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## TOPICS

Ask an American: student exchange programs; begs the question; face value; at the time versus then

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## GLOSSARY

**to test (one's) limits** – to push someone to do things that he or she didn't think were possible

\* Jumping out of an airplane with a parachute really tested her limits, but she was able to do it.

**TV production** – the process of creating a television show, including writing the script, recording the show, and editing the video

\* He's studying communications and media because he wants to work in TV production.

**wrestling** – a sport where two people, usually men, fight each other by using just their arms and the rest of their bodies and try to make it so that the other person cannot stand up and has to fall to the ground

\* In wrestling, men fight against other men who weigh approximately the same amount.

**choir** – a group of people who sing together; a large group of singers

\* Have you ever sung in a choir?

**to come down here** – to come to a place

\* I came down here on vacation in 1974, and I liked it so much that I've never left to go back home!

**to host (someone)** – to have an exchange student live with oneself or with one's family during a student exchange program

\* His family hosted many Japanese exchange students when he was a child.

**famine** – starvation; a period of time where large groups of people in a particular place don't have enough to eat

\* Insects destroyed the rice fields and caused a major famine.



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**drought** – a long period of time when it doesn't rain and there isn't enough water for people

\* During the drought, it was against the law for people to wash their cars or water the grass in front of their house.

**to take (one's) place** – for someone to get one's job when one retires or leaves the company

\* When Janice announced that she was going to accept another job, her boss immediately started trying to find someone to take her place.

**unity** – being all part of the same thing; joined as one group

\* Do you think the European Union is a good example of international unity?

**begs the question** – an expression used to say that a statement or claim requires more explanation because it is unclear or raises other questions; to use an argument or claim a position that depends on some other questionable or doubtful assumption (something that you say is true, but that may not be)

\* If you write, "sales increased significantly" in your report, it just begs the question of how much sales have increased.

**face value** – the price or value shown on the face or front of a ticket, stamp, or price tag; the original or intended price of an item, with the price printed on it

\* The face value of a bill from the 1800s was just \$1, but because it was so old and rare, a collector bought it for more than \$400.

**at the time** – the particular time of day or period when something is happening

\* At the time when I agreed to have the meeting at my house, I thought I was free that day, but then when I checked my calendar I saw that I already had plans.

**then** – referring to a particular time or a more general time period

\* I used to live in Nebraska and I was a farmer then, but now I live in Dallas and work as an attorney.



## **WHAT INSIDERS KNOW**

### **High School Clubs**

American high school students can choose to join many “clubs” (groups of people who have similar interests and want to participate in similar activities). Clubs often have meetings after school.

Some high school clubs are related to school “subjects” (things that are studied at school). Math clubs, Spanish clubs, and French clubs are all pretty common, or are found at many or most American high schools.

Other clubs are “tied to” (connected with) non-academic interests, or things that are not studied at school. For example, members of a chess club might meet to play “chess” (a game of strategy played by moving many small pieces on a board covered with black and white squares). Members of a dance club might meet to dance together.

In the “country” (agricultural areas; not the city), many high schools have 4-H clubs where students learn how to farm and take care of animals. “Service clubs” are also popular. Members of service clubs meet to work on “community service projects” where they help other people in the community. For example, the members of a community service club might help elderly people paint their homes, or they might pick up garbage that other people have left on the streets.

Most high school clubs are free, but a few charge a small “membership fee” (an amount of money that must be paid in order to join). High school clubs are a great way for students to have fun, learn more about the things that interest them, and make new friends.



## **COMPLETE TRANSCRIPT**

You're listening to ESL Podcast's English Café number 187.

This is ESL Podcast's English Café episode 187. 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. On it, you can visit our ESL Podcast Store, which has some additional courses in business and daily English that I think you will enjoy. You can also download the Learning Guide for this episode, and every one of our current episodes. The Learning Guide contains lots of additional information, including a complete transcript of this episode, vocabulary words, definitions, sample sentences, cultural notes, and a comprehension quiz on what you're listening to now.

On this Café, we're going to have another one of our Ask an American segments, where we listen to other native speakers talking at a normal rate of speech – a normal speed. We're going to listen to them and explain what they are talking about. Today we're going to listen to teenagers from other countries who have studied in the United States through student exchange programs. As always, we'll also answer a few of your questions. Let's get started.

Our topic on this Café's Ask an American segment is exchange programs – student exchange programs, where people go to another country to live with a family and go to school there, usually for one year. These are usually high school students. Sometimes the exchange between one country and the other is a little shorter than a year, but the typical exchange is a one-year program. Sometimes the child of one family goes and lives in the house of the family of someone from another country, and then they come back and live in their house. Sometimes the families just volunteer to have students in their house and going to their local school for a year.

We're going to listen to several students who have studied in the U.S., and what their experience has been. This will be a good opportunity for us to hear different accents – non-native accents in English. Their English is pretty good; there are few mistakes here and there, but for the most part they are quite good in terms of their English speaking. So we'll listen to their experiences.

We're going to start with a 17-year-old girl from India; she studied in Atlanta, Georgia, which is in the southeast part of the United States. We'll listen first to



her quote, talking about what she learned spending a year in the United States, and then we'll go back and explain what she said.

Let's listen:

[recording]

"It was amazing, I think, for me to test my limits, to know how far I can go. I have gotten to reflect on myself this year. I've gotten to know myself better, my strengths, my weaknesses."

[end of recording]

She begins by saying that the experience was amazing, or very positive and good. She says she was able to test her limits and know how far she can go. The phrase "to test (one's) limits" means to know how much you can do. A "limit" is the maximum amount of something. If I go running, 40 minutes may be my limit; it's the most I can do. I don't run that much anymore. Actually, I never ran that much, it's just an example! Sometimes we don't know our limits, but having an unusual experience can certainly test your limits, or make us do things that we didn't even think we could do. "To challenge yourself" would be another way of saying this idea of testing your limits. That's what the student exchange program did for this young woman.

She says that she has gotten the opportunity (she has had the opportunity) to reflect on herself or think about herself this year. She said she got to know herself better, including her strengths, or what she does well, and her weaknesses, or what she does poorly.

Let's listen again:

[recording]

"It was amazing, I think, for me to test my limits, to know how far I can go. I have gotten to reflect on myself this year. I've gotten to know myself better, my strengths, my weaknesses."

[end of recording]

The next woman we're going to listen to – young woman is also from India, who studied in the U.S. Her accent is a little more non-American. She's going to talk



about the classes that she took and the things that she did in her classes here in the U.S.

Let's listen:

[recording]

"I took all different kinds of classes like photography and TV production and drawing and painting and we got to do a lot of projects and research. We got to present our research in different ways."

[end of recording]

This girl, Nikhita, says that she took many different kinds of classes. American high schools, many of them offer many different kinds of classes, especially the bigger schools, schools with 1,000, 2,000, maybe 3,000 students in it. Nikhita took photography and TV production. "Photography" is a class where you learn how to use a camera. "TV production" means making television shows. In a class on TV production, you might learn how to write dialogue for characters, use lighting and cameras to record your show, use different video editing software to make things look good; you may also learn to add music to your show. Maybe if I had taken a class in TV production, we wouldn't have had that problem with the third anniversary video where some of you didn't see Lucy's face. I never took a class in TV production unfortunately, but they did not have any classes in TV production at my school. It was before television had been invented!

Nikhita also says she took classes in drawing and painting and that she was able to do a lot of projects and research. A "project" in school is any sort of task that usually requires that you do several things on your own, things that you get together to present (or to show) the class or the teacher. She says that she and the other students were able to present or share their research in different ways. This is a big emphasis in many American high schools: teaching students how to make presentations, how to give the information that they've learned to other people, how to communicate that effectively.

Let's listen to Nikhita again:

[recording]



“I took all different kinds of classes like photography and TV production and drawing and painting and we got to do a lot of projects and research. We got to present our research in different ways.”

[end of recording]

Next we’re going to listen to David, a boy from Indonesia, who also had some new and interesting experiences during his student exchange program. He’s going to talk about some of the activities that he participated in at his school. These are activities outside of the main classes, what we would call “extracurricular” activities.

Let’s listen:

[recording]

“I joined wrestling here and that’s like something I’ve never really done before. I joined the choir and we went to Florida for a spring concert.”

[end of recording]

David says, “I joined wrestling here.” “Wrestling” is a sport where two people, usually two boys or two men, fight each other by using their arms and the rest of their bodies. They try to make it so that the other person cannot stand up and has to fall to the ground. The wrestling that is done in the U.S. is sometimes called Greco-Roman wrestling, from the idea that it came from the ancient world originally, this sport. David joined the high school’s wrestling team, which was something he had never done before. In most American schools you have different sports teams that play games against other schools (competitions).

David also says he joined a “choir,” which is a group of people who sing together. Most American schools have at least one choir, and sometimes people continue to sing in choirs at their church or other places in their community even after they’ve finished high school. David says that in the spring his school choir went to Florida for a concert, or a performance where they sang in front of other people. Some high schools send their students on trips for these activities, and this is an example.

Let’s listen to David’s quote one more time:

[recording]



“I joined wrestling here and that’s like something I’ve never really done before. I joined the choir and we went to Florida for a spring concert.”

[end of recording]

The next student we’ll listen to is Hussein, who is also from Indonesia. He studied in the state of Pennsylvania, which is in the northeast part of the United States. His host mother, or the mother of the family where he was living, had been in the U.S. military in Iraq and Hussein was worried about how his host mother would react to him, being a Muslim. Hussein’s English is a little more difficult to understand and he makes a few small errors. Let’s first listen to what he has to say, and then we’ll talk about it.

[recording]

“She was in Iraq for one year. I mean, it’s like, first time I came down here I thinks like it’s weird cuz my first name Hussein. I think that it’s gonna be something wrong. But first time come down there and she talked nicely to me and she said she want to host me cuz she has been in Iraq and then she wanna learn more about my culture and my religion.”

[end of recording]

Hussein begins by saying that she, his host mother, was in Iraq for one year. Then he uses some very typical teenage expressions, especially to fill space – to fill time as you are thinking. He says, “I mean, it’s like,” both of those are expressions we use informally when we are trying to think of what we want to say next. He says the “first time I came down here,” meaning, I think, he went to Pennsylvania, “I thinks like it’s weird.” He says “thinks” when he really means “thought” – I thought “it’s weird (it’s strange) cuz my first (is) name Hussein.” “Cuz” is an informal way of saying “because.” So Hussein is saying that it was strange for him because his first name was Hussein; he was expecting that he might have some problems. He says, “I think that it’s gonna be something wrong,” meaning I thought that it was going to cause problems. Then he says, “But first time (I came) down,” meaning the first time I came down, “she talked nicely to me and she said she want to host me (because) she has been in Iraq.” “She talked nicely to me and she said she wanted to host me,” is what Hussein means, because “she has been in Iraq and then she (wanted to) learn more about my culture and my religion.” So she wanted, I think Hussein actually says “she wanna,” she wanted to learn more about my culture and religion.





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I should mention that “to host (someone)” in this case means to have a student – an exchange student live with you or your family during one of these programs. The verb “to host” can also mean to sponsor, to be the person or the place where something – some event is held. “To host” can also mean that you are paying for something for someone else, especially for an event or a party. At a wedding reception, the party after the wedding, it’s common for the bar (the alcoholic beverages – the beer and the wine) to be hosted by the bride and groom, meaning the bride and groom pay for your beer and wine. That isn’t always the case; in some weddings they have what’s called a “no host bar,” meaning you have to pay for your own alcoholic beverages.

So, Hussein was afraid that his host mother may not like him, but it turns out that she was very interested in his religion and culture, and that was something of a surprise for him.

Let’s listen one more time to Hussein:

[recording]

“She was in Iraq for one year. I mean, it’s like, first time I came down here I thinks like it’s weird cuz my first name Hussein. I think that it’s gonna be something wrong. But first time come down there and she talked nicely to me and she said she want to host me cuz she has been in Iraq and then she wanna learn more about my culture and my religion.”

[end of recording]

Finally, we’re going to listen to a student tell us about why these exchange programs are good for the future of all of our countries. Let’s listen:

[recording]

“There’s a lot of problems going on in the world: there’s war, famine, drought. It’s a good thing that the leaders around the world know that the kids, that who are gonna take their place one day, want to have peace and unity.”

[end of recording]

This student says that there’s a lot of problems going on in the world today, meaning there are a lot of problems in the world. He gives some examples:



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there's war, famine, drought. "Famine" (famine) means that there are a large group of people in a particular place who do not have enough to eat. It's the same as "starvation." "Drought" (drought) means you have long periods of time where it doesn't rain; there isn't enough water for the people.

George says that, considering all the problems in the world, it's a good thing that leaders around the world know that the kids who are going to take their place one day want to have peace and unity. In this context, the phrase "to take (someone's) place" means to get someone's job. So the world leaders today will someday retire, and today's children will be tomorrow's leaders. This student thinks that it's a good thing that kids who take the place of today's world leaders want to have world peace and unity, or being all part of the same group – the same thing. "Unity" means having many people or countries join together in some way – cooperating in some way.

Let's listen to this quote one more time:

[recording]

"There's a lot of problems going on in the world: there's war, famine, drought. It's a good thing that the leaders around the world know that the kids, that who are gonna take their place one day, want to have peace and unity."

[end of recording]

Those, then, are some opinions and views of international students who have studied here in the U.S.

Now let's answer a few of your questions.

Our first question comes from Gustavo (Gustavo) in Uruguay. Gustavo wants to know the meaning of the expression "begs the question." "Begg (begs) the question" is an expression used to say that a statement or a claim requires more explanation because it's unclear. So when someone says something and it doesn't really answer the question, or it causes you to have more questions, then we might use this phrase: "that begs the question."

We also use this when someone makes a statement – someone says something that they think is true that depends on some other assumptions, some other ideas that are doubtful, that may not be true. For example: "You say that all of these houses are too small. That begs the question of how big a house has to



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be for you to consider it large.” In other words: “What is your definition of small, if you say these houses are too small?” To say the house is too small begs the question – it makes you ask another question: “Well, what do you mean by small?” Or, a certain person living in Los Angeles (who is originally from Minnesota) doesn’t like cats, and you could say, “Well, he doesn’t like cats, but that begs the question of why he allows his wife to have three cats in their house,” that’s something that is difficult to understand.

This phrase, “begs the question,” is a little more formal; you would hear it in a formal conversation perhaps, or in writing.

Our next question is from Peter. I’m not sure where Peter is from; let’s say he’s from Mars! Peter from Mars says, “The face value of a ticket, what does that mean?” “The face value.”

“The face value” is amount of money that you have to pay to buy a ticket, the official amount. For example you’re going to the concert by the American rocker Bruce Springsteen and you buy a ticket, and the ticket costs \$50 or \$75, that’s the face value of the ticket. However, you may have a friend who wants to buy that ticket for \$150 or \$200. So, the face value is the official price, it’s the price that you paid for the ticket from the company or whoever was selling the ticket. The other price is what you may have to pay, and it might be a great deal more – a lot more if it’s a valuable ticket.

We usually use this expression for tickets, sometimes for money: “The face value of this piece of paper is one dollar, it’s a one dollar bill.” We use it for documents that represent money, things such as “bonds,” which is a type of financial investment. Those are the things that we tend to use this expression – face value.

There’s a related expression, however, which is “to take (something) at face value.” “Don’t take what your girlfriend says at face value,” that means don’t accept it as being true, don’t believe everything that she is saying to you. “To take something at face value” means to believe it without questioning it, without doubting it. “To not take (something) at face value” means, of course, to doubt it, to think maybe it isn’t true.

Finally, Naomi (Naomi), who is also from an unknown country – let’s say she’s from Pluto! Naomi wants to know the difference between the expression “at the time” and “then.”



“At the time,” or “at that time,” is a specific time of day or period of time when something is happening. “Yesterday, Naomi said that she was in Paris. At the time, I thought she was telling the truth,” meaning yesterday when I heard that she was in Paris, I thought that she was telling me the truth. Now I don’t believe her; now I know that she was actually on Pluto!

“Then” can be used in a very similar way, however, so the differences are not great. It’s more common or more natural to hear “then” at the end of a sentence or end of a clause: “I was young then,” rather than saying, “Then I was young.” In fact, those two things mean different things. When “then” comes towards beginning of the clause or sentence, it usually means the next thing that happened: “I was on the train, then I got off the train and got on a bus.” If you use it at the end of the sentence, it is more likely to mean same thing here as “at that time”: “Where were you during the 1980s?” “I was living in St. Paul, Minnesota then,” at that time, during that time period.

If you have a question or comment, you can email us. Our email address is [eslpod@eslpod.com](mailto:eslpod@eslpod.com). Email us your name, country (or planet!), and we’ll try to answer your question here on the English Café.

From Los Angeles, California, on planet Earth, this is Jeff McQuillan. Thank you for listening. Come back and listen to us next time, won’t you, on the English Café.

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