



ESL Podcast 74 – Reserving a Rental Car

GLOSSARY

reservation – an arrangement to use some service or have some product set aside for one's own use at a future time

* That restaurant will be really crowded on Mother's Day, so if we want to eat there, we'll need to make a reservation.

phone tree – the system of computerized menus that one hears when calling a large company, typing numbers or speaking simple answers so that one's call can be sent to the right department or person

* Our company needs a phone tree that separates calls for sales, technical support, and warranty information.

agent – a person who represents a company while interacting with customers

* Which travel agent did you work with when you bought your airplane ticket?

to pick (something) up from (somewhere) – to find and get something from a particular location

* Did you remember to pick up the flowers from the flower shop?

airport location – where an airport is, especially when there are two or more airports serving one city

* Washington, DC has two airport locations: Washington Dulles International Airport and Ronald Reagan Washington National Airport.

to return (something) to (somewhere) – to give something back to someone at a particular location after one has finished using it

* Please return your books to the library within two weeks.

to drop (something) off – to take something somewhere and leave it there, especially when one does not spend very much time there

* Can you drop the kids off at soccer practice after work today?

compact – a small car, often with only two doors

* The smallest parking spaces are for only compact cars.

mid-size – a medium-sized car with four doors and room for five passengers

* We have a mid-size car, so there should be room for everyone to travel together.



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full-size – a large, comfortable car with a lot of room for passengers and bags

* I've never felt comfortable trying to park full-size cars. They seem too big.

the most economical – the one that offers the greatest value for the lowest price; the most cost-effective; the cheapest

* This camera is a little more expensive than the other options, but it's the most economical because it lasts for many more years.

fee – the amount of money paid for a particular purpose or service

* Most students complain that tuition fees are too high.

grand total – the final sum after all related costs have been added together

* If you buy \$100 worth of clothing, the grand total after sales taxes is going to be \$109.75.

tax – money collected by the government to pay for the costs of its services, usually charged as a percentage of another amount

* Oregon doesn't have a sales tax, but it has a high income tax.

applicable – relevant; connected or related to what one is talking about; needing to be dealt with in a particular situation

* Which regulations are applicable to this transaction?

F as in Frank – a way to clarify which letter one is stating, especially over the phone, by stating a common word that begins with that particular letter

* His name is Abad: A as in alpha, B as in bravo, A as in alpha, and D as in delta.



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COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

1. What did Jeff have to do before speaking with the reservation agent?
 - a) He had to find a phone that was shaped like a tree.
 - b) He had to search for the right number.
 - c) He had to go through the phone menu options.
2. Which kind of car did Jeff choose?
 - a) The one with the best gas mileage.
 - b) The newest make and model.
 - c) The least expensive one.

WHAT ELSE DOES IT MEAN?

to pick up from

The phrase “to pick (something) up from (somewhere),” in this podcast, means to find and get something from a particular location: “Could you please pick up some milk and eggs from the store on your way home from work?” The phrase “to pick (oneself) up” means to stand up after one has fallen: “Little kids fall down all the time, but they quickly pick themselves up and start running around again.” The phrase “to pick (something) up” can mean to clean a room, organizing it and putting things away: “You need to pick up your room before you can go over to Jimmy’s house.” Finally, the phrase “to pick (something) up” can mean to learn how to do something without formal instruction, usually because one has been exposed to it for a period of time: “How long did it take you to pick up basic Spanish?”

to drop (something) off

In this podcast, the phrase “to drop (something) off” means to take something somewhere and leave it there, especially when one does not spend very much time there: “This morning I had to drop off our clothes at the dry-cleaner’s before going to the office.” The phrase “to drop off” also means to decrease: “The need for farm laborers has dropped off in recent years as farmers have begun using more machines to do their work.” The phrase “to drop in on (someone)” means to visit someone for a short period of time without advance notice: “Thelma wishes her grandchildren would drop in on her more often.” Finally, the informal phrase “drop it” is used to ask someone to stop talking about a particular subject that makes one uncomfortable: “Just drop it, okay? I don’t want to say any more about it than I already have.”



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CULTURE NOTE

Some Americans choose the “cheapest” (least expensive) option when renting a car: a “no-frills” (without anything special or additional) compact car. Other customers choose “top-of-the-line” (best available) full-size cars with leather seats. Here are some other “extras” (additional things) that customers can choose to have.

Parents of small children can choose to get a “car seat” when they rent a car. A “car seat” is a special chair for young children. It attaches to the car on top of a regular seat and makes it safer for babies and young children to travel in a car. For many families, asking for a car seat when renting a car is more convenient than flying with their own car seat.

Car renters can also request a “GPS” (global positioning system) “navigation” (helping one know where one is and where one is going) system. This is a small computer inside the car that has an electronic “display” (allowing something to be seen) with a map that shows the car’s current location. The driver can type in the “destination” (where one wants to go) and the navigation system will provide directions, usually through a computerized voice.

Another extra offered by many car rental companies is a “toll pass.” In areas with many “tolls” (money paid to use a particular section of road or to cross a certain bridge), drivers must stop to pay frequently. With a toll pass, they can drive through special “lanes” (rows of traffic) and an electronic signal is sent from the toll pass to the “toll booth” (where money is collected) with no need to stop or even slow down.

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



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COMPLETE TRANSCRIPT

Welcome to English as a Second Language Podcast number 74 – Reserving a Rental Car.

This is English as a Second Language Podcast episode 74. I'm your host, Dr. Jeff McQuillan, coming to you from the Center for Educational Development in beautiful Los Angeles, California.

This episode is about making a reservation for a rental car. Let's get started!

[start of dialogue]

I will be in Chicago next week and need a rental car. I called up Bargain Rental Car and made a reservation. After I got through the phone tree, I spoke with a reservation agent.

Agent: Welcome to Bargain Rental Car.

Jeff: I'd like to reserve a rental car.

Agent: What city will you be picking up from?

Jeff: Chicago.

Agent: Which airport location? O'Hare or Midway?

Jeff: Hmm. I'm not sure. Is there a downtown location?

Agent: Sure. We have an office at 401 State Street.

Jeff: Is that near Prairie State College?

Agent: I really don't know.

Jeff: That's okay. I'll go ahead and make a reservation for that location.

Agent: For what date and time?

Jeff: For November 11th, around 7 p.m.

Agent: Returning to the same location?



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Jeff: No. I'd like to drop it off at the Chicago O'Hare airport.

Agent: Okay. On what date and time?

Jeff: It'll be that Sunday, November 13th, around the same time.

Agent: What size car would you like? A compact, mid-size, or full-size?

Jeff: I'd like the most economical.

Agent: That would be the compact. The rental fee would be \$32.25 a day, giving you a grand total of \$62.50 for the two days.

Jeff: Does that include taxes and fees?

Agent: No. With all applicable taxes and fees, your grand total comes to \$77.40.

Jeff: Okay, that's fine.

Agent: Your last name?

Jeff: McQuillan. M-C-Q-U-I-L-L-A-N.

Agent: And your first name?

Jeff: Jeff.

Agent: J-E-S-S?

Jeff: No, J-E-F, as in Frank, F.

Agent: What credit card will you be using?

Jeff: I'll be using a MasterCard.

Agent: Okay, I have a compact reserved for pickup at our downtown location on November 11th at 7 p.m., returning November 13th at 7 p.m. at Chicago O'Hare. Is there another reservation I can help you with?

Jeff: No, that's all. Thanks.



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Agent: It's my pleasure. Have a good afternoon and thank you for calling Bargain Rental Car.

[end of dialogue]

Our dialogue begins with me saying, "I will be in Chicago next week and need a rental car." Chicago is located in the central part of the United States, in the state of Illinois. "I called up Bargain Rental Cars and made a reservation." "Bargain Rental Cars" is just a made-up name, not a real company that rents cars. A "bargain" is a good deal, a low price. I called up this rental car company and made a "reservation." A "reservation" is when you make some arrangement to use a service or perhaps to use a physical object for a certain amount of time. Here, I'm reserving a car. I want to use a car when I am in Chicago. "After I got through the phone tree, I spoke with a reservation agent."

The term "phone tree" refers to a system of announcements that you hear when you are trying to get a hold of someone, when you are trying to contact someone, in a large company. A lot of companies, when you call the phone number for the company, do not have a live human being answering the phone. Instead, you hear a message. Typically, the message will say something like, "If you'd like information on this topic, press 1. If you'd like information on this topic, press 2," and then you have to keep pressing different numbers or saying different numbers until you get to the information or the person you want. That's a phone tree.

I say, "After I got through the phone tree" – after I found the right option – "I spoke with a reservation agent." An "agent" (agent) is a person who works for a company, who is responsible for talking to customers. The president of the company doesn't have time to talk to every customer, so they hire people to work for the company, called "agents," who talk directly to the customer when the customer has questions. You can have a "customer service agent" – that's a person who deals with the customers and gives them service, gives them help. Some companies call them by a special name.

Here, we use the term "reservation agent" – that would be the person who is going to help me make a reservation. The agent answers the phone, "Welcome to Bargain Rental Car." That's a very formal way that a company might use to answer the phone. I say, "I'd like to reserve a rental car." The agent then asked me, "What city will you be picking up from?" "To pick something up" from somewhere is to go to a particular location in order to get something. Here, she's asking where I will pick up the car, where I will get the car. I may pick up at one



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location and drop off at a different location. We'll talk about dropping off in a minute.

"Picking up a car" means getting the car the first day so that you can drive it and use it. I tell her that I'll be picking it up in Chicago. She then asked, "Which airport location?" She's asking which place I want to pick it up, since in many big cities there is more than one airport. The Los Angeles area, for example, has at least three large airports and several small airports. The agent asks if I want to pick up the car at "O'Hare" or "Midway." Those are the names of two large airports in the Chicago area. I say, "I'm not sure. Is there a downtown location?" Now I'm asking if I can pick up my car not at the airport, but somewhere in the central part of the city.

The agent says, "Sure, we have an office at 401 State Street" – that's the place where I could go and pick up a car downtown. I then asked the agent, "Is that near Prairie State College?" I'm asking if the place where I can pick up the car is near to the place where I want to go, which in this dialogue is a made-up college by the name of "Prairie State College." That's not a real college. The agent doesn't know if Prairie State College is near the downtown location. I say, "That's okay. I'll go ahead and make a reservation for that location." "I'll go ahead" means I will continue on. I want to make the reservation.

The agent asked for what date and time. I say, "For November 11th, around 7 p.m." – seven o'clock in the evening. Then the agent asked me, "Returning to the same location?" That means, "Are you going to bring the car back" – are you going to return the car – "to the same place where you picked it up?" I say, "No. I'd like to drop it off at the Chicago O'Hare airport." "To drop something off" is the opposite of "to pick something up." It's to leave it when you are finished using it – in this case, giving the car back to the rental car company. The agent asks, "Okay, on what date and time?" I say, "It'll be that Sunday, November 13th, around the same time" – approximately at the same time.

The agent says, "What size would you like? A compact, mid-size, or full-size?" There are three basic sizes you can rent a car in. The smallest size is called a "compact" (compact). Usually, a compact car is very small and often has only two doors. A regular car that has four doors and is larger would be called a "full-size car." In between a full-size car and a compact car is a "mid- (mid-) size car." A mid-size car is not small but not large – somewhere in between. Usually, mid-sized cars do have four doors.

I say, "I'd like the most economical." When we talk about something being "economical," we mean it's not expensive. It's cheap. It doesn't cost a lot of



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money. I want the cheapest car I can rent, which is what I always do in real life when I rent a car. I always rent the cheapest car I can find. The agent says, “That would be the compact,” meaning if you want the cheapest car, you want to rent the compact car. Then she tells me that “The rental fee would be \$32.25 a day, giving you a grand total of \$62.50 for the two days.”

The “rental fee” (fee) is the price of the car. The agent is giving me the price of the car for each day. She says it “would be” – it will be – “\$32.25 a day.” She doesn’t use the words “dollar” and “cents.” She just says “\$32.25.” When you’re talking about prices, the person will understand from the context, from the conversation, what that means. It doesn’t mean \$3,225 dollars a day, although it could. It means \$32.25. The agent then says that the total would be \$62.50 – 62 dollars and 50 cents for the two days.

I say, “Does that include taxes and fees?” In most places, when you rent a car, you have to pay taxes. You have to pay the government some additional money. Also, sometimes when they give you the price of the rental car, there are additional costs, additional fees that they don’t include in the daily fee that they tell you. In other words, something that would not be included in the \$32.25 a day. You have to be very careful to make sure that the price you are getting when you rent a car in the United States includes the taxes and fees – all the additional costs.

Of course, the gas is not included. You have to pay for your own gas. And usually when you rent a car in the United States, you have to fill the gas tank up again before you return it. If you don’t, they will charge you for the gas that they have to put in the car so that the next person can use it. The agent says, “No,” meaning no, it doesn’t include taxes and fees.

She then says, “With all applicable taxes and fees, your grand total comes to \$77.40.” “Applicable” (applicable) means relevant – connected to what we are talking about. “All applicable taxes” would be all the taxes that would apply to or be relevant to this transaction, this rental. It’s not really a necessary term. Of course the company is not going to charge you taxes for things that are not applicable, but it’s one of those terms that has been adopted by a lot of businesses nowadays. They use that term. The agent says the “grand total” comes to \$77.40. The “grand (grand) total” is the final total after all the expenses are added together.

Sometimes, the company that you are purchasing something from will give you a total that just includes certain costs and then they say, “Well, adding the taxes and the other things, the grand total is . . .” whatever it is. The term “grand total”



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is also used, many times, when you are buying more than one thing. You may be buying several different items from a store. The person who is giving you the prices may give you the individual prices for each thing you buy and then at the end say, “The grand total is . . .” – and that would include all of the things that you are buying.

I say, “Okay that's fine” – that's okay. She then asks for my last name and I spell it for her. She says, “And your first name?” I say, “Jeff.” The agent doesn't understand me, so she says “J-E-S-S?” She thinks my name is Jess, and I say, “No, J-E-F, as in Frank, F.” Like many languages, English has certain words that we use when we are trying to communicate the letter that might be difficult for the other person to hear or to distinguish. Different countries, I'm guessing, in English have different words that they use.

There isn't one official set of words that everyone who speaks English uses. People will often use the names of common objects or of people. So, I use the name “Frank.” “F, as in Frank” means if you think of the word “Frank,” the first letter is “F” – that that's the letter I'm talking about. It's always the first letter that you use. So, you might say, “B, as in Boy.” The word “boy” begins with a “B,” and that's how you know that I'm saying “B” and not “D” or “G.”

Again, it's hard to give you a list of these words. In some languages, there is an established list that everyone uses, but not in English. I actually use the list that is used internationally by radio operators and military people. Some people know this list, but it's used mostly by government officials and military officials. The words in alphabetical order from A-Z are “Alpha,” “Bravo,” “Charlie,” “Delta,” “Echo,” “Foxtrot,” “Golf,” “Hotel,” “India,” “Juliet,” “Kilo,” “Lima,” “Mike,” “November,” “Oscar,” “Papa,” “Quebec,” “Romeo,” “Sierra,” “Tango,” “Uniform,” “Victor,” “Whiskey,” “X-ray,” “Yankee,” and “Zulu.” Now you know.

The dialogue ends with the agent asking me what credit card I want to use. I say, “I'll be using a MasterCard.” “MasterCard,” “Visa,” and “American Express” are the three most popular credit cards in the United States. The agent then repeats the information about my reservation and asks me if there is another reservation she can help me with. I say, “No. That's all. Thanks.” That's all means I'm done. I don't have anything else to get from you or ask of you.

The agent then says, “It's my pleasure.” That's a very formal way to say, “You're welcome.” “It's my pleasure. Have a good afternoon and thank you for calling Bargain Rental Car.”

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



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Agent: For what date and time?

Jeff: For November 11, around 7 p.m.

Agent: Returning to the same location?

Jeff: No. I'd like to drop it off at the Chicago O'Hare airport.

Agent: Okay. On what date and time?

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Jeff: No, that's all. Thanks.

Agent: It's my pleasure. Have a good afternoon and thank you for calling Bargain Rental Car.

[end of dialogue]

Thanks to our wonderful scriptwriter for her wonderful scripts. I speak, of course, of Dr. Lima Uniform Charlie Yankee, Tango Sierra Echo.

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



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