

## Learn English With Photos 12 – A Week in Chicago

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Hello and welcome to episode 12 of Learn English With Photos. In the first part of this lesson I'm going to be talking about a trip I made to Chicago in 2000. I'll then go over some of the vocabulary and finish by asking you some questions relating to the topic.

In April 2000 I accompanied a group of French professionals on a one-week e-commerce training course at the University of Illinois at Chicago, for what was my first and only trip to the United States. Ironically, the seminar took place just after the first dot-com bubble burst, and the future of e-commerce was looking decidedly shaky. The rest, however, is history, as they say.

Let's begin with an overview of the city. Chicago is located in northeastern Illinois on the southwestern shores of Lake Michigan. The town of Chicago was founded in 1833, and has grown to become the third most populous city in the United States, with approximately 2.7 million residents.

The most popular nickname for Chicago is the "Windy City", although Chicago is not significantly windier than any other U.S. city. During the week I was there the weather was warm and sunny, which meant that I was able to take a lot of photos.

The thing which impressed me most was the height of the buildings. There seemed to be skyscrapers everywhere. I'm not very fond of heights but I did pluck up enough courage to take a trip to the top of the Sears Tower, one of the most popular tourist destinations in Chicago.

At the time of its completion in 1973, it was the tallest building in the world, surpassing the World Trade Center towers in New York, and it held this rank for nearly 25 years. It is still the tallest building in the United States and the seventh-tallest free-standing structure in the world. Over one million people visit its observation deck each year, and as you would expect, the views are truly spectacular.

Not all the buildings are skyscrapers though, and I came across some very attractive brownstone houses, and these with wooden exteriors.

Unlike its bigger rival New York, Chicago doesn't have a subway but it does have the famous 'L'. The 'L', short for 'elevated', is the rapid transit system serving the city of Chicago and some of its surrounding suburbs. The oldest sections of the 'L' started operations in 1892, making it the second-oldest system in the Americas, after Boston. Although the 'L' gained its nickname because large parts of the network are elevated, some portions are also in subway tunnels. On average nearly 800,000 people use the 'L' each weekday, and annual ridership for 2011 was 221.6 million.

Of course, other modes of transport are available. There's the bus, for example. Or a horse and cart. But if you want something a bit more luxurious, this stretch limo would be hard to beat.

Chicago has a long history of crime – the famous gangster Al Capone operated here in the 1920s, but these cops seemed quite relaxed.

Although our group spent most of the week in the classroom learning about the finer points of e-commerce, we did have time to see some of Chicago's many sights.

The Navy Pier Park, which extends into Lake Michigan, is Chicago's number one attraction with over eight million visitors a year. Its most eye-catching feature is the 148-foot-high Ferris Wheel.

Here's the Chicago River which gets dyed green on Saint Patrick's Day.

The Chicago Water Tower is the second-oldest water tower in the United States. It is located on North Michigan Avenue along the Magnificent Mile shopping district. The tower was constructed to house a large water pump, intended to draw water from Lake Michigan, but it now serves as a Chicago Office of Tourism art gallery.

And talking of art, no trip to Chicago would be complete without a visit to the Art Institute of Chicago, where you can find some of the world's most famous Impressionist and Post-Impressionist paintings. Two of my favourites are Grant Wood's American Gothic and Edward Hopper's Nighthawks.

At the weekend I hired a bike and cycled along the shore of Lake Michigan. There were plenty of people jogging or walking their dogs, or doing both at the same time.

I'm sure there were lots more things I could have done, and a week is not really long enough. But I was just happy to soak up the American atmosphere.

At the end of the seminar, there was a drinks party and we all got awarded a certificate. All in all, it was a memorable week, and I'd love to go back to the States one day.

But enough dreaming, we've still got work to do. I'm now going to go over some of the vocabulary. I'll say each word twice and you can repeat it after me if you like. I'll also give a definition and make a few comments where appropriate.

# Vocabulary

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- ❑ **attractive** — pleasant to look at
- ❑ **award** — give someone a prize, diploma, an examination mark, etc.
- ❑ **brownstone** — in the United States, a brownstone is a type of house which was built during the 19th century. Brownstones have a front that is made from a reddish-brown stone.
- ❑ **bubble** — a bubble is a situation in which large numbers of people want to buy shares in a company that is new or not yet financially successful, and pay more than the shares are worth. When it becomes clear that the shares are worth less than people paid for them, you can say that the bubble has burst.
- ❑ **burst** — if something bursts, it suddenly breaks open or splits open and the air or other substance inside it comes out
- ❑ **construct** — if you construct something such as a building, road, or machine, you build it or make it
- ❑ **cop** — cop is an informal word for a policeman or policewoman
- ❑ **cycle** — if you cycle, you ride a bicycle
- ❑ **dot-com** — company that sells goods and services on the Internet, especially one whose address ends '.com'
- ❑ **draw** — to draw something such as water or energy from a particular source means to take it from that source
- ❑ **dye** — if you dye something, you change its colour by soaking it in a special liquid
- ❑ **e-commerce** — the buying, selling, and ordering of goods and services using the Internet
- ❑ **elevated** — if you elevate something, you raise it above a horizontal level
- ❑ **eye-catching** — something that is eye-catching is very noticeable
- ❑ **Ferris wheel** — a very large upright wheel with carriages around the edge of it which people can ride in. Ferris wheels are often found at theme parks or funfairs.
- ❑ **foot** — a unit for measuring length, height, or depth, and is equal to 12 inches or 30.48 centimetres. When you are giving measurements, the form 'foot' is often used as the plural instead of the plural form 'feet'.
- ❑ **found** — to be the first to start building and living in a town or country
- ❑ **free-standing** — not supported by or attached to anything
- ❑ **gangster** — a member of an organized group of violent criminals
- ❑ **height** — the height of a person or thing is their size or length from the bottom to the top
- ❑ **hire** — if you hire something, you pay money to the owner so that you can use it for a period of time
- ❑ **impress** — if something impresses you, you feel great admiration for it
- ❑ **Impressionist** — an Impressionist painting is one painted in the style of Impressionism, a style of painting developed in France between 1870 and 1900 which concentrated on showing the effects of light on things rather than on clear and exact detail
- ❑ **jog** — run slowly, often as a form of exercise
- ❑ **located** — if something is located in a particular place, it is present or has been built there

- ❑ **luxurious** — if you describe something as luxurious, you mean that it is very comfortable and expensive
- ❑ **memorable** — something that is memorable is worth remembering or likely to be remembered, because it is special or very enjoyable
- ❑ **nickname** — a nickname is an informal name for someone or something
- ❑ **observation deck** — an observation deck is a place up high where people can see things
- ❑ **overview** — an overview of a situation is a general understanding or description of it as a whole
- ❑ **painting** — a painting is a picture which someone has painted
- ❑ **pluck up courage** — if you pluck up the courage to do something that you feel nervous about, you make an effort to be brave enough to do it
- ❑ **populous** — a populous country or area has a lot of people living in it
- ❑ **pump** — a machine or device that is used to force a liquid or gas to flow in a particular direction
- ❑ **rank** — the degree to which somebody/something is of high quality
- ❑ **rapid transit system** — an electric railway characterized by high speed and rapid acceleration
- ❑ **ridership** — number of people riding the subway, train, etc.
- ❑ **Saint Patrick's Day** — 17 March, the day of the national saint of Ireland
- ❑ **shaky** — if you describe a situation as shaky, you mean that it is weak or unstable, and seems unlikely to last long or be successful
- ❑ **shore** — the shore of a sea, lake, or wide river is the land along the edge of it
- ❑ **sight** — the sights are the places that are interesting to see and that are often visited by tourists
- ❑ **skyscraper** — a skyscraper is a very tall building in a city
- ❑ **soak up** — if you soak up the atmosphere in a place that you are visiting, you observe or get involved in the way of life there, because you enjoy it or are interested in it
- ❑ **spectacular** — something that is spectacular is very impressive or dramatic
- ❑ **stretch limo** — a very long and luxurious car in which a rich, famous, or important person is driven somewhere
- ❑ **suburbs** — an area where people live that is outside the centre of a city
- ❑ **subway** — in American English a subway is an underground railway/railroad system in a city
- ❑ **surpass** — to do or be better than somebody/something
- ❑ **surrounding** — that is near or around something
- ❑ **tower** — a tall narrow building or part of a building
- ❑ **training course** — a series of lessons or lectures teaching the skills that you need for a particular job or activity
- ❑ **trip** — a journey to a place and back again, especially a short one for pleasure or a particular purpose
- ❑ **view** — what you can see from a particular place or position
- ❑ **windy** — with a lot of wind

# Questions

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1. Have you ever been to the United States? Where did you go? What did you see and do?
2. Which part of American would you most like to visit and why?
3. What else do you know about Chicago?
4. If you had just one day in Chicago, how would you spend it?
5. What are some stereotypes about Americans? In your experience, is there any truth in them?
6. Some non-Americans say that we are too influenced by American culture. What do you think?
7. What are some of the differences between American English and British English?
8. Would you like to study or work in America? Why or why not?

