



ESL Podcast 536 – Using a Computer Keyboard

GLOSSARY

keyboard – the flat, rectangular part of a computer that has many buttons with letters, numbers, and symbols that one pushes with one’s fingers to type

* On a Spanish-language keyboard, the ñ is where the semicolon (;) is on the English-language keyboard.

QWERTY – used to describe a keyboard design where the letters Q-W-E-R-T-Y are the first letters in the top row when read from left to right

* The QWERTY keyboard was designed to make it easy for salespeople to type the word “typewriter” while demonstrating how a typewriter works, since all those letters are on the top row.

layout – the organization of something; the position of individual pieces of something; the way something is organized or arranged

* This house has a very strange layout. When you walk into the house, you have to go through the bathroom and the laundry room before you enter the living area.

function key – one of the F1, F2,...F12 buttons on a keyboard that represent specific commands

* Once you’ve highlighted a file name, pushing the F2 function key makes it easy to rename the file.

ergonomic – a way of designing equipment, technology, and furniture to make it easier, safer, more efficient, and more comfortable to use

* When Cort told the doctor his back hurt, she recommended that he buy an ergonomic chair to use at the office.

wireless – without being connected by any cables; describing a technology that isn’t physically connected to other pieces of technology, but can communicate with them by sending signals through the air

* We bought a wireless telephone for the house so that we can walk around and do things while making phone calls.

to single (someone) out – to treat someone in a way that is different from the way everyone else is treated, especially if it’s something that person doesn’t like

* Why does Ms. Pebley always single you out, making you answer the hardest questions in class?



ESL Podcast 536 – Using a Computer Keyboard

orientation – an overview; basic information to make someone more familiar or more comfortable with something, and giving someone enough information to be able to begin using something

* All the new employees get a quick orientation on their first day at work when they're shown how to use the copier, fax machine, and other office equipment.

built-in – describing something that is a permanent part of something else, and was not added or purchased separately

* This apartment has built-in book cases.

number pad – a small keyboard, or a part of a larger keyboard, that has buttons for numbers 0-9 and mathematical symbols, like /, *, -, and +

* When working on spreadsheets, Mary prefers using a number pad so that she can type the numbers more quickly.

num lock – number lock; the button on a keyboard that controls whether the buttons on the number pad function as numbers or as arrows

* To play this game, you need to hit the num lock key once, so that pressing 8 makes the character go up, pressing 2 makes it go down, and pressing 4 and 6 make it move from side to side.

esc – escape; the button on a keyboard that allows one to exit from a program or de-select something

* If the program stops working, just hit esc to return to the main menu.

control – a button on the bottom row of a keyboard that, when pressed in combination with other buttons, lets one perform commands within computer programs

* In Microsoft Word, pushing control-z lets you undo your previous action.

alt – a button on the bottom row of a keyboard that opens menus so that one can then press other keys to perform commands within a computer program

* You can save a file in Microsoft Excel without using the mouse by pushing alt, F, and then S, which opens the File Menu and then selects Save.

shift – one of two buttons on the keyboard, on the left and right side, that is used with letter keys to make them capitalized

* If you want to display the # symbol, press shift and 3 at the same time.



ESL Podcast 536 – Using a Computer Keyboard

caps lock – a button on the left-hand side of the keyboard that, when pressed, makes all other letters capitalized until it is pressed again

* Most email users think it's rude to type with the caps lock on, because the capitalized text makes it look like you're yelling.

hotkey – one or more buttons on a keyboard that one can push to make the computer perform a particular command or a series of commands

* If you push this hotkey, the computer will automatically open your email program and check for new messages.

stuck with – forced to have, do, or use something when one does not like it

* Nobody likes the new rules, but we're stuck with them until the manager decides to change them again.

that's the spirit – a phrase used to encourage another person to continue doing what he or she is doing, or to continue to have the same positive attitude

* - This biochemistry class is really difficult, but I know I can get an A.
- That's the spirit!

COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

1. Why does Leslie have a new keyboard?
 - a) Because the old one stopped working.
 - b) Because the wires weren't long enough.
 - c) Because her employer wanted to upgrade all the keyboards.
2. Which key would you use to type the "&" symbol?
 - a) The esc key.
 - b) The alt key.
 - c) The shift key.

WHAT ELSE DOES IT MEAN?

to be singled out

The phrase "to be singled out," in this podcast, means to be treated in a way that is different from the way everyone else is treated, especially if it's something one doesn't like: "Almost all the kids were misbehaving, but Michael was singled out for punishment, because he is the oldest and should have known better." The phrase "to be single" means to be unmarried: "Are you single, married, widowed,



ESL Podcast 536 – Using a Computer Keyboard

or divorced?” Finally, the word “singles” can be used to refer to all people who are not married: “This dance club is very popular among singles in their 20s.”

orientation

In this podcast, the word “orientation” means an overview: “All new students are required to participate in a two-day orientation before classes begin.” The phrase “religious orientation” or “political orientation” is used to talk about one’s general religious or political beliefs: “Geoffrey is a conservative Republican, but he has many friends with other political orientations.” Finally, the phrase “sexual orientation” is used to talk about whether one prefers men, women, or both for romantic or sexual relationships: “Our employees’ sexual orientation is none of our business.”

CULTURE NOTE

Early typewriters had keyboards where the letters were “arranged” (organized) alphabetically. This made it very easy for “typists” (people who type) to find letters on the keyboard, but it also created problems. Each time a typist hit a key, a long piece of metal moved upward to “strike” (hit) the paper. If the typist typed too quickly, pieces of metal that were next to each other would hit each other and “jam up” (get in the way so that a machine cannot work) the typewriter.

The QWERTY keyboard layout was created by Christopher Sholes in 1874 as a way to solve this problem. The QWERTY layout separates common “keystroke” (the act of pressing one key) combinations, so that the metal pieces were less likely to hit each other.

The QWERTY keyboard layout was also created to help salespeople sell more typewriters. When they needed to “demonstrate” (show how something works) the typewriter to a potential customer, they could type the word “typewriter” by using only keys on the top row, making it seem like it was very easy to type.

Of course, modern computers don’t jam up, so it may seem strange that almost all Americans continue to use the “inefficient” (not working as well as something could or should) QWERTY keyboard layout. Several other, more efficient layouts have been created, but they are not very popular because so many people have already learned how to type on the QWERTY keyboard layout.

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



ESL Podcast 536 – Using a Computer Keyboard

COMPLETE TRANSCRIPT

Welcome to English as a Second Language Podcast number 536: Using a Computer Keyboard.

This is English as a Second Language Podcast number 536. 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 – that's www.eslpod.com. Go there to download a Learning Guide for this episode. The Learning Guides are 8- to 10-page guides for each of our current episodes that allow you to improve your English even faster. If you don't want to become a Learning Guide member and support these free audio podcast that way, you can also make a donation to our podcast by going to the website.

This episode is called "Using a Computer Keyboard," something that all of us probably do every day. It's going to talk about some specific vocabulary we use when talking about a keyboard. Let's get started.

[start of dialogue]

Leslie: This keyboard is so hard to use. I can't find where anything is!

Dave: It's a standard QWERTY keyboard. The layout may be a little different, with the function keys on the right-hand side instead of on the top, but you'll get used to it in no time.

Leslie: That's what you think. I don't need an ergonomic wireless keyboard. I liked my old one.

Dave: Everybody in the office is getting one, so you weren't singled out. Okay, let me give you a quick orientation. The keyboard has a built-in number pad, and all you need to do is press the "num lock" key to use it. The escape ("esc") key is over here, and the "control," "alt," and "shift" keys are on the bottom.

Leslie: Where's the "caps lock"?

Dave: It's on your left.

Leslie: But my old keyboard had a bunch of hotkeys. What am I supposed to do without them?



ESL Podcast 536 – Using a Computer Keyboard

Dave: You can program your function keys to act as hotkeys. Do you want me to show you how to do that?

Leslie: I guess so. Since I'm stuck with this keyboard, I guess I have to live with it.

Dave: That's the spirit!

[end of dialogue]

Leslie begins our dialogue by saying, "This keyboard is so hard to use." The "keyboard," as you probably know, is the flat, rectangular part of the computer that has buttons on it that you press down in order to enter information into a computer. Leslie says, "I can't find where anything is (I can't locate anything)!"

Dave says, "It's a standard QWERTY keyboard." "QWERTY" (QWERTY) is used to describe a keyboard design, the most common keyboard design in English, where the letters Q-W-E-R-T-Y are the first letters in the top row when you read them from left to right. This is a QWERTY keyboard, Dave says, "The layout may be a little different, with the function keys on the right side instead of on the top, but you'll get used to it in no time." A "layout" is a way that we organize things; it's the position of individual pieces of something. You can talk about the layout of a house, how the house is designed – where the bedrooms are, where the bathrooms are. "Layout," here, refers to the position of the keys – the "keys" are the buttons that you press, that's why we call it a keyboard. The position of the keys is the layout for the keyboard. Dave is saying that the function keys for this keyboard are on the right-hand side – on the right of the keyboard – instead of on the top. "Function keys" are the ones that say "F1, F2, F3," and so on to "F12" that are used in some computers for specific commands, things that the computer does if you press one of those keys.

Dave says that Leslie will get used to it in no time, meaning very quickly. Leslie says, "That's what you think," meaning that's your opinion, but it isn't true. "That's what you think. I don't need an ergonomic wireless keyboard. I liked my old one." The word "ergonomic" (ergonomic) is an adjective we use to describe equipment, technology, or furniture that is made to be more efficient to use, so that it doesn't hurt your body. For example, an ergonomic chair would be a chair that you could sit in for a long time and it wouldn't hurt your back. An ergonomic keyboard is designed so that you can use it without hurting your hands – without getting any sort of pain in your hands. It's supposed to be designed to prevent that. "Wireless" keyboards are keyboards that you don't have a physical wire to



ESL Podcast 536 – Using a Computer Keyboard

connect the keyboard to the computer. Wireless – without wires. Many keyboards and mice nowadays are wireless, my keyboard and mouse are wireless for example.

Leslie said she liked her old keyboard. Dave says, “Everybody in the office is getting one (is getting these new keyboards), so you weren’t singled out.” “To single (someone) out” is a phrasal verb meaning to treat someone differently than everyone else, especially if it’s something a person doesn’t like. For example, the teacher may say, “Everyone needs to write a five-page essay (a five-page paper),” and one of the students complains about it, the teacher could say, “Well, you are not being singled out. Everyone has to do this.” So, Leslie is not being singled out. By the way, the word “single” has a couple of different meanings in English. For those meanings, take a look at our Learning Guide for this episode.

Dave says, “Okay, let me give you a quick orientation.” The word “orientation,” here, means an overview, when someone gives you basic information to make you familiar with something, to give you some important information. When you start a new job you may attend a company orientation, where they give you information about things that are important for you to know in that company. “Orientation,” however, has other meanings, just like the word “single.” You can find those meanings in our Learning Guide for this episode.

Dave says, “This keyboard has a built-in number pad.” When we say something is “built-in,” we’re describing something that is a permanent part of something else; it wasn’t added separately, it was made that way. For example, you could have a built-in closet (that is a place where you keep your clothes). In my room – in my bedroom, I have a built-in closet. It’s not a separate piece of furniture that we bought and put in my room, it was part of the room; it was built that way. “Built” is the past tense of “build.” So, something that is “built-in” is a permanent part of it. Many keyboards have a built-in number pad. The “number pad” is a small, usually square or rectangular part of a keyboard that has just numbers as well as a few mathematical symbols. Number pads are useful for entering numbers in very quickly. In fact, some people are very fast when they use their number pads. Dave says, “all you need to do is press the ‘num lock’ key to use it.” On some keyboards the number pad is separate from the rest of the keys. In some keyboards, however, it’s part of the keys, and you have to press a special key – a special button to use it, and that is typically called the “num (num) lock” (“num” stands for “number”).

He says, “The escape key (‘esc’) is over here.” On a keyboard, “esc” means escape, often used to get out of a program or to perhaps undo something that



ESL Podcast 536 – Using a Computer Keyboard

you did. He says, “the ‘control,’ ‘alt’ (alt), and ‘shift’ keys are on the bottom.” These are special keys used on keyboards for specific commands or functions on computers. The “control” key is usually pressed with another key to do something in a computer program. For example, on Windows, when you are in the program Microsoft Word and you press control-z (the letter “z”) you will undo your previous action. The “alt” key is similar; the alt key is usually pressed with another key to do something. It’s often used to open menus in a computer program. The “shift” key is the key you press to make capital letters (to make large letters). It’s also, again, used as part of a command sometimes. If you press control-alt-delete on a Windows machine that usually will turn your computer off; it will shut it down or give you that option.

Leslie says, “Where’s the ‘caps lock’?” The “caps lock” is the key, usually on the left side of the keyboard, that when pressed makes all of the letters capital letters. It’s like having the shift key always being pressed. The word “caps” (caps) stands for “capitals” or “capital letters.”

Dave says to Leslie, “The caps lock is on your left.” Leslie says, “But my old keyboard had a bunch of hotkeys.” “Hotkeys” are additional keys or buttons that you can press to make the computer do certain things. On some computer programs, you can often “program” the hotkeys, make certain combination of keys or certain keys command buttons so that when you press them something happens right away. Leslie says, “What am I supposed to do without them?” This Leslie really likes to complain, doesn’t she? Dave says, “You can program your function keys to act as hotkeys. Do you want me to show you how to do that?” Leslie says, “I guess so. Since I’m stuck with this keyboard, I guess I have to live with it.” “To be stuck with (something)” means to be forced to do something or be forced to use something that you don’t want to use. Leslie feels that she’s stuck with this keyboard, meaning she doesn’t have any other choice, but she’s not very happy about it. Leslie is a very unhappy person, it seems! She says, “I guess I have to live with it.” “To have to live with (something)” means you have to put up with it, you have to tolerate it.

Dave jokingly says, “That’s the spirit!” Normally, “that’s the spirit” is a phrase used to encourage the other person to continue doing what they are doing, to have a positive attitude. But here, it’s used sarcastically, as a joke, since Leslie has a very negative attitude. I think Leslie needs to look for a new job, personally!

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

[start of dialogue]



ESL Podcast 536 – Using a Computer Keyboard

Leslie: This keyboard is so hard to use. I can't find where anything is!

Dave: It's a standard QWERTY keyboard. The layout may be a little different, with the function keys on the right-hand side instead of on the top, but you'll get used to it in no time.

Leslie: That's what you think. I don't need an ergonomic wireless keyboard. I liked my old one.

Dave: Everybody in the office is getting one, so you weren't singled out. Okay, let me give you a quick orientation. This keyboard has a built-in number pad, and all you have to do is press the "num lock" key to use it. The escape ("esc") key is over here, and the "control," "alt," and "shift" keys are on the bottom.

Leslie: Where's the "caps lock"?

Dave: It's on your left.

Leslie: But my old keyboard had a bunch of hotkeys. What am I supposed to do without them?

Dave: You can program your function keys to act as hotkeys. Do you want me to show you how to do that?

Leslie: I guess so. Since I'm stuck with this keyboard, I guess I have to live with it.

Dave: That's the spirit!

[end of dialogue]

If I had to single out the most important person at ESL Podcast, that would be our scriptwriter, Dr. Lucy Tse.

From Los Angeles, California, I'm Jeff McQuillan. Thank you for listening. Come back and listen to us next time on ESL Podcast.

English as a Second Language Podcast is written and produced by Dr. Lucy Tse, hosted by Dr. Jeff McQuillan, copyright 2009 by the Center for Educational Development.