



ESL Podcast 479 – Using Frequent Flyer Miles

GLOSSARY

long weekend – a period of three days (Friday-Sunday, or Saturday-Monday) where one has one extra day off from work, getting three free days in a row, usually because one uses a vacation day or because there is a holiday

* They drove to North Carolina and spent time on the coast over the long weekend.

to be strapped – to be broke; to not have enough money; to have very little money

* We can't go to the festival because we don't have enough money to buy a ticket. We're strapped until payday.

to set (one) back – to cost a certain amount of money; to make one pay a certain amount of money

* If you buy that new suit, it's going to set you back almost \$350.

frequent flyer miles – points in a program where one earns points (miles) every time one flies on a particular airline or spends money in certain ways, and those points can be exchanged for reduced-price or free flights in the future

* Damian is trying to get enough frequent flyer miles to fly to Hawaii for free.

blackout dates – dates when frequent flyer miles cannot be used and one cannot get a free or reduced-price ticket, no matter how many points one has

* Most airlines have blackout dates around Christmas because they want to make as much money as possible from the many people who are willing to pay a lot of money to visit relatives who live far away during the holidays.

to rack up – to get a lot of something, adding a little bit at a time over a period of time

* By the time Gabriel was 15 years old, he had already racked up \$1,700 in his savings account from doing small jobs for people in his neighborhood.

to enroll – to sign up for something; to enter a program; to begin to participate in something

* They decided to enroll in a swim class at the gym.

to redeem – to exchange points or pieces of paper for something that is worth money

* We got a coupon in the mail that we can redeem at the grocery store for a free bag of rice.



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upgrade – an increase or improvement from one thing or level to another

* If you have a Basic Membership in ESL Podcast, you can purchase an upgrade for just \$50 to become a Premium Member and have access to all the Learning Guides that we have ever made.

to add up – to increase, usually one at a time or a small amount at a time

* Eating out really adds up! \$4.00 for coffee and a muffin, \$9.25 for lunch, and \$1.20 for a soda and an apple as a snack...I've already spent almost \$15 and I still haven't had dinner!

to partner with (someone or an organization) – to collaborate and cooperate; to work closely with something on a project or in a program

* The Environmental Defense Fund partnered with McDonald's to try to decrease the amount of garbage produced by fast-food restaurants.

bonus – extra; additional; something that is not normally included

* Sheila got bonus points on the test for answering the optional questions.

restriction – a limitation; something that one cannot do or that is not allowed; a minimum or maximum

* In your office, are there restrictions on what employees can wear?

to work around (something) – to cope; to find a way to do what one wants despite restrictions or limitations; to be successful even though there are some obstacles or things that make it difficult

* Lana will be on vacation next week, so we'll need to work around her schedule.

elite status – a very high level in a program where one has a lot of benefits or advantages, usually because one has spent a lot of money to get to that level

* Hal has elite status at that hotel, so whenever he goes there, they give him the best room and a free bottle of wine.

a word to the wise – a phrase used when one is giving advice to another person

* A word to the wise: always think before you speak.

for the sake of – in order to

* Galina didn't say anything for the sake of avoiding an argument, but she really disagreed with Harold very strongly.



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point taken – a phrase used to show that one has heard and understood what another person has said, and accepts or agrees with it

* Kevin talked about the importance of saving money for emergencies. I said, “Point taken,” and decided to start saving more money right away.

COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

1. Why is Anne surprised that Jurgen was in Chicago?
 - a) Because she thought he had to work that weekend.
 - b) Because she didn’t think he had enough straps.
 - c) Because she didn’t think he had very much money.
 2. Why does Anne say, “Point taken”?
 - a) Because she’s taking Jurgen’s frequent flyer miles.
 - b) Because she accepts Jurgen’s advice.
 - c) Because she doesn’t like it when Jurgen gives her advice.
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WHAT ELSE DOES IT MEAN?

to be strapped

The phrase “to be strapped,” in this podcast, means to not have enough money: “They’re strapped this month because they bought a lot of new clothes.” The phrase “to be strapped for cash” has the same meaning: “Clarke was strapped for cash, so he paid for the meal with his credit card.” The phrase “to be strapped in” means to be wearing one’s seatbelt, or to be tied onto or into something: “Please don’t start driving until everyone is strapped in.” The phrase “to strap (something) down” means to tie something to the top of something else, especially to the top of a car: “They strapped their suitcases down and then started driving down the street.” Finally, the phrase “to strap (something) on” means to tie something to one’s body: “The hikers strapped their heavy backpacks on and started walking through the forest.”

bonus

In this podcast, the word “bonus” means extra, additional, or something that is not normally included: “Anyone who buys these dishes this week gets these knives as a free bonus.” A “bonus” is also money that one receives in addition to one’s normal pay for work: “All the employees got a 3% bonus at the end of the



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year.” Or, “Do you think we’ll get the holiday bonus this year?” The word can also be used as an adjective: “Students can receive 10 bonus points by completing extra homework assignments.” An “added bonus” is something that one did not expect to receive: “Heather had a great time at the party and, as an added bonus, met some new clients, too.”

CULTURE NOTE

Most people enroll in frequent flyer programs because they want to “earn” (get) miles and redeem them for reduced-price or free tickets, or get free upgrades to “first class” (more comfortable, larger seats with better service). However, a customer must have a lot of miles “built up” (accumulated; collected) before he or she can get these “benefits” (the advantages or good things about being in a program). Fortunately, other benefits are available to people with fewer frequent flyer miles.

Many airlines let people redeem their frequent flyer miles for “access” (permission to use or do something) to their airport “lounges” (rooms where people can relax). Airport lounges are often quieter than the areas in front of airport “gates” (the areas where people wait for their planes) and they have more comfortable seats. Many airport lounges also have free coffee or “snacks” (food eaten between meals). The nicest airport lounges might even have showers.

People can also redeem their frequent flyer miles for other products and services. For example, you might be able to redeem your miles for magazine “subscriptions,” where you receive the new edition of a certain magazine in the mail each month. Or you might be able to redeem your miles for a piece of electronics, like a stereo or an mp3 player.

Some people don’t fly very often, but they still want to participate in frequent flyer programs. These people can earn miles by staying at “affiliated” hotels (hotels that have an agreement with the airline) or by renting cars from affiliated companies. Some people even buy frequent flyer miles, although this is an expensive way to get the benefits.

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



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COMPLETE TRANSCRIPT

Welcome to English as a Second Language Podcast number 479: Using Frequent Flyer Miles.

This is English as a Second Language Podcast number 479. 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. Go there to download a Learning Guide for this episode that contains all of the vocabulary, definitions, sample sentences, additional definitions, comprehension questions, cultural notes, and a complete transcript of this episode.

This episode is called "Using Frequent Flyer Miles." These are special bonuses or awards that airlines give you for flying on their airplanes. It's a dialogue between Anne and Jurgen using some vocabulary we use to talk about this special program. Let's get started.

[start of dialogue]

Anne: Where were you this past weekend? I tried calling you on Friday to see if you wanted to go to the movies with me.

Jurgen: I was in Chicago for a long weekend.

Anne: Chicago? I didn't know you were planning a trip. I thought you were pretty strapped this month. A ticket to Chicago would set you back at least \$300.

Jurgen: I am pretty strapped, but I wanted to go to my friend Rachel's wedding. I was able to use my frequent flyer miles to get a ticket. I was lucky that those weren't blackout dates.

Anne: Oh, that explains it. You've been traveling a lot using your frequent flyer miles. How do you rack up so many miles? I'm enrolled in the frequent flyer programs of three different airlines, but I never seem to have enough miles to redeem them for a ticket or even an upgrade.

Jurgen: The trick is to get a credit card that gives you miles. For every dollar I charge on my credit card, I get one mile. Since I use my credit card for a lot of business purchases, the miles add up pretty quickly. I also use a lot of the hotels



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and restaurants that partner with the airlines, and doing that gives me bonus miles.

Anne: Aren't there a lot of restrictions? Do you ever have problems redeeming the miles?

Jurgen: Yeah, there are some restrictions, but I work around them. There are fewer restrictions if you have elite status, but I'm a long way from that.

Anne: So I need to get a credit card that gives me frequent flyer miles.

Jurgen: Yeah, but a word to the wise: spend carefully. You don't want to rack up credit card debt for the sake of racking up frequent flyer miles!

Anne: Point taken. Thanks for the tip.

[end of dialogue]

Anne begins our dialogue by asking, "Where were you this past weekend? I tried calling you on Friday to see if you wanted to go to the movies with me." Jurgen explains, "I was in Chicago for a long weekend." A "long weekend" is usually a period of three days, maybe four days: Friday, Saturday, Sunday, Monday or Thursday, Friday, Saturday, Sunday. Americans like to have their holidays on a Monday; that gives them a long weekend. They get Saturday, Sunday, and Monday to rest from work.

So Jurgen was in Chicago, that's why he couldn't go with Anne to the movies last weekend. Anne says, "Chicago? I didn't know you were planning a trip. I thought you were pretty strapped this month." "To be strapped" (strapped) means to not have any money, to have very little money, we might also say "to be broke." "Strap" has several meanings in English; take a look at our Learning Guide for some additional explanations.

Anne says, "A ticket to Chicago would set you back at least \$300." "To set (someone) back" means that it cost a certain amount of money, it's the amount of money you have to pay. It's sort of an odd expression, for example: "This computer set me back \$1,000." That means the computer cost \$1,000. We usually use this expression when we are trying to indicate that it's a lot of money: "I once bought a girlfriend a diamond necklace, it set me back \$500." After I gave her the necklace, of course, she broke up with me and kept the necklace; the lesson here is be careful before giving your girlfriend expensive jewelry!



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Anne says that a ticket to Chicago would set you back at least \$300. Jurgen says, “I am pretty strapped, but I wanted to go to my friend Rachel’s wedding. I was able to use my frequent flyer miles to get a ticket.” “Frequent” means often; “flyer” is somebody who flies in an airplane. In this case, a “frequent flyer” is someone who uses airplanes a lot – who travels a lot. Many airline companies – many airlines have special programs where you can earn what they call “miles,” points for each trip that you take, and the more trips you take the more miles you get. Eventually, if you get 20,000 or 30,000 miles you can get a free trip.

So, Jurgen is saying that he had flown a lot before; he had these frequent flyer miles, sort of like a coupon, that he could use to get a ticket for free to Chicago. Jurgen says, “I was lucky that those weren’t blackout dates.” In most airline programs they give you these miles that you can “redeem,” or use to get a ticket, however there are certain days that they will not allow you to use your frequent flyer miles. Usually these are around holidays when everyone wants to fly, it’s very popular so you can’t use your miles on very popular days. “Blackout” is when you are not allowed to do something or see something; “blackout dates” are dates that you can’t use your frequent flyer mile coupons. A “blackout” can also mean when there is no power, for example the electricity goes out in your house, and it goes out in the entire city. That would be called a “blackout.” “Blackout” can also mean if you’ve drunk too much and you don’t remember what happened yesterday while you were drinking. This doesn’t happen to me – frequently!

Anne says, “Oh, that explains it (that explains why you were able to go to Chicago).” She says, “You’ve been traveling a lot using your frequent flyer miles. How do you rack up so many miles?” “To rack up” is a two-word phrasal verb meaning to get a lot of something, usually by adding a little bit at a time over a long period of time. For example, if you have a library book that you don’t return on time, and you do this for several months, you borrow the book and then you don’t return it, the library charges you a “fine,” a fee, a penalty you have to pay, you could say, “I’ve racked up \$1,000 in library fines.” Another word would be “accumulated.”

So, Anne is asking Jurgen how he racked up – how he accumulated so many miles. She says, “I’m enrolled in the frequent flyer programs of three different airlines.” “To be enrolled” means that you are participating in something, you sign up or register for something and you are part of that program. We often use this verb in talking about going to college: “I’m enrolled at the university (I am a student and I am going to classes at the university).” Anne says that she never seems to have enough miles to redeem them for a ticket or even an upgrade. “To redeem” means to give something in exchange for something else, usually



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points or coupons, something that is worth money that you can give in order to get something back. In this case, you are redeeming your frequent flyer miles to get a ticket on that airline. An “upgrade” is an increase or an improvement from one thing or one level to another thing or another level. With frequent flyer mile programs you can sometimes buy a ticket for a certain seat, and then upgrade to a higher class – a better seat: a business class or a first class seat. Airplanes have what they call “economy seats,” these are the cheap seats, they’re also called “coach (coach) seats,” and then they have the bigger, nicer, roomier seats that are business class and first class. So an upgrade would be going from, for example, a coach class ticket to a first class ticket.

Jurgen says, “The trick (or the special way to do this) is to get a credit card that gives you miles. For every dollar I charge on my credit card, I get one mile. Since I use my credit card for a lot of business purchases, the miles add up pretty quickly.” “To add up” means to increase; it’s similar to “to rack up.” “To add up” means things get bigger and bigger, usually slowly over time. So what Jurgen is saying here is that many airlines have agreements or partnerships with credit card companies, when you use your credit card you get one mile, usually, for every dollar that you spend. And since Jurgen uses his credit card for business expenses, he has a lot of expenses on his credit card – a lot of charges, and he gets miles for all of those. This is a very popular program. I do this with my credit card; I get miles for every time I buy something on my credit card. Of course you still have to pay for it, it’s not free.

Jurgen says, “I also use a lot of hotels and restaurants that partner with the airlines, and doing that gives me bonus miles.” “To partner (as a verb) with someone” means to cooperate, to work closely with someone. Again, there are restaurants that partner, or work with the airline companies, and they will give you miles for every dollar that you spend at their restaurant. “To get bonus miles” means to get extra, or additional, miles. “Bonus” has a couple of different meanings; take a look at our Learning Guide for some additional explanations.

Anne asks Jurgen, “Aren’t there a lot of restrictions?” “Restrictions” are limitations, things that you are not allowed to do. She says, “Do you ever have problems redeeming the miles?” Jurgen says, “Yeah, there are some restrictions, but I work around them.” “To work around (something)” means to find a way to do what you want, even though you have restrictions or limitations. It means to be successful even though there are obstacles or things that make it difficult for you to do what you want to do. Jurgen says, “There are fewer restrictions if you have elite status.” “Elite status” is a very high level in a program where you get a lot of additional benefits – a lot of additional things. The frequent flyer programs have different levels of membership. If you fly a lot,



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for example 100,000 miles a year, you will often be put into a higher category in the program, and you will get more from the program.

Anne says, “So I need to get a credit card that gives me frequent flyer miles.” Jurgen says, “Yeah, but a word to the wise.” The expression “a word to the wise” means that you are going to give the person some advice: “Here is some advice.” He says, “a word to the wise: spend carefully. You don’t want to rack up credit card debt for the sake of racking up frequent flyer miles!” Once again, that verb “to rack up” – to accumulate, to get a lot of. He’s saying you don’t want to get a lot of credit card debt, money you owe to the bank, just so that you can get more frequent flyer miles. “For the sake of” means “in order to.”

Finally, Anne says, “Point taken.” “Point taken” is an expression that we use to mean I understand what you are saying, I agree with what you are telling me. “Point taken,” she says, “Thanks for the tip.”

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

[start of dialogue]

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Anne: Point taken. Thanks for the tip.

[end of dialogue]

If we had an elite status for scriptwriters, the writer of this episode, Dr. Lucy Tse, would certainly be in that category!

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

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