



ESL Podcast 386 – Learning How to Drive

GLOSSARY

brake – the part of the car that is near the driver’s feet that, when stepped on, makes the car slow down or stop; the part of any moving machine used to stop
* Jeb stepped on the brakes very quickly when he saw that children were playing in the street.

gas pedal – the part of the car that is near the driver’s feet that, when stepped on, makes the car start moving or go faster.
* When Ingot’s foot slipped and hit the gas pedal, the car jumped forward very quickly.

to take 10 years off (one’s) life – a phrase used to show that one was very scared by another person’s actions and, as a result, will die 10 years earlier
* Coming home and finding a thief in my house took 10 years off my life!

median – the space between two sides of a highway or another major road, usually covered with grass or made from cement
* The city decided to plant flowers in the median to make the roadways more beautiful.

railing – a short piece of metal along the side of a road to keep cars from accidentally driving off the road
* When the driver fell asleep, he would have accidentally driven off the side of the mountain if the railing hadn’t stopped his car.

to not know what (one) is getting into – to do something without knowing all the details ahead of time; to do something without realizing the extent or danger before doing it
* You don’t know what you’re getting into by studying to become a doctor! It requires years and years of hard work.

to get the hang of (something) – to begin to understand how to do something and be able to do it better
* It takes some people a long time to get the hang of skiing.

to shift gears – to change the speed and power of a vehicle by moving a stick inside the car
* When you go uphill, shift from fifth gear to fourth gear so that the car has more power.



ESL Podcast 386 – Learning How to Drive

to parallel park – to park on the side of a street so that all the cars are in a line, with each car's front next to another car's back

* How many times did you have to back up to parallel park in that tiny space?

reverse – backwards; facing backward

* Driving in reverse is more difficult than driving forward because you can't see where you're going very easily.

steering wheel – the large circle in a car that a driver moves with his or her hands to make the car change directions

* Drivers who don't wear seatbelts often get hurt in high-speed accidents when their body hits the steering wheel.

speedometer – the small, circular display in front of a driver that shows how fast the car is moving

* The policeman said that I was driving 75 miles per hour, but the speedometer showed only 62 miles per hour.

rearview mirror – the small, rectangular mirror that hangs in the center of the front of a car so that the driver can see behind the car

* That woman is using her rearview mirror to put on makeup while driving on the freeway!

to work (oneself) into a tizzy – to become very anxious, worried, panicked, or stressed

* Yvonne always works herself into a tizzy before important tests.

sidewalk – the narrow, flat surface next to a road, usually made from cement, that people walk on

* Nancy sweeps the sidewalk in front of her home every morning.



ESL Podcast 386 – Learning How to Drive

COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

1. Which of these things do drivers use to parallel park?
 - a) Gas pedal
 - b) Median
 - c) Speedometer
2. Who should use the sidewalk?
 - a) Walkers
 - b) Drivers
 - c) Cars

WHAT ELSE DOES IT MEAN?

median

The word “median,” in this podcast, means the space between two sides of a highway or another important road: “While we were driving north on the highway, we looked over the median and could see that the cars going south were moving very slowly.” In mathematics, the word “median” describes a number that is in the middle of an ordered list, with an equal number of items above and below it: “In the set [2, 4, 5, 8, 9], 5 is the median.” Finally, in geometry, a “median” is a line drawn from one point of a triangle to the center of the opposite side: “The median of an equilateral triangle always divides the triangle into two identical, smaller triangles.”

reverse

In this podcast, the word “reverse” means backwards: “Even when you cross a one-way street, be sure to always look both ways, just in case a car is driving in reverse.” As a verb, “to reverse” means to make something change completely, so that it is the opposite of what it was before: “The teacher never used to assign homework, but last year she reversed her practices and started giving a lot of assignments.” The phrase “to reverse oneself on (something)” means to change one’s opinion about something: “The presidential candidate reversed himself on the issue of gun control.” Finally, the verb “to reverse” can mean to exchange: “When Brock’s mom started dating, he felt like they had reversed roles, since he started to ask her questions about where she was going and when she would be home.”



ESL Podcast 386 – Learning How to Drive

CULTURE NOTE

Driving in the United States is much like driving in any other country, but there are some common road rules that you may not be familiar with. Here are a few of them.

In the United States, if you are following a “school bus” (a large, yellow bus that is used to take children to and from their home and school), you must stop when it stops. It is “illegal” (against the law) to “pass” (drive past) a school bus when it is stopped. This is because cars might hit children who get off the bus and cross the street without looking both ways. Most school buses have warning messages written on the back, reminding drivers that it is illegal to pass a stopped bus.

Drivers also need to “yield” (slow down or stop to let another person or vehicle move) to “pedestrians” (people who are walking). If a person is crossing the road in front of a car, the driver should slow down or stop to let that person continue moving. Most American drivers do that, but “nevertheless” (even though this is true) pedestrians should walk with “caution” (care for one’s safety) and never “assume” (believe that something is true) that a car will stop.

At an “intersection” (the place where two streets meet), cars that want to turn left have to wait for cars coming from the other direction to leave the intersection first. A “Boston left,” the practice of making a left turn quickly before cars from the opposite direction, is illegal. Drivers need to wait until all of the cars coming in the other direction have crossed the intersection before turning. In some cities, the traffic lights include a green “arrow” (←), which comes before the green light for the cars in the opposite direction. In this case, it is permitted to turn left before the opposing cars.

Comprehension Questions Correct Answers: 1 – a; 2 – a



ESL Podcast 386 – Learning How to Drive

COMPLETE TRANSCRIPT

Welcome to English as a Second Language Podcast number 386: Learning How to Drive.

This is ESL Podcast number 386. I'm your host, Dr. Jeff McQuillan, coming to you from the Center for Educational Development in beautiful Los Angeles, California.

Our website is eslpod.com. You can download an 8 to 10 page Learning Guide for this episode that will help you improve your English even faster. You can also take a look at our ESL Podcast Store, which has some additional courses in daily and business English.

This episode is called "Learning How to Drive." It's a dialogue between Xavier and Brandy, and it includes a lot of vocabulary you would use in talking about driving a car. Let's get started.

[start of dialogue]

Xavier: Look out! Put your foot on the brake!

Brandy: I am braking.

Xavier: No, your foot is on the gas pedal!

Brandy: Oh. There's the brake.

Xavier: You just took 10 years off my life. I was sure you were going to hit the median or the railing. I didn't know what I was getting into when I agreed to teach you how to drive.

Brandy: Relax. I'm really getting the hang of this. Shifting gears isn't as hard as I thought it would be, it's cool to parallel park, and driving in reverse is fun!

Xavier: Would you please keep your hands on the steering wheel, instead of playing with the radio? Keep your eyes on the speedometer and stop using the rearview mirror to look at yourself.

Brandy: And you stop working yourself into a tizzy. I'm a fine driver.

Xavier: I don't think those people you're about to hit would agree with you.



ESL Podcast 386 – Learning How to Drive

Brandy: If they don't like the way I drive, they should get off the sidewalk!

[end of dialogue]

Our dialogue begins with Xavier saying to Brandy, "Look out (meaning be careful)! Put your foot on the brake!" The "brakes" slow and stop the car; they slow and stop the wheels from turning. When we say "the brake," we mean really the brake pedal, which is a little a little piece of metal that you press down with your foot in order to make the brakes work. So, Xavier is saying, "Put your foot on the brake," meaning press the brake pedal down. Brandy says, "I am braking." Notice "to brake" can be a verb as well: to slow something down. Xavier says, "No, your foot is on the gas pedal!" The "gas pedal" is the opposite, in some ways, of the brake pedal; it makes the car go faster. Of course, that would be a big mistake to make! Brandy says, "Oh," realizing her error, "There's the brake," meaning "Now I have found the brake."

Xavier is teaching Brandy how to drive. In the United States you can get your driver's license beginning at the age of 16. But if you get a license at 16 or 17, you have to take formal classes; someone has to teach you how to drive, and you have to pass a test. If you are 18 years or over, in most states, you don't have to take classes; you can if you want to, but you can teach yourself or, better yet, have someone else teach you how to drive. You can't drive without someone in the car with you to help you until you get your license. Getting a driver's license in the U.S. requires two tests: a written test and a road test, or what sometimes is called a "behind the wheel" test, where you are actually in a car and someone is testing your driving. But in our dialogue, Brandy is still learning to drive, from Xavier.

Xavier says to Brandy, "You just took 10 years off my life." To "take 10 years" or "five years off someone's life" is a phrase we use to say that you were very scared by what another person did. The idea is that because you became so scared – so frightened – your health got worse and you will die 10 years earlier than you would have otherwise. So, it's obviously not a compliment; it's something of a criticism. When you say something like that, you're saying that the person did something very dangerous or very scary.

Xavier says, "I was sure you were going to hit the median or the railing." The "median" (median), here, means the space between the two sides of a highway or another large or important street. Usually, the median has either grass or cement that separates the two sides, so the eastbound and the westbound. The cars going in one direction and the cars going in the other direction are separated



ESL Podcast 386 – Learning How to Drive

by a median. “Median” has a couple different meanings in English; take a look at that Learning Guide for some additional explanations.

Xavier also talks about the railing. The “railing” is a short piece of metal that is along the side of the road to prevent cars from accidentally going off the road and into the area next to the road. Usually you will find these on freeways and highways; railings will prevent cars from damaging the parts of the property that are next to the highway. It will also prevent the car from, perhaps, going down into an area where they could get killed more easily. Of course, if you hit the railing at a very high speed, you can get killed as well.

Xavier says, “I didn’t know what I was getting into when I agreed to teach you how to drive.” The expression “to not know what you are getting into” means to do something without knowing all of the details ahead of time; to do something without realizing, perhaps, how much work it was or how dangerous it was. People often say this about marriage!

Brandy then says, “Relax. I’m really getting the hang of this.” Once again, we have an idiomatic expression; to “get the hang of” something means to begin to understand how to do something and be able to do it better. If you just start a new type of activity – driving or flying a plane, or anything that requires a lot of learning – you may use this expression as you start to get better at it. Or, if you’re learning to play a musical instrument and you start to sound better, you could say, “I’m getting the hang of this.”

Brandy says, “Shifting gears isn’t as hard as I thought it would be.” To “shift gears” means to change the speed and power of the car, usually by moving a small stick. In the U.S., as in most countries, there are two kinds of cars. The kind of car where you have to move this stick, what we call a “stick shift,” back and forth between the different positions – the different gears – this is called a “stick shift,” or simply a “stick.” Someone says, “I’m driving a stick,” they don’t mean a real stick, which is a long pole, they mean a stick shift car. The opposite would be an automatic transmission, and there you don’t have to use a stick to move things, usually, back and forth between the gears. You do need to move it from park – from the stop position – to the drive position. But it’s not the same as a stick shift, where you have to move it as you go faster and slower.

Brandy also says that it’s cool to parallel park. To “park your car” means to put your car on the side of the road and stop it and leave it there. To “parallel park” means that you park your car in between two other cars, and usually this means that you have to pull up in front of the second car and then go in reverse, we would say “back up” into this empty space. It’s often considered one of the more



ESL Podcast 386 – Learning How to Drive

difficult things to learn how to do when you first learn to drive. Brandy says, “driving in reverse is fun!” “Reverse” means going backwards.

Xavier says to Brandy, “Would you please keep your hands on the steering wheel, instead of playing with the radio?” The “steering wheel” is the large circle – a large wheel that the driver holds onto to move the car left or right; you turn the wheel. That’s called a “steering wheel”; the verb “to steer” means to take something and put it in a certain direction, in this case the car.

Xavier is telling Brandy to keep her hands on the steering wheel, instead of playing with the radio. People, of course, often do other things while they are driving, and this can be very dangerous. Xavier says, “Keep your eyes on the speedometer and stop using the rearview mirror to look at yourself.” “Keep your eyes on the speedometer” means look at the speedometer. The “speedometer” (which looks like it’s spelled “speed-o-meter,” but we say “speedometer”) is a small display in the front of the car that you can look at that tells you how fast you are going – what your speed is. The “rearview mirror” is the mirror that hangs in the center front of the car that allows you to look behind you to see what is behind you. Xavier is telling Brandy to stop using the mirrors to fix her hair or to look at herself. Sometimes women do that when they drive – men do it, too, I guess. Not me; I don’t wear makeup – normally!

Brandy says to Xavier, “And you stop working yourself into a tizzy.” This is an expression, “to work yourself into a tizzy” (tizzy), that means to become very worried or very anxious, to have a lot of stress. It’s a sort of old-fashion word, but you’ll still hear people use this expression: “to work yourself into a tizzy.”

Brandy says, “I’m a fine driver.” Xavier responds, “I don’t think those people you’re about to hit would agree with you.” So he’s making a joke, saying that Brandy is about to hit some people who are walking, and they probably don’t think she is a good driver if she does that. Brandy says, “If they don’t like the way I drive, they should get off the sidewalk!” The “sidewalk” is a narrow part next to the road that people walk on. So if you go down a street, on both sides of the street, normally in an American city, you will have sidewalks, places where people can walk. Of course, Brandy is sort of making a joke here – we hope! Cars should never, ever be on the sidewalk; that would be very dangerous to people who are walking on the sidewalk. She says, “Well, if they don’t like my driving, they shouldn’t be on the sidewalk,” suggesting that it’s okay for her to drive on the sidewalk. Again, we hope she’s joking!

Now let’s listen to the dialogue, this time at a normal speed.



ESL Podcast 386 – Learning How to Drive

[start of dialogue]

Xavier: Look out! Put your foot on the brake!

Brandy: I am braking.

Xavier: No, your foot is on the gas pedal!

Brandy: Oh. There's the brake.

Xavier: You just took 10 years off my life. I was sure you were going to hit the median or the railing. I didn't know what I was getting into when I agreed to teach you how to drive.

Brandy: Relax. I'm really getting the hang of this. Shifting gears isn't as hard as I thought it would be, it's cool to parallel park, and driving in reverse is fun!

Xavier: Would you please keep your hands on the steering wheel, instead of playing with the radio? Keep your eyes on the speedometer and stop using the rearview mirror to look at yourself.

Brandy: And you stop working yourself into a tizzy. I'm a fine driver.

Xavier: I don't think those people you're about to hit would agree with you.

Brandy: If they don't like the way I drive, they should get off the sidewalk!

[end of dialogue]

The script for this episode was written by someone who certainly has the hang of scriptwriting, Dr. Lucy Tse.

From Los Angeles, California, I'm Jeff McQuillan. Thanks for listening. We'll see you next time on ESL Podcast.

English as a Second Language Podcast is written and produced by Dr. Lucy Tse, hosted by Dr. Jeff McQuillan. This podcast is copyright 2008.