

Pub English – Video

What can you do to get a taste of real British culture?

How about going to the pub (<https://www.quora.com/What-are-the-differences-between-Bars-Pubs-Clubs-Discos-and-Lounges>)? There are around 60,000 pubs in the UK, so if you're in the UK now, there is probably one just around the corner!

Pubs are incredibly popular in the UK, and traditional pubs still offer a glimpse of true British (<https://www.oxfordonlineenglish.com/british-american-pronunciation>) culture. Maybe you've been out sightseeing all day and you're looking for a nice place to relax.

No trip to the UK is complete without a visit to the local pub. In this lesson you'll learn pub English to help you order in a pub, and also how to sound like a real local while you're in there.

1. Basic Words and Phrases for Going to the Pub

(<https://www.oxfordonlineenglish.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/pub.webp>)

Imagine: you've found a beautiful old British pub; you walk in and go to the bar. The bartender asks: 'What can I get you?' What do you do?

Stephanie: Hello.

Olivier: Hi, what can I get you?

S: Um.... beer.

O: Which beer?

S: Umm... this one.

O: Pint or a half?

S: What?

O: Big or small?

S: Big, please.

O: Anything else?

S: What?

O: Do you want anything else?

S: Um... yes. Wine, please.

O: Red or white?

S: Red.

O: We've got Merlot, Cab, or Pinot.

S: [looks blank] That one.

O: Large or small?

S: Small. **O:**

Okay, anything else?

S: [shrugs shoulders]

O: Eight pounds forty please.

S: [hands over money]

O: Cheers.

S: Thank you.

Okay, let's be honest, that didn't go so well. Why not? There were many issues with understanding and using the vocabulary you need for pub English. But, there's good news! The vocabulary that you need in the pub is quite limited. Let's see how that could have gone better.

O: Hi, what can I get you?

S: A pint of Kronenbourg and a small glass of Merlot please.

O: Here you are. Anything else?

S: No thanks, that's all.

O: That'll be eight forty.

S: Here you are.

O: Cheers.

S: Thanks.

I think you can see that was much better. But what was different? Mostly, she was more specific with the order. That meant I didn't have to ask her so many questions, and the whole order didn't take much time. Pubs are informal places, so it's fine to use very simple, direct language in pub English.

You can simply list the drinks you want, like this: 'one pint of IPA and two small glasses of house white, please.' You can use phrases like 'I'd like...' or 'Can I have...?', but they aren't necessary. This is true for the bartender, too.

You should expect to hear shortened questions, like these: 'Ice?', 'Anything else?', 'Draft or bottle?' You should be ready for this, and not just in the pub! Shortened questions like these, for example 'Ice?' instead of 'Do you want ice?' are very common in informal English.

Now you know the basics, let's look at how to order all the different kinds of drinks you can find in a typical British pub.

2. Ordering Drinks

(<https://www.oxfordonlineenglish.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/beer.webp>)

Beer is by far the most popular drink ordered in pubs. Generally, you can choose from ale or lager. 'Ale' includes many kinds of beer (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_beer_styles). Light ale is often called 'bitter', while dark ale is often called 'stout'. Ale is especially popular in the UK, while in some countries it isn't a common drink. 'Lager' is the standard, light, fizzy beer that is popular around the world. So, a pub might have ales like Guinness, London Pride, or Doom Bar, and lagers like Kronenbourg, Fosters, Stella Artois, or Heineken. Both ale and lager come in bottles and draft. 'Draft' means from the tap.

The last thing to think about is the size. There are normally just two options: a pint, or a half-pint. A pint is just over 500ml. If you simply name the beer you want, the bartender will generally assume that you want a pint of draft beer. If you want a half-pint or a bottle, it's better to say so directly. Let's see an example of ordering some beer.

S: Hi, can I have an Amstel please?

O: Pint? **S:** Just a half, please.

O: Here you are. Easy, right? Let's look at one more example where it's a little more complicated.

S: Hi, two pints of Amstel, a bottle of Becks and half a Fosters please.

O: Sorry, the Amstel's off. How about Grolsch?

S: Sure, that's fine.

O: So that's two pints of Grolsch, one bottle of Becks, and a half of Fosters.

S: That's right.

O: No problem. Here you are.

Sometimes, the pub will run out of one kind of beer. If the bartender tells you that something is 'off', that means they don't have any more. In the past the selection of wines (<https://winefolly.com/review/common-types-of-wine/>) in pubs was quite limited, but now you will often find pubs with a large selection of wines. If you want to see which wines the pub has, you could ask: 'Do you have a wine list?' You could also ask: 'What red/white wines do you have?' Or, 'Do you have a Pinot Grigio?'

Let's see an example of ordering wine.

O: Hi, what can I get you?

S: Yes, what red wines do you have?

O: We've got a Pinot Noir, a Zinfandel and a Malbec.

S: Two large glasses of Pinot Noir please

O: Okay, no problem. That's four fifty, please.

S: Are you sure? That seems cheap...

O: It's happy hour till six, so they're two-for-one.

'Happy hour' is a time, usually early in the evening, when pubs and bars have special offers on drinks. Here, the wines were 'two-for-one', meaning you can buy one and get one free. Let's look at a slightly more complicated example of ordering wine.

O: Hi, what can I get you?

S: Hi, do you have Pinot Grigio?

O: No, sorry. We've only got Chardonnay or Cabernet Blanc.

S: Hmm. I don't really like either of those. What about rosé?

O: We only have one: a Syrah.

S: Okay, that's perfect. A large glass of Syrah and two small glasses of Chardonnay.

O: Anything else?

S: No that's all, thanks.

O: That'll be eleven pounds twenty, please.

S: Can I start a tab?

O: Of course. I'll just need to swipe a card.

Did you hear that phrase at the end: "Can I start a tab?" Can you guess what it means? A tab means that you pay for everything when you leave the pub. Normally, you pay for food and drinks as you order them, but if you're planning to stay in the pub for some time, you might start a tab so that you can order food and drinks quickly and conveniently.

You've seen how to order beer and wine; what other kind of drinks could you order? You could also order spirits or mixed drinks. 'Spirits' includes hard alcohol like vodka, whiskey, gin, rum, and so on. You can also order mixed drinks, like vodka and coke or gin and tonic. Some pubs might serve cocktails, although it's more common for bars to serve cocktails.

There's a difference between pubs and bars in the UK! Ordering mixed drinks is easy: put the spirit first, then the mixer, like this: 'vodka and orange', 'whiskey and coke', 'rum and ginger beer'.

S: Hi, what can I get you?

O: Two rum and cokes, a vodka lemonade and a gin and tonic please.

S: Anything else?

O: Oh, and a whiskey, please.

S: Straight?

O: Yes.

S: Ice?

O: No thanks.

Do you remember what was ordered? I asked for: two rum and cokes, a vodka lemonade, a gin and tonic and a straight whiskey. In pubs, it's common to leave out the word 'and' when ordering mixed drinks, so you can say, 'gin and tonic' or 'gin tonic'. 'Straight' here means without any mixer. If you want to sound like a real local, and you want ice with the drink, you can say 'on the rocks'. For example, 'A Glenlivet on the rocks please.'

3. Ordering Food

(<https://www.oxfordonlineenglish.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/hamburger.webp>)

Of course, you don't just come to the pub to drink! In recent years the food in pubs has really improved, and you can often find some nice traditional food. Pubs aren't restaurants, so you need to order food at the bar. The menu will often be written on a blackboard near the bar somewhere.

Let's see how to order food using pub English.

S: Hi, what can I get for you?

O: Can I order some food please?

S: Yes, of course. What table number are you?

O: Sorry, I'm not sure. It's that table in the corner.

S: Okay, no problem. That's table 7. What would you like?

O: I'd like one scampi and chips and a steak and ale pie.

S: Anything else?

O: Yes, do you have anything for children?

S: Yes, just down here we have a few things for children. [pointing]

O: Ah, excellent... And a spaghetti Bolognese as well please.

S: Okay, anything else?

O: No, that's everything.

S: Great, that's twenty-three seventy please.

O: Here you are.

S: Thank you. Cutlery and condiments are over on the table in the corner; you can just help yourself.

O: Thanks.

Do you remember what I ordered? There were three things. I ordered a scampi and chips, a steak and ale pie and a spaghetti Bolognese. 'Scampi' is shrimp which is covered in breadcrumbs and deep-fried. 'Steak and ale pie' is a traditional English pub dish. It's a pie with thick pastry, with beef cooked in ale inside.

Do you remember the first question the bartender asked? She asked, 'What table number are you?' Often you will see a number somewhere on the table. You need to tell the bartender your table number when you order food.

The only other question Oli asked was, 'Do you have anything for children?' Very often pubs will have a specific menu for children. If you can't see it on the menu, you can always ask.

Finally, at the end of the dialogue, I mentioned some things on the table in the corner. Do you remember what I said? I said that the cutlery and condiments were on the table. 'Cutlery' means knives, forks and spoons. 'Condiments' could be ketchup, mustard, mayonnaise, or salt and pepper, for example.

Learn more with this Oxford Online English lesson on talking about food (<https://www.oxfordonlineenglish.com/talk-about-food>).

Right, now you have your drink, and you're waiting for your food. It's time to do some talking. Next, you'll see some slang and idioms that you might hear and say in the pub.

4. Pub Slang and Idioms

I think you've got the basics now, but if you want to practice your English, you should speak to other people besides the bartender. Watch a dialogue and try to find the idioms and slang.

S: Is he alright?

O: He's just had one too many.

S: He's not drinking any more, is he?

O: No, no, he got cut off about an hour ago.

S: That's probably for the best. How about you?

O: Just a little tipsy, I got here late.

S: They're closing soon, right?

O: Yeah, they just called last orders, but I think some people are going to John's place for a bit of a piss-up.

S: Hmm... I'll come for a bit, but I can't stay long. I've got work in the morning and I don't want to be hungover.

O: That's what everyone says. Anyway, let's go, bottoms up!

So, what did you hear? At the beginning, I said, 'He's had one too many'. This is used to describe somebody who is drunk. There are many other words (<https://www.eurocentres.com/blog/15-ways-say-drunk-british-english/>) you can use here, like 'pissed', 'smashed', 'hammered', 'battered', 'wasted',... [interrupting] Okay, we get it!

There are many slang words you can use here. You also heard 'he got cut off about an hour ago'. 'Cut off' means that the bar staff refuse to sell you any more alcohol, because you've drunk too much already.

The next word was 'tipsy'. This is the feeling when you've had one or two drinks. You aren't drunk, but you can feel something from the alcohol.

I invited Stephanie to John's house for a 'piss-up'. This is a very informal way to describe a drinking session with a group of people. Don't expect to be drinking a cup of tea at a piss-up!

At the end of the evening, the bartender will call last orders. Sometimes they shout across the pub, or sometimes they ring a big bell. This is your last chance to order drinks before the pub closes.

I said that I didn't want to be 'hungover'. This isn't really slang or an idiom, but is a very common event after a night in the pub. When you wake up feeling terrible, it's because you are hungover.

The last phrase was 'bottoms up'. This a way of saying, finish your drink and often said as you are getting ready to leave the pub.

Now you should know how to order different drinks in a pub, so next time you're walking past an old traditional pub, why not stop for a quick drink and use some pub English! Thanks for watching!