



ESL Podcast 590 – Paying Airline Fees

GLOSSARY

fee – money paid to do or have something; money paid for a professional service

* The library charges a late fee of \$1 per day for each overdue book.

to tack on – to add something; to include one or more additional items

* Did you remember to tack on the tip for the waiter when you signed your credit card receipt at the restaurant?

surcharge – money paid in addition to the normal cost of something

* When gas prices were very high, many shipping companies charged a gas surcharge.

whole slew of – many; a lot of; lots

* They had to fill out a whole slew of paperwork when they bought their home.

checked baggage – luggage that is left with airline employees when one checks in for a flight and placed inside the plane, so that the traveler doesn't pick up the bags again until he or she has reached the final destination

* How many pieces of checked baggage are allowed for each traveler on an international flight?

oversize – too large; bigger than allowed

* Wanda is a bass player and whenever she travels, she has to check her instrument as an oversize item.

overweight – too heavy; heavier than allowed

* If you fly with all those bottles of wine, your bags will be overweight.

to justify – to provide a reasonable explanation for something; to be a fair reason for something

* The fact that she stole money from you doesn't justify stealing money from her.

to shell out – to pay for something, especially when one doesn't want to pay for it

* The university expects students to shell out hundreds of dollars for new textbooks each semester.



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to fly standby – to want to be on a flight that is full, putting one's name on a list so that if other passengers do not come for the flight, one can have their seat
* Quentin has a ticket for a 3:30 flight, but he's trying to fly standby on an earlier flight.

reservation – an arrangement to have an airplane seat, restaurant table, hotel room, or other service available for oneself at a certain time in the future
* We're trying to make hotel reservations for our trip, but so far we haven't been able to find any vacant rooms.

worked up – exited, agitated, upset, and angry; very emotional about something
* I always get worked up when talking about politics.

to nickel and dime (someone) – to make someone pay many small amounts of money that together add up to be a lot of money
* The telephone company says it charges just \$29.99 per month, but then it nickels and dimes you with usage fees, taxes, and other charges.

base fare – the basic price of a flight, before taxes and other fees are added to the cost
* The base fare was just \$325, but after all the taxes and fees, the flight cost almost \$800!

to turn back – to return; to go back the way one came
* When Yogi was half way to his office, he realized he had left his glasses at home, so he had to turn back to get them.



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COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

1. What does Justine mean when she says, “there is a whole slew of added fees”?
 - a) The added fees are unfair.
 - b) There are many new fees.
 - c) The added fees are very expensive.
2. What does Howie means when he says that the airlines “know how to nickel and dime you”?
 - a) The airlines are making a lot of money with many small fees.
 - b) The airlines accept payments only in coins – not dollar bills.
 - c) The airlines aren’t accurate in adding up the fees.

WHAT ELSE DOES IT MEAN?

to tack on

The phrase “to tack on,” in this podcast, means to add something or to include one or more additional items: “If you tack on a few additional credits each term, you can graduate half a year early.” A “tack” is a small piece of metal like a short needle at one end and with a flat, round surface on the other end, used to hold things to a wall: “She used a tack to put her new schedule on the door.” The phrase “to tack (something) up” means to hang something on a surface by using a tack: “The store lets people tack up announcements by the front door.” Finally, the verb “to tack” means to attach two pieces of fabric together with very loose, long stitches before actually sewing them together: “If you tack those two pieces together first, they won’t move as much when you sew them.”

to turn back

In this podcast, the phrase “to turn back” means to return or to go back the way one came: “It’s starting to get really dark. I think we should stop hiking and turn back before it gets too late.” The phrase “to turn (one’s) back on (someone or something)” means to refuse to help someone or to ignore something: “How could you turn your back on him when he really needed your help?” The phrase “to turn (one’s) back to (someone or something)” means to turn one’s body away so that one is not looking at someone or something: “When he gets really mad at his little sister, he turns his back to her and pretends he can’t hear her.”



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CULTURE NOTE

Airlines “employ” (hire; give jobs to) people in many different “positions” (job descriptions). Most fliers interact only with a few airline employees, like “reservation agents,” who help people select and pay for a flight, and “check-in staff members,” who take travelers’ bags when they arrive at the airport and print out “boarding passes” (documents needed to get on a plane).

Of course, the airline also employs “pilots” (people who fly the plane) and “co-pilots” (people who work closely with the pilot). Most travelers don’t see the pilot, but they do interact with the “flight crew,” or the team of “flight attendants” who guide people to their seats, “store” (put away) “carry-on luggage” (bags taken on the flight), and offer food and drinks to the passengers.

Many other airline employees work “behind the scenes” (in jobs where they are not seen by customers). For example, “baggage handlers” move travelers’ luggage to the correct flight. “Mechanics” “maintain” (keep in good condition) airplanes and fix them when they are broken. Other “crews” (teams; groups of people who work together) prepare the planes for “take-off” (the moment when a plane leaves the ground and begins flying) by filling the “fuel tanks” (large containers for holding gas), applying “de-icer” (a chemical that prevents ice from forming on the plane’s wings), “stocking” (putting something where it is needed) food and drinks, and cleaning the inside of the plane.

Airlines also have many employees in their “corporate offices” (buildings where administrative work is done). These include “top executives,” like the chief executive officer, and many people who work in finance, communications, public relations, marketing, and “logistics” (deciding which flights should go where, and when).

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



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COMPLETE TRANSCRIPT

Welcome to English as a Second Language Podcast number 590: Paying Airline Fees.

This is English as a Second Language Podcast episode 590. I'm your host, Dr. Jeff McQuillan, coming to you from the Center for Educational Development in beautiful Los Angeles, California.

Visit our website at eslpod.com. Download a Learning Guide for this episode that contains all of the vocabulary, definitions, sample sentences, additional definitions, cultural notes, comprehension questions, and a complete transcript of everything we say.

This dialogue contains lots of vocabulary related to taking an airplane, specifically about paying for certain things on the airlines in the United States. Let's get started.

[start of dialogue]

Justine: So that's the plan. We drive to San Francisco, then to Portland, then to Seattle, and then to Vancouver.

Howie: What? Why are we driving to Vancouver instead of flying?

Justine: Haven't you noticed all of the fees the airlines are tacking on these days? First, there were the fuel surcharges and now, there is a whole slew of added fees.

Howie: Like what?

Justine: Well, there's a checked baggage fee, for one. On some airlines, you have to pay to check just one bag, and each additional bag is another fee. If you have oversize or overweight bags, that's another fee.

Howie: Okay, I don't like fees either, but I don't think that justifies driving all the way to Vancouver.

Justine: Well, let me tell you about some of the other fees. Do you want a snack or a meal on the flight? You're going to have to shell out for those now. Do you want to fly standby? Yes, it used to be free, but not anymore. Do you want to



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make your reservation by phone instead of on the Internet? That's another fee. Do you want a pillow or a blanket for your long flight? Okay, but that's another fee!

Howie: Okay, don't get worked up. I see what you mean. They really know how to nickel and dime you. Once we add all of those fees to the base fare, I guess flying isn't such a good deal. But do you really want us to drive three days to get to Vancouver?

Justine: What's the problem with driving?

Howie: Oh, I don't know, maybe it's the fact that I only have a week for vacation? As soon as we get to Vancouver, we'll have to turn back!

[end of dialogue]

Justine begins by saying, "So that's the plan. We drive to San Francisco, then to Portland, then to Seattle, and then to Vancouver." So, they're planning some sort of driving trip. We would call it a "road trip," where you drive a long distance on vacation. If they live in Los Angeles, and we'll guess they do, they're going to first drive north to San Francisco here in California – in Northern California; then to Portland, which is located in Oregon, the state just north of California; then they're going to drive to Seattle, which is located in the state north of Oregon called Washington; and finally to Vancouver, which is part of the province of British Columbia in Canada.

Howie says, "What? Why are we driving to Vancouver instead of flying?" Justine says, "Haven't you noticed all of the fees the airlines are tacking on these days?" A "fee" is money that you pay to do something; it could also be money paid for some professional service like a lawyer or an accountant. The library, for example, charges you a late fee if you bring the book back after the time that you were supposed to have it. When you fly an airplane – or in an airplane in the United States you have to pay for your ticket, but there are also additional fees – additional money that you have to pay the airline for all sorts of things. This has become especially true in the last five to seven years. "To tack (tack) on" is a two-word phrasal verb meaning to add something, to include something in addition to the other things. The airlines are tacking on fees; they're charging you for more and more things. "First," Justine says, "there were the fuel surcharges and now, there is a whole slew of added fees." I should mention that "tack" has a number of different meanings in English, and those can be found in the Learning Guide. A "surcharge" (surcharge) is money that you have to pay in



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addition to the normal cost of something. Often this is done temporarily. When the gasoline prices increased dramatically a few years ago the airlines in addition to charging you for your ticket began requiring you to pay a surcharge, even more money, because they said they had to pay more money to get the gasoline – the fuel to fly the plane. Justine refers to a whole slew (slew) of fees. “A whole slew of (something)” is a lot of something, many of whatever it is. I have a whole slew of cards in my wallet: I have credit cards, I have my driver’s license, I have my library card, and so forth – a whole slew of them.

Howie says, “Like what?” What are these added fees? Justine says, “Well, there’s a checked baggage fee, for one,” meaning for the first example. “Baggage” refers to your bags or luggage that you put your clothing and other things into in order to travel. When you “check” your luggage, you don’t take them with you onto the airplane. You leave them with the airplane employee – the airline employee, and they put it below on the bottom of the plane. Most U.S. airlines now will make you pay anywhere between 15 and 25 dollars to check a bag. “On some airlines,” Justine continues, “you have to pay to check just one bag, and each additional bag is another fee (usually higher). If you have oversize or overweight bags, there’s another fee.” An “oversize (something)” is something that is larger than is usually allowed – too large. “Overweight” is something that is heavier than the normal rules permit, something that is too heavy. When you say, “My friend is really overweight,” you mean they are too heavy. They need to stop eating all of those McDonald hamburgers and French fries!

Howie says, “Okay, I don’t like fees either, but I don’t think that justifies driving all the way to Vancouver,” which would be at least two or three days if you stopped to sleep. Howie says he doesn’t think it justifies. “To justify” (justify) means to provide a reasonable explanation for something, to be a good reason to do something. We have an old saying: “The ends,” meaning your goals, what you are trying to achieve, “do not justify the means,” meaning the way that you try to do it. Just because something is important – really important, doesn’t mean you can do anything in order to get that. The ends don’t justify the means.

Justine says, “Well, let me tell you about some of the other fees. Do you want a snack or a meal on the flight?” A “snack” would be a small something to eat, less than a meal. She says, “You’re going to have to shell out for those now.” “To shell (shell) out for (something)” means to pay for something; it’s a two-word phrasal verb. Usually we use this when we are paying for something we don’t really want to pay for. She continues: “Do you want to fly standby?” “To fly standby” means to wait to see if there is room on a plane that is already full.



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That is, you don't have a ticket for the plane but you are hoping, perhaps because you arrived early at the airport or late at the airport, you can get on a plane other than the one you have a ticket for. That's called "flying standby," or to be "on standby." "To stand by" means to wait basically. Justine says, "it used to be free, but not anymore," that is, flying standby. She then says, "Do you want to make your reservation by phone instead of on the Internet? That's another fee." Your "reservation" is an arrangement – an agreement you have with, in this case, the airline for a particular seat. You can also have reservations at restaurants, at a hotel, and so forth. Justine says, "That's another fee. Do you want a pillow or blanket for your long flight (your long trip)? Okay, but that's another fee!"

Howie says, "Okay, don't get worked up." "To get worked up" means to get excited, upset, angry, emotional. He says, "I see what you mean (I understand what you're saying). They really know how to nickel and dime you." This is an old expression. "To nickel and dime (someone)" – we'll often say "to nickel and dime (someone) to death" – means to make someone pay many small amounts of money that eventually add up to a lot of money. A nickel is the coin in the U.S. worth five cents – five pennies; a dime is worth 10 cents. Paying one nickel or one dime is not very much money, but if they charge you a nickel and a dime for everything you do eventually you'll see that is a lot of money. Howie says, "Once we add all of those fees to the base fare, I guess flying isn't such a good deal." The "base fare" (fare) is the basic price of your airplane ticket, without the taxes or the other fees added. "Base" just means basic in this case; it's the first thing that the airline charges you for, and then they add other things on top of that such as tax and other fees.

Howie thinks that maybe flying isn't such a great deal, or a good deal, meaning it isn't cheap. He says, "But do you really want us to drive three days to get to Vancouver?" Justine says, "What's the problem?" Howie says, "Oh, I don't know, maybe it's the fact that I only have a week for vacation? As soon as we get to Vancouver, we'll have to turn back!" "To turn back" means to return, to go back the way you came. That verb "to turn" has many meanings in English, especially in phrasal verbs; take a look at the Learning Guide for more information on that.

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

[start of dialogue]



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[end of dialogue]

There are a whole slew scriptwriters out in the world, especially here in Los Angeles. But we prefer our own scriptwriter, Dr. Lucy Tse.



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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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