



## TOPICS

Airport X-ray machines, Guinness Book of World Records, to be under siege, to run like butter, girlfriends, to trade up

---

## GLOSSARY

**checkpoint** – a place where one’s documents and/or things are looked at closely for security

\* When we drove past the checkpoint, the police officer asked to see my driver’s license and car registration.

**to scan** – for something to be “read” by a machine so that the machine takes a picture of what is inside

\* The doctor took an X-ray scan of Wilson’s leg to see whether it was broken.

**pat-down** – a police officer or security officer putting one’s hands on another person’s clothing to feel whether that person is hiding a gun or another weapon under his or her clothing

\* Usually male police officers do pat-downs of men, and female police officers do pat-downs of women.

**metal detector** – a piece of electronic equipment that makes a loud sound if the person walking through it is carrying or wearing anything made of metal

\* Don’t forget to take the coins out of your pocket before you walk through the metal detector.

**privacy** – without other people’s knowledge of personal information about oneself

\* Some Americans feel like you’re violating their privacy if you ask very personal questions, like how much money you make or how much you weigh.

**strip search** – the act of a police officer or security officer asking another person to take off his or her clothes to see if that person is carrying weapons or drugs

\* Have you ever had to take off your clothes for a strip search?



## ENGLISH CAFÉ – 89

---

**wand** – an electronic device that is held in one’s hand and waved over another person which will make a noise if that person is carrying or wearing anything made of metal

\* The wand beeped when it passed over Jodie’s hand, because she had forgotten to take off her wedding ring.

**to go off** – for a machine to make a loud noise to alert someone of something

\* The smoke alarm often goes off when they’re cooking because they usually burn their food.

**reference book** – a book that lists a lot of information, such as a dictionary, encyclopedia, atlas, or telephone directory

\* Which reference book should I look in for information about Nebraska?

**brewery** – a place where beer is made, or a company that makes beer

\* They went on a tour of the brewery and learned how beer is made there.

**to compile** – to put together many different pieces of information to make something else

\* The students compiled information from more than 30 articles to write their research papers.

**hit** – a movie, song, or book that is very popular among most people

\* The Harry Potter books are a hit among readers worldwide.

**trivia** – information that is interesting, but not very important; useless facts

\* In the United States, Trivial Pursuit is a popular game that tests players’ knowledge about history, science, media, pop culture, and sports.

**to run like butter** – to operate very smoothly and without problems

\* The business is running like butter, so the owner feels comfortable taking a one-week vacation.

**girlfriend** – a woman who one is involved with romantically (but not yet married to); a woman’s female friend

\* Carol and her girlfriends were surprised to hear that Paul had a new girlfriend.

**to trade up** – to exchange or sell something that one has or owns to get something bigger or better, often used for cars or houses

\* Three years ago we bought a small house. We hope to trade up to a larger one in about five years.



## **WHAT INSIDERS KNOW**

### **Americans in the Guinness World Records**

Guinness World Records, previously known as the Guinness Book of World Records, is a reference book that is published “annually” (every year), and has lists of “records” (something that is the best, biggest, smallest, fastest, slowest, etc. of its kind) for almost everything! Some of the records are very unusual.

Here are some interesting American records in Guinness World Records:

- The “highest earning” (making the most money for one’s work) female singer of all time – Madonna
- The youngest person to visit the North and South Poles – Jonathan Silverman
- The person with the tallest “Mohawk” (hair that stands up in a line on the top of one’s head) – Aaron Studham
- The largest wall of “bubbles” (balls of air that are made with soap) – Pacific Science Center in Seattle, Washington
- The most bubbles inside each other (9) – Hollywood, California

Some people will do almost anything to have their name in the book. In fact, Guinness decided to stop listing “eating and drinking records,” “heaviest cat,” and many other records because people were doing very unsafe things to make those records. For example, some people were drinking deadly amounts of alcohol to get into the book.

November 9 is International Guinness World Records Day, when thousands of people in many countries try to “break” old records, meaning that they try to beat a previous record. In one year, Americans made over 10,000 “claims,” or statements that they had made a new record. That’s about 30 per day!



## **COMPLETE TRANSCRIPT**

You're listening to ESL Podcast's English Café number 89.

This is ESL Podcast's English Café episode 89. 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 website at [eslpod.com](http://eslpod.com) and download a Learning Guide for this episode that contains all the vocabulary, definitions, cultural notes, additional definitions not discussed on the podcast, and a complete transcript of this episode.

In this episode, we'll talk about airport X-ray machines, part of airport security, and what that means for those who travel. We're also going to talk about the Guinness Book of World Records, and what you can find in there. And as always, we'll answer a few questions. Let's get started!

As you know, many airports in the United States and in other countries have more security now. They are more careful about checking people before they come into the airport. One of the newest ways of doing that is using an X-ray machine when you go through the security checkpoint. A “checkpoint” (checkpoint – one word) is when you have to stop and have your luggage – your bags – checked to make sure that you are not carrying anything dangerous.

Right now, if you go to an American airport you will have to walk through a metal detector. This is a machine that “detects,” or checks, to see if you have any metal objects like a gun, for example. The officers or guards will also take your bags and put them in an X-ray machine. An “X-ray machine” is one that allows you to see through the outside material to look at anything that might cause a problem.

Well, they are now thinking about, in some American airports, of making humans go through a special X-ray machine, it's called a “body-scanning machine.” “To scan” (scan) means to look at. You can also use the verb “to scan” to mean to look at something very quickly, but here it means to look at your body with this machine.

Traditionally, if the police or security officers think that you might have some dangerous object after you walk through the metal detector, they may do what's called a “pat-down” (pat-down). A “pat-down” is when the officer takes his or her



## ENGLISH CAFÉ – 89

---

hands and puts them on the outside of your body and touches your body from the top down to the bottom of your legs to see if you have anything dangerous that you are hiding. The X-ray machine is supposed to replace these pat-downs, and make it more efficient for the security officers to look at your body and see if there is any dangerous object on it.

Some people are against these new machines. They think that they are a violation of the privacy – their personal rights of people not to have someone looking at their body. The word “privacy” (privacy) comes from the word “private,” and it means secret or not letting anyone else know about your own personal things.

Other people say that it's better than trying to pat down everyone, or doing strip searches. A “strip search” is when you go into a special room and you have to take your clothing off completely. Some people are saying that the X-ray machine would be a better way to do this. Right now, however, there are only a couple of airports in United States that are testing this new system, so it's still something very new and experimental.

Typically, when you go into a U.S. airport and you go to the security checkpoint, you have to put your bags through the X-ray machine. You have to take your shoes off and your jacket off and put those through the X-ray machine, usually. Then you walk through the metal detector that sees, or checks, to see if you have any metal objects. And then, if you have a metal object on you, if the metal detector goes off, then you have to be checked more carefully.

When we say the metal detector “goes off,” we mean it makes a sound or an indication that you might have some metal on you, and that is when the security officer will do a pat down. Or, sometimes they have a special hand metal detector called a “wand” (wand), and they take this wand, which is maybe a 12-inch or 16-inch piece of metal like a stick, then they put it around your body – they go up and down your arms and your legs to make sure that you don't have any metal objects on you.

If you do have to go through security at an American airport, it's very important not to try to make a joke with the security officers. Don't try to be funny; they don't like that, and they usually give people more problems if you try to be funny. So, just be serious and walk through, and you shouldn't have any problems, at least at the security checkpoint.



---

**ENGLISH CAFÉ – 89**

---

Our next topic is something you may be familiar with, called the Guinness Book of World Records. The Guinness Book of World Records is what we would call a “reference book.” A “reference book” is a book that gives you information, such as a dictionary, an encyclopedia, a catalogue of colleges and universities; all of these would be “reference books.” And if you go to a library – a public library or a school library – they’ll have a special reference section. Sometimes they will have a special person working in that section, called the “reference librarian.” Reference books usually cannot be removed from the library building.

The Guinness Book of World Records is a book of achievements that people have made: people who have climbed many mountains, or people who have done other things for the longest amount of time, or done something at the highest level. The Guinness Book also has world records of natural phenomenon – that is the highest mountain, the longest river, and so forth.

The Guinness Book was originally started back in the 1950s by someone who worked for the Guinness Brewery. A “brewery” (brewery) is a place that makes beer, an alcoholic drink. Guinness is still a very famous beer from Ireland. If you drink beer, you probably have heard of it. Well, the director of the Guinness Brewery had this idea of starting a book that had all of these world records in it, and he talked to some people at the universities there, and decided in 1954 to compile what became known as the Guinness Book of World Records. “To compile” (compile) means to put together or to put in one place many different facts.

The book was sold in the bookstores; it was what you might call a “surprise hit.” When we say something is a “hit,” we mean it is very popular. A song can be a hit – it can be a popular song. A movie can be a hit. You can say, “Titanic was a hit movie.” Of course, Titanic also hit the iceberg! That’s a different use of the verb “hit,” but as an adjective, “hit” means successful. So, the book was a surprising success – a surprise hit. It began to sell many, many copies.

Later on, the Guinness Company decided to open some museums in several cities throughout the world. You can visit the Guinness World Records Museums; these are in places such as Tokyo. Here in Los Angeles, in the Hollywood neighborhood of Los Angeles, we have one of these small museums. I have never actually been to the Hollywood museum; I’m not sure if it’s really something I would find very interesting.

If you pick up the Guinness Book of World Records, you will find lots of interesting facts. Some of these are important pieces of information. For



## ENGLISH CAFÉ – 89

---

example, the largest country in the world by population, meaning that has the most number of people. That, of course, is China. The smallest by population is Vatican City, which is the home of the Catholic Church in Italy – the world capital, you could say. The largest city, in population, would be the Tokyo area. The most popular language in the world is Mandarin Chinese; over 1 billion people speak Mandarin Chinese. But the most widespread spoken language is probably English, at least if you think of first and second language speakers.

There are also some very unimportant facts. For example, the world's longest “hot dog,” which is a round piece of meat that is very popular in the U.S., especially if you go to a baseball game; they always have hot dogs for sale. The longest hot dog was 104 feet, 9 inches. No one really cares about that, but that's the kind of what we would call “trivia” you can find in the Guinness Book of World Records. “Trivia” (trivia) is an unimportant fact, something that isn't necessarily something that you need to know to survive in the world but might be interesting to know.

You may be interested in knowing what our questions are for today, so let's get to that! Our first question comes from Co (Co), originally from Vietnam, now living in California. Co wants to know the meaning of the expression “under siege” (siege).

“Under siege” is when you have soldiers – people in the army – or police officers who surround an area. It could be a large area such as a city; it could be a small area such as a building, and they prevent anyone from leaving or going into the area. That's to be “under siege.”

Sometimes we use it, however, in a more general way. You might say, for example, “I felt like I was under siege when the lawyers kept asking me all the difficult questions.” So, it's like you're being attacked. Sometimes we use “under siege” to mean to be attacked by someone; to be criticized or to have negative things said to you. It also has the more traditional meaning of when the police or the military surround an area so that no one can leave it or get into it.

Our second question comes from Kesia (Kesia) down in Brazil. Kesia wants to know the meaning of an expression: “runs like butter.” For example, what does the sentence “The school runs like butter” mean?

This is not a very common expression, but it means operates without any problems or functions very smoothly without any problems. So, if you say, “The



## ENGLISH CAFÉ – 89

---

school runs like butter,” you mean it doesn't have any problems when it is operating.

“Butter” (butter) is something that you might put on your sandwich, on a piece of bread. It comes from a cow originally. It's often white or yellow. The word “butter” is sometimes used as an adjective, informally, to mean very smooth, and that's the meaning that we have here.

Our next question comes from Sihyung (Sihyung) from somewhere, I'm not sure where. The moon, perhaps! In episode 245 of ESL Podcast, there's a sentence that Sihyung didn't understand. The woman in the dialogue says, “I've been trying to set up my good friend with one of my single girlfriends.” The question is: “How can this woman be someone who has a girlfriend, since 'girlfriend' is normally someone who's in a romantic relationship? The same is true for 'boyfriend.' This woman is already married.”

Normally this is true that we use the word “girlfriend” to mean someone who you are in a romantic relationship with. However, women sometimes call their own female or woman friends “girlfriends.” Men, however, never call their male friends “boyfriends.” You would call your male friends your “buddies,” perhaps (buddies). You could also say your “guy friends” (guy), which refers to a man often, but you would never say a “boyfriend.”

So, “girlfriend” can mean a romantic partner, or, if a woman is using the term, it's usually about another female friend that she has. “Boyfriend,” however, only means a romantic partner. So thank you Sihyung, wherever you are, for that question.

Our final question comes from Claudia (Claudia), originally from Argentina – Argentina – now living in Los Angeles. Claudia wants to know the meaning of the expression “to trade (trade) up.” What does it mean, “to trade up”?

“To trade up” means to exchange or sell something that you have in order to get a better kind of that same thing. We often use this expression in talking about cars or houses. For example, if you own a small car, you may say, “I want to trade up. I want to get a bigger, more expensive car.” Or, if you live in a small house, you may say that you are thinking of “trading up” to a bigger house in Beverly Hills.

If you have a question for ESL Podcast, you can email us. Our email address is [eslpod@eslpod.com](mailto:eslpod@eslpod.com).





English as a Second Language Podcast  
[www.eslpod.com](http://www.eslpod.com)

**ENGLISH CAFÉ – 89**

---

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 Café is written and produced by Dr. Jeff McQuillan and Dr. Lucy Tse. This podcast is copyright 2007 by the Center for Educational Development.