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## ESL Podcast 414 – Common Traffic Signs

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### GLOSSARY

**to squint** – to mostly close one’s eyes so that only a small part of the eye can be seen and the skin around the eye is very wrinkled, usually because there is too much light or because one has poor vision

\* When Younceoul saw that her son was squinting, she decided to take him to the eye doctor to see if he needed glasses.

**sign** – a large piece of wood, metal, plastic, or paper that has writing and/or pictures on it, giving people information, especially about what they should do or where they should go

\* According to that sign, Disneyland is just 20 miles further.

**dead end** – a street that ends without connecting to another street, making cars turn around

\* The Seelig family wants to live on a dead end so that there will be fewer cars driving by and their kids can play in the street more safely.

**no U-turn** – a sign that lets drivers know that they are not allowed to turn around and change direction in the road

\* There’s a big “no U-turn sign” on the road, so we had to use a store’s parking lot to turn around.

**do not enter** – a sign that lets people know that they should not enter or drive on a particular street or area, usually because it would be dangerous because cars are coming the other way

\* The city put a “Do Not Enter” sign at the entrance to the freeway when it had to close the freeway for two weeks of construction.

**one way** – a sign that lets drivers know that cars are allowed to drive in only one direction on a particular street

\* All of the downtown streets are one-way, which makes it very hard to get to some of the buildings.

**to pull off (the road/street)** – to slow down one’s car and stop driving, putting one’s car on the side of the road or street for a short period of time

\* When Pauline’s car started making strange noises, she pulled off the road and looked at the engine.



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**no stopping** – a sign that lets drivers know that they should not stop in a particular part of the street and must continue driving

\* Drivers were stopping in front of the airport, making it difficult for people to drive in the street, so the airport put up “No Stopping” signs.

**back on track** – doing something correctly after a period of time when one was doing it incorrectly

\* Ulysses did very poorly in school last year, but now he is back on track, getting good scores on his exams.

**speed bump** – a small section of the road that is higher than the rest of the road, placed so that cars have to drive over it very slowly, used to make drivers drive more slowly in a particular area

\* People drive through our neighborhood too quickly, so we want to have some speed bumps to slow them down.

**blind** – unable to see; without the ability to see; without vision

\* Izra is blind, but he has learned how to read Braille by touching special pages in books with his fingers.

**school crossing** – an area where many children cross the street next to a school; an area where many children go from one side of the street to another as they go to and from school

\* Jake had to pay \$340 for not stopping in front of the school crossing when there were a lot of children walking there.

**posted** – put where many people can see something; hung or held up in a public place

\* The little girl posted her telephone number and a picture of her missing cat on the store’s door, hoping that someone would find it for her.

**speed limit** – the maximum speed that drivers are allowed to drive at in a particular area; the fastest speed that is allowed in an area

\* In the United States, the speed limit on most freeways is 65 miles per hour.

**to flash** – for a light to turn on and off repeatedly and quickly

\* This little light will start to flash when the camera needs a new battery.

**detour** – an alternate route; a way to go from one place to another place when the normal way is closed, usually because of construction or a special event

\* More than 3,000 runners are running downtown today, so there are a lot of detours for cars to go around them.



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**will I never...?** – a phrase used to show that one does not believe that something will happen, even though one wants it to happen

\* I studied so much, but I still didn't do well on the exam. Will I never get an "A"?

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### COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

1. Why might a person squint?
  - a) Because he or she is blind.
  - b) Because he or she is back on track.
  - c) Because he or she cannot see well.
2. Where would it be most common to see speed bumps?
  - a) On a one-way street.
  - b) In a school crossing zone.
  - c) On a detour.

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### WHAT ELSE DOES IT MEAN?

#### **flash**

The verb "to flash," in this podcast, means for a light to turn on and off repeatedly and quickly: "The restaurant has a flashing sign to try to get people's attention so that they will eat there." The phrase "to flash (something) at (someone or something)" means to shine a light or to make a light go in a particular direction: "The policeman flashed the light into the dark building, looking for the thief." The phrase "to flash a smile at (someone)" means to smile at someone very quickly, for a short period of time: "The singer flashed a smile at the audience and the young girls shouted, 'We love you!'" Finally, the phrase "(something) flashed through one's mind" means that one thought of something very quickly or had a memory very quickly: "When I smelled the apples, memories of my grandmother's cooking flashed through my mind."

#### **to pull off**

In this podcast, the phrase "to pull off" means to slow down one's car and stop driving, putting one's car on the side of the road or street for a short period of time: "When Becca got too hot while she was driving, she pulled off the road to take off her jacket." The phrase "to pull it off" also means to be able to do something that is very difficult: "Nobody thought they'd be able to open their own business, but they pulled it off and now they own a very successful restaurant." The phrase "to pull (someone) over" means for a policeman to ask a driver to



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stop his or her car on the side of the road, usually because the driver has done something wrong: “We got pulled over for driving too fast.”

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### CULTURE NOTE

When driving in the United States, you will see a lot of different “traffic signs” (signs that give information to drivers). Many traffic signs are “obvious” (easy to understand), but other signs don’t have words and can be more difficult to understand.



For example, this sign is just the letter P with a red circle around it and a red “diagonal” (from one corner to another) line through it. This is the “no-parking” sign and it means that cars may not park there at any time. Drivers who park near this sign are given a “ticket,” which is a small piece of paper given by the police when one has done something wrong. People who get a parking ticket usually have to pay a “fine” (money paid to the government when one has done something wrong).



This sign is a “no hitch-hiking” sign. It means that drivers are not allowed to “give rides” (let someone ride in their car) to “hitch-hikers,” which are people who stand on the side of the road and hold out their hand and “thumb” (the biggest finger on one’s hand) as shown in the picture on the sign, asking drivers to take them somewhere. Hitch-hiking isn’t as common in the U.S. anymore, probably because it can be dangerous, both for the drivers and the hitch-hiker.



Finally, this “railroad-crossing” sign is a “warning” (a message letting someone know that there is danger) to drivers, letting them know that “railroad tracks” (a special road for trains) go across the road. Drivers who see this sign should slow down and look carefully for trains. If they see a train nearby, they should stop and wait for the train to pass before they “cross” (go across) the railroad tracks.

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



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### COMPLETE TRANSCRIPT

Welcome to English as a Second Language Podcast number 414: Common Traffic Signs.

This is English as a Second Language Podcast episode 414. 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](http://eslpod.com). You can download a Learning Guide for this episode that contains all of the vocabulary, definitions, sample sentences, additional vocabulary, comprehension questions, cultural notes, and a complete transcript of everything you hear on this episode.

This episode is called "Common Traffic Signs." It's going to talk about the kinds of signs you see when you drive. It will be a dialogue between Ben and Lauren, and they're going to be having a little problem reading the traffic signs. Let's get started.

[start of dialogue]

Ben: Why are you squinting like that?

Lauren: I left my glasses at the office.

Ben: You mean you can't see?!

Lauren: I can see pretty well. What was that yellow sign we just passed?

Ben: It said, "Dead End." Stop! Turn around.

Lauren: I can't. That sign says, "No U-turn."

Ben: Okay, but we can't keep going. Those signs say, "Do Not Enter" and "One Way."

Lauren: Okay, fine. I'll just pull off the road and you can drive.

Ben: You can't. That sign says, "No Stopping." Hey, you just made an illegal U-turn!

Lauren: What else could I do? Anyway, we're back on track now.



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Ben: Watch out for those speed bumps! You really are blind without your glasses. You're going too fast. According to that sign, this is a school crossing zone. The posted speed limit is 25 miles per hour.

Lauren: That's only true when the lights are flashing. Is that a "Detour" sign?

Ben: I can't believe it. Will I never get home?

[end of dialogue]

The dialogue begins with Ben asking Lauren, "Why are you squinting like that?" To "squint" (squint) means to close your eyes partially so that only a small part of your eye can be seen. Usually we do this if there is too much light. Or, if you can't see very well, you close your eyes not all the way in order to see a little better.

Lauren says, "I left my glasses at the office." So, she should have her glasses on while she drives, but she forgot them so she squints. Ben says, "You mean you can't see?!" – do you mean that you cannot see? Lauren says, "I can see pretty well. What was that yellow sign we just passed?" The word "sign" is a common word to describe any piece of wood, metal, plastic, or paper that has writing or pictures on it to give you information; all countries have their own road signs.

Ben says the yellow sign said, "Dead End." He then says to Lauren, "Stop! Turn around." To "turn around" means to take the car in the opposite direction, to go back from where you came. A "dead end" is a street that doesn't connect to any other street. If you go down a street that is a dead end, you can't go any farther; you have to turn around and go back to get out.

Lauren says, "I can't (meaning I can't turn around). That sign says, 'No U-turn.'" A "U-turn" is when you are driving down a street in one direction – it's a "two-way" street, meaning cars go in both directions – and you want to go in the opposite direction. So you're traveling, for example, west on a street and now you want to go east on the street. You can, in many places, make a "U-turn," where the car is traveling in the shape of a "U." You turn the car around so it goes in the other direction. There are some places where a U-turn would be too dangerous, so you may see a "No U-turn" sign.

Ben says, "Okay, but we can't keep going (meaning okay, you can't take a U-turn, but we can't keep going in the same direction). Those signs say, 'Do Not Enter' and 'One Way.'" These are two other popular signs you will see on



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American streets. “Do not enter” means that you should not go down that street. Usually this is because there are cars coming from the other direction and it would be dangerous. A “one-way” street is a street that drivers can only move in one direction; they can only go north or they can only go south. A “two-way” street is a street where drivers go in both directions. And of course, here in the United States, people drive on the right side of the street – the right side of the “road,” which is just another name for a street or a highway.

Lauren says, “Okay, fine. I’ll just pull off the road and you can drive.” To “pull off” the road or the street means to slow your car down and eventually to stop driving. You put your car on one side of the road or street for a short period of time. For example, if you get a cell phone call – a mobile phone call – you may pull off the road so you can talk to that person and not have to worry about causing an accident. In some states it’s illegal to talk on your cell phone in the car, at least to have the phone up to your face, so you may pull off the road, or pull off to the side of the road. Lauren says she’s going to pull off the road and allow Ben to drive. That term, “pull off,” has a couple of different meanings in English; take a look at our Learning Guide for some additional explanations.

Ben says to Lauren, “You can’t,” meaning you can’t pull off the road here. He points to another sign that says, “No Stopping.” “No Stopping” is a sign that tells drivers that they can’t pull off to the side of the road or the side of the freeway. They have to keep driving because it would not be safe to pull off the road at that point. Ben then says, “Hey, you just made an illegal U-turn!” meaning she made a U-turn where it wasn’t allowed – it wasn’t permitted.

Lauren says, “What else could I do? Anyway, we’re back on track now.” To be “back on track” means to be doing something correctly after doing it incorrectly for a certain amount of time. So you’re doing something wrong, and then you realize and you correct your mistake, and now you’re doing it correctly – the right way – we would say you “got back on track.”

Ben says, “Watch out for those speed bumps!” A “speed bump” is a small section of the road that is higher than the rest of the road; it causes the cars to slow down. If you try to go over a speed bump at a high speed you could damage your car. Speed bumps have become very popular in Los Angeles in the last few years. Many of the streets where there’s a lot of traffic also have many people who live that street, and so they complain that the traffic is dangerous for them and the city puts in speed bumps to slow the traffic down. I personally don’t really like these, but then again, I don’t live on a busy street.





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Ben then says to Lauren, “You really are blind without your glasses.” To be “blind” means to be unable to see – you cannot see. If someone says, “you’re blind without your glasses,” they mean you cannot see very well at all unless you have your glasses on. I am this way; I am blind without my glasses. My wife says I’m blind with my glasses, too, but that’s another problem!

Ben says, “You’re going too fast. According to that sign, this is a school crossing zone.” A “school crossing” is a part of the street where many children, next to a school, will be crossing the street. Because it is dangerous for children to be crossing the street when there is a lot of traffic – when there are a lot of cars – many places put up “school crossing” signs, meaning you should be extra careful – you should be very careful in this area because children will be crossing the street, going from one side of the street to the other. A “zone” is just another word for an area.

“The posted speed limit,” Ben says, “is 25 miles per hour.” The “speed limit” is the maximum speed that you can drive in a particular area or on a particular street. In most cities, the speed limit is between 25 and 35 miles per hour. That would be between 40 and 55 kilometers per hour, roughly – approximately. The word “posted” means that something is put in a place where everyone can see it. So, the “posted speed limit” is the speed limit you see on the side of the road. On American freeways and highways the speed limit varies considerably. It’s different in different places even in different parts of the country, so you need to look at the posted speed limit to make sure you aren’t driving too fast.

Lauren says, “That’s only true when the lights are flashing,” meaning the posted speed limit is 25 miles an hour only when the lights on the sign are flashing. To “flash” means to go on and off, on and off repeatedly, and usually quickly. Some speed limits are only used when the sign is flashing; if the sign isn’t flashing, then you don’t have to worry about that speed limit. The word “flash” has a couple of different meanings in English; take a look at the Learning Guide for some additional explanations.

Lauren says, “Is that a ‘Detour’ sign?” A “detour” is an alternate route; it’s a way to go from one place to another place when the normal route – the normal way that you would go – is not possible. So for example, if they are fixing the street – there is construction on the street, or there’s a special event and the street is blocked – the street is closed – you might have to “take a detour,” meaning you might have to go a different way in order to get to where you want to go.

Ben says, “I can’t believe it. Will I never get home?” This expression, “will I never...” plus the verb or the result, is used when you don’t believe something will





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happen even though you want it to happen. So you want to get home, but because of all the difficulties it doesn't look like you're going to get home. So you may say, "Will I never get home?" Or if you have, say, a neighbor whose children like to cry and scream in the street – this is just an example, I'm not talking about my neighbor and his child – you may say, "Will that child never shut up?" – will that child never be quiet. The answer, of course, is no!

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

[start of dialogue]

Ben: Why are you squinting like that?

Lauren: I left my glasses at the office.

Ben: You mean you can't see?!

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Ben: I can't believe it. Will I never get home?

[end of dialogue]



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The script for this episode was written by someone who never has to squint because she has perfect eyesight, Dr. Lucy Tse.

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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