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The junior year abroad is one way of having students study in other countries. The students will get credit for their time studying in another country, that is the university will give them academic credit so that they will be able to graduate in the same amount of time. Another way of saying that is that their courses count. When we say something counts, we mean that it is valid, that it is something that you can use for, in this case, the requirements that you have a certain number of classes to graduate with your Bachelor's degree.

Some students study in very short term programs. I remember when I was in the university, I wanted to study a semester abroad - not a whole year but a half a year. Other students study only a month or two in the summertime; some universities in the United States have what's called a "J Term" - "J" stands for January - and they have one month in January where they offer short courses - three or four weeks - and students can sometimes study in another country just for those three or four weeks.

Some of my nieces and nephews - my brother's children - have done this. I know one of my nieces studied in Spain for a year; that was a junior year abroad program. Another niece studied just for a month. So, there are different programs that people can sign up for.

I, myself, was involved in a study abroad program. I had actually graduated with my first Bachelor's degree back in 1986. I didn't know what I wanted to do with my life - I still don't! So, I worked for a year and I saved up my money and then I went to Mexico, and I lived in Mexico and studied Spanish there.

Well, I stayed there for about four months. I was studying on my own, that is I wasn't studying at the university, I was studying language at a private school - a private institute. And then I decided I would take some academic courses there, so I took some courses at one of the local universities and was able to get college credit at my own university, the University of Minnesota.

I think about this because that was twenty years ago that I did that, back in 1987 - in January of 1987. So, twenty years ago this month, I participated in a study abroad program, and of course, it was a wonderful experience to be able to learn about different cultures and learn a different language.

Some students study abroad, or go abroad, in order to do humanitarian work. Humanitarian, "humanitarian," is work that you do to help other people. Some students will go on special programs. Usually these are two-three-four weeks, sometimes in the summer, sometimes during a break in the school year when



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students are not going to classes, and they'll help out in a different country, perhaps building homes or helping in schools - doing things that would help and benefit people who need help in other countries. So, that's also a popular way of students going to different countries.

Although studying abroad is popular, it's still just minority of American students that actually go and study in a different country. Part of the reason is that it is expensive; you need money to pay for the trip and living in a different country. Part of it is that some students just aren't interested in studying in other countries or learning other languages, and that is a big problem, I think, in the United States, of students not being interested in learning other languages. I think that is changing, but we still have a long way to go, meaning we still have a lot of progress that we need to make in order to reach that goal.

Our second topic today has nothing to do with studying abroad. It has to do with a controversial issue that I have received a few emails about - asking me to talk about - and that is gun control.

Many people outside of the United States have a difficult time understanding Americans' attitudes towards guns and owning guns. In many countries, it is illegal for people to own guns, but we would sometimes call firearms, "firearms." A firearm is a gun, often a small gun, that you use - that could be used to kill someone. But in the United States, in most states it is legal for people to own these guns, so the question is why, and why are Americans so different from most other countries when it comes to gun ownership.

Well, I think there are two reasons why that is; one of them is legal and one of them is cultural. Of course, the two things are often related. Let's start with the legal issues. In the United States, we have a national Constitution like many countries. But unlike many countries, a difference in the United States is that the Constitution is changed only very rarely. The last change to the Constitution was more than thirty years ago, so we don't change the Constitution very much.

One of the things that is in the Constitution - one of the changes or amendments, we would call them, "amendments," an amendment is a change to some document - some formal document. One of the amendments, the earliest or early amendments, was the Second Amendment, and the Second Amendment says that American citizens have a right to bear arms. To bear, "bear," means to own or to have; arms is another word for guns or firearms.



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So, this is a legal right in the Constitution. Now, many people disagree about what that means. There are federal laws - national laws - and there are state laws related to whether you can own a gun or not; every state is different. In some states, for example in Hawaii, it is not legal to have a gun, or very difficult for an individual person - citizen - to buy and own a gun. In some states it is very easy, states like Texas or Alaska. These states have laws that allow people to get their own gun, usually with very little effort - very little work.

These states issue permits, or permissions, for people to own a gun. They're usually called "concealed carry permits." To conceal, "conceal," means to hide, and to carry means to have with you - to take with you when you go out of your house. So, "concealed carry" means you can have a gun but people can't see that you have a gun.

There is, as I say, a lot of argument about whether people should have a right to bear arms. Some people say that it helps individual Americans defend themselves against crime. Other people say that it causes more problems because of all these guns that are out in the population. This is related, I think, to the cultural reason why Americans have this different attitude, or some Americans have a different attitude toward gun ownership.

The United States, as you know, was started in the eastern part of this - what is now the United States, as a British colony. And, the country grew and it kept moving west by either buying land or through wars. The expansion, or the increase in the size of the United States meant that there was always a frontier, and the concept of a frontier is very important in American culture.

A frontier, "frontier," is a word that can mean the border between two countries or two areas. It can also mean an area that is somewhat wild, where there isn't a lot of police, there isn't a lot of government presence. It is an area where everyone has to protect themselves because there is no organized or very powerful government presence, and that was true in American history. As Americans moved west, from the east coast of the United States to the west coast the, there was always a frontier - an area where it was dangerous and that people had to protect themselves.

So, this is my theory of one reason why Americans, even though there's no more frontiers in terms of wild places, there is still this cultural, historical remembrance of that period, and Americans combine that with an idea of individual freedom, and that is one of the causes, I think, of why some Americans have different opinions.



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Of course, there are many Americans who want to change these laws, who believe in gun control or limiting the number of people who can have guns. There are also powerful organizations that try to keep the law the way it is now. One organization is called the National Rifle Organization, or the NRA, and they have been very successful in stopping gun control.

If you're interested in this topic, you might want to see a movie - a documentary - by Michael Moore, "Moore," and that was a movie called "Bowling for Columbine." Columbine was a tragic event in American history recently, when some students - two students got guns and went to school and killed other students, and Michael Moore made an interesting, controversial documentary about guns and gun control. He's very much in favor of gun control, so it's really only one side of this debate or question, so you should know that before you see the movie. So, for both legal and cultural reasons, we have a very different attitude and a different environment in the United States when it comes to guns.

Now let's answer a few of your questions.

Our first question comes from Vitti, "Vitti," in the city of Paris. Vitti wants to know the difference between "come and eat" and "come to eat."

This is an interesting question because these two things really mean the same in most situations, but there has been a change in English over the last 20-30 years, perhaps longer. Usually, or traditionally, we would say, "come to eat," using the infinitive form of the verb to eat.

In informal English, many people have substituted or put in the place of the word "to" the word "and." So they'll say, "Well, I'm going to come and eat," or "I'm going to go and shop," when they mean "I'm going to go to shop," "I'm going to go to eat." However, it's become so common that I would probably say that both of those forms are considered acceptable, especially in conversational English.

It's also possible for these two expressions to mean something slightly different. You could say that when someone says, "Come and eat," they are saying "I'm going to come" - to come to your house and I'm going to eat, so there are two separate actions. And that's also a possible use of an expression like "come and eat" and would mean something a little different than "come to eat."

Jakub, "Jakub," from the Czech Republic wants to know the difference between expression in spite of, "in spite" of (three words) and despite, "despite."





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Well, these are usually identical expressions - they mean the same thing in most cases. You can say, "I'm going to the party in spite of the rain." That means that I am not going to be bothered by or affected by or influenced by the fact that it is raining - I'm going to go in spite of that. You could also say, "I'm going to go despite the rain," it means the same thing. Notice you can't say, however, "despite of the rain." You only use the "of" with the words "in spite," if you're going to say despite, "despite," then you do not use the preposition "of" after it.

I would say that they are some cases where "in spite of" might be more common than "despite." Sometimes we use "in spite of" when you are going to do something even though someone else doesn't want you to do it. "The teenage girl decided to go to the movie in spite of her parents' opposition." Her parents said no but she went anyway because she's a teenager, that's what teenagers do!

You may have noticed also that because these are prepositions - "despite" is a preposition and "in spite of" works as a preposition - the verb after it will be in the "ing" form, not in the "to" form. So, you would say, "despite eating," but you would not say "despite to eat." That's because it's a preposition, and the object of the preposition has to be a noun, or in this case, a gerund, which is the verb with an "ing" afterwards. If you don't understand that explanation, don't worry about it; just know that after "despite" and "in spite of" we use the "ing" form of the verb.

Another popular way of using these expressions is to add the phrase "the fact that" after the prepositions. So, you say, "Despite the fact that her parents do not want her to go the movie, the teenage girl went to the movie anyway," or "In spite of the fact that it is raining, I am going to go to the party."

If you have a question that you would like us to try to answer on the Café, you can email us at [eslpod@eslpod.com](mailto:eslpod@eslpod.com). We can't answer all of your questions, but we'll try to answer as many as we can.

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

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