organization or company. It has the idea of being somewhat formal when you look into a problem or something that happened. For example, when President John F. Kennedy was killed in 1963, there was a formal inquiry into who really killed him.

If you would like to inquire about the meaning of some words or expressions, email us. Our email address is eslpod@eslpod.com. 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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