



REAL-LIFE AMERICAN ENGLISH SURVIVAL GUIDE

Your practical companion for travel, conversations, and everyday confidence

By The American Girl Language Services

LEARN IT. SPEAK IT. LIVE IT.™

A note from The American Girl

Welcome! I believe learning English should feel like opening a door, not taking a test. You can memorize hundreds of words and still freeze when a cashier asks you a simple question. This guide is here to change that. We'll practice the words Americans actually use, the little cultural details that make conversations easier, and the exact sentences you can say when you need help. You do not need perfect English to connect with people. You need useful English—and the courage to use it.

My promise to you: every chapter gives you language you can use immediately. Read it aloud, practice with a friend, and try one new phrase in real life. That is how confidence grows.

— The American Girl

Your learning roadmap

01 THE JOURNEY

Prepare for your trip, make plans, and communicate at the airport.

02 THE ARRIVAL

Navigate immigration, baggage claim, transportation, and hotel check-in.

03 THE TRIP

Handle restaurants, shopping, directions, and everyday situations.

04 AMERICANIZE IT!

Understand natural speech, friendly small talk, and U.S. cultural habits.

How to use this book: Read the mini-lesson. Say each phrase aloud three times. Practice the dialogue with two different answers. Then complete the “Your turn” activity.

01 THE JOURNEY

Before you board a plane, you can already start speaking American English. Planning a trip is a perfect opportunity to practice asking questions, making decisions, and explaining your plans.

Talk about your plans

Americans often use “going to” for plans and “will” for quick decisions or predictions. Say: “I’m going to visit Chicago in November.” Say: “I think I’ll take an earlier flight.” In casual speech, “going to” often sounds like “gonna,” but write it as “going to” in formal messages.

Essential travel language

- I’m planning a trip to the United States.
- I’m traveling for vacation / work / school.
- I’d like to book a round-trip ticket.
- Is there a nonstop flight?
- What time does boarding begin?
- How much is a checked bag?
- Can I bring a carry-on and a personal item?
- Could you send me the confirmation by email?
- Is this ticket refundable or changeable?

Real conversation • Calling an airline

You: Hi! I’m looking for a flight to Boston next month.

Agent: Sure. What dates are you traveling?

You: I’m leaving on the tenth and coming back on the seventeenth.

Agent: Would you prefer a nonstop flight?

You: Yes, if possible. And could you tell me the baggage allowance?

Airport vocabulary you will actually hear

Departure = when your flight leaves. Arrival = when it lands. Gate = where you board. Boarding pass = your ticket to get on the plane. Layover = time between connecting flights. Carry-on = a bag that travels with you in the cabin. Checked bag = luggage placed in the aircraft hold.

At the airport: ready-to-use phrases

- Where is the check-in counter for this airline?
- Do I need to check this bag?
- Could I have an aisle seat, please?
- Has the gate changed?

- Is the flight on time?
- Where do I go for security?
- Could you repeat that more slowly, please?

American Girl tip

Airline baggage allowances and entry requirements change. Check your airline's current policy and official U.S. government travel information before departure. Never assume that a rule from a previous trip still applies.

YOUR TURN • Speak it!

Tell a friend where you are going, why you are traveling, and what you need to do before departure. Use "I'm going to..." at least twice.

My answer: _____

02 THE ARRIVAL

You have landed! Now it is time to turn your classroom English into real-world English. The secret is to keep your answers short, clear, and truthful.

At immigration and passport control

- I'm here for tourism.
- I'm visiting friends for one week.
- I'll be staying at a hotel in downtown Miami.
- My return flight is on Friday.
- Could you please repeat the question?
- I'm sorry, I didn't understand. Could you speak more slowly?

Know what to expect

International arrivals may involve passport inspection, baggage collection, and customs procedures. Follow airport signs and instructions. Different travelers may use different lanes or processes, and officers may ask different questions. Always answer honestly and have your travel documents available.

Real conversation • Passport inspection

Officer: What is the purpose of your visit?

You: I'm here on vacation.

Officer: How long are you staying?

You: Eight days.

Officer: Where will you be staying?

You: At a hotel in Miami Beach.

Finding your luggage and your ride

- Where is baggage claim?
- Which carousel is for flight 218?
- My suitcase didn't arrive. Where can I report it?
- Where is the rideshare pickup area?
- Does this train go downtown?
- How much is the fare?
- Could you drop me off at this address, please?

Real conversation • Hotel check-in

You: Hi! I have a reservation under Ashley.

Front desk: Welcome! May I see your ID and a credit card?

You: Of course. Is breakfast included?

Front desk: Yes, it's served from seven to ten.

You: Great. And what time is checkout?

Useful hotel expressions

"Under the name" tells staff whose name is on a reservation. "Included" means the service is part of the price. "Incidentals" are possible additional charges. "Checkout" is the time you must leave your room. "Could I get a late checkout?" is a polite way to request extra time.

YOUR TURN • Speak it!

Practice checking in at a hotel. Include your reservation name, one question about breakfast, and one request about your room.

My answer: _____

03 THE TRIP

Now comes the fun part: exploring. You will order food, shop, ask for directions, and solve little problems. Each interaction is an opportunity to practice.

Asking for directions

- Excuse me, is there a pharmacy nearby?
- What's the easiest way to get to the museum?
- Is it within walking distance?
- Do I turn left at the next light?
- How many blocks is it from here?
- Could you show me on the map?
- Thanks so much for your help!

Real conversation • Finding a coffee shop

You: Excuse me, is there a coffee shop around here?

Local: Yes! Go straight two blocks and turn right.

You: Is it on the corner?

Local: Exactly. You can't miss it.

You: Perfect. Thank you!

At a restaurant

- Do you have a table for two?
- Could we see the menu, please?
- Can I get the grilled chicken, please?
- Does this dish contain nuts?
- Could I have the dressing on the side?
- Could we get separate checks?
- Can I get a box for the leftovers?
- Could we have the check when you have a moment?

Speak like an American

"Can I get..." is a common, natural way to order in the U.S. "For here or to go?" asks whether you will eat there or take the food away. "On the side" means served separately. "Split the check" can mean dividing the bill; if you need each person's own bill, ask for "separate checks."

Real conversation • Ordering lunch

Server: Hi there! What can I get you?

You: I'll have the turkey sandwich, please.

Server: Would you like fries or a salad?

You: A salad, please. And could I get the dressing on the side?

Server: Absolutely. Anything to drink?

You: Just water, thanks.

Shopping without stress

- Do you have this in a medium?
- Can I try it on?
- Where are the fitting rooms?
- Is this the sale price?
- Do you accept contactless payment?
- Could I get a receipt?
- What's your return policy?
- I'm just looking, thanks.

A quick cultural note: prices and tips

In many U.S. locations, sales tax is added at checkout, so the amount you pay may be higher than the shelf price. Tipping customs vary by service and location. At sit-down restaurants, tipping is customary; always check whether a service charge or gratuity has already been added. When in doubt, ask politely.

When something goes wrong

- I think there's a mistake on my bill.
- I ordered the vegetarian option.
- My room key isn't working.
- I lost my wallet. Can you help me?
- I need a doctor / pharmacy / police officer.
- Please call 911. It's an emergency.

YOUR TURN • Speak it!

Write and say a short restaurant order with one special request. Then ask for the check politely.

My answer: _____

04 AMERICANIZE IT!

This is where English begins to feel natural. Americans often connect words, shorten common phrases, and use expressions that do not translate word for word. You do not need to imitate every expression. Start by recognizing them.

Understand everyday reductions

- gonna → going to: "I'm gonna head out."
- wanna → want to: "Wanna grab coffee?"
- gotta → have got to / need to: "I gotta go."
- kinda → kind of: "It's kinda cold."
- lemme → let me: "Lemme check."
- dunno → don't know: "I dunno yet."
- whatcha → what are you / what do you: "Whatcha doing?"

Important: informal is not the same as incorrect

These spellings represent casual spoken pronunciation. They are useful for listening and relaxed conversations, but formal emails, schoolwork, and professional writing usually call for standard forms.

Friendly phrases you will hear

- What's up? → A casual hello or "What's happening?"
- How's it going? → How are things?
- No worries. → It's okay; don't worry about it.
- Sounds good! → I agree with that plan.
- I'm all set. → I don't need anything else.
- You got it. → Sure; absolutely.
- Let's catch up. → Let's talk and share news.
- I'm running late. → I won't arrive on time.

Real conversation • Small talk

Neighbor: Hey! How's it going?

You: Pretty good! How about you?

Neighbor: Not bad. Got any plans this weekend?

You: I'm thinking about checking out the beach.

Neighbor: Nice! Have fun!

You: Thanks! You too!

Common idioms, explained simply

- Piece of cake → very easy.

- Under the weather → feeling a little sick.
- Break the ice → help people feel comfortable.
- On the same page → in agreement.
- Call it a day → stop working for now.
- Get the hang of it → learn how to do something.
- Hang in there → keep going; don't give up.
- Touch base → briefly reconnect or check in.

Cultural confidence, not stereotypes

The United States is diverse. Communication styles vary by region, age, workplace, and individual. In many situations, a friendly greeting, eye contact when comfortable, and a clear “please” or “thank you” help. Some people enjoy small talk; others prefer to get to the point. Pay attention to the person in front of you rather than assuming every American communicates the same way.

Everyday American conventions

- Dates are often written month/day/year: 10/13/2026.
- Distances are commonly given in miles, and temperatures in Fahrenheit.
- A “restroom” is a polite word for a public bathroom.
- “Check” is common for the restaurant bill.
- “Line” is common for a queue.
- For immediate police, fire, or medical emergencies, call 911.

YOUR TURN • Speak it!

Choose three phrases from this chapter and create a conversation with a friend. Try using one idiom naturally.

My answer: _____

THE AMERICAN GIRL 7-DAY SPEAKING CHALLENGE

- DAY 1 | Introduce yourself in four sentences.
- DAY 2 | Ask three travel questions aloud.
- DAY 3 | Practice an airport conversation.
- DAY 4 | Role-play a hotel check-in.
- DAY 5 | Order a meal with one special request.
- DAY 6 | Ask for directions and repeat the answer.
- DAY 7 | Use five casual American expressions in a conversation.

Your confidence checklist

- ☐ I can introduce myself.
- ☐ I can ask someone to slow down or repeat.
- ☐ I can navigate an airport and hotel.
- ☐ I can order food and ask about ingredients.
- ☐ I can ask for directions and shop confidently.
- ☐ I recognize common American informal expressions.

A final word

Your English does not need to be perfect to be powerful. Every time you ask a question, start a conversation, or try a new expression, you are building a real skill. Keep showing up, keep speaking, and celebrate your progress. I'll be cheering you on every step of the way. Learn it. Speak it. Live it!

THE AMERICAN GIRL LANGUAGE SERVICES | Real English. Real Conversations. Real Confidence.

Educational note: This guide teaches language and general cultural awareness. Travel, immigration, airline, health, and legal rules can change; consult official sources for current requirements.