



American Car Culture

(Basic, A-Level)

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In the United States, cars are a big part of everyday life. In many places, people depend on cars to get to work, go shopping, or take children to school. This is especially true in the suburbs, where homes and stores are far apart.



This has created a special kind of culture around driving. Many Americans have long commutes, and cars are a big part of their daily lifestyles. People eat in their cars, drink coffee in their cars, and even go to drive-through banks, fast-food restaurants, or pharmacies.

Especially in the suburbs and in small towns, there is little or no public transportation, so people must drive everywhere. If you do not have a car, you cannot go anywhere very easily. You can try walking or riding a bicycle, but places can be very far apart. It can also be a little dangerous because streets in the United States are built for cars, not for people.

Because so many people drive, there is often heavy traffic in big cities. Some people commute for hours every day, and they spend most of that time sitting in traffic. Parking can also be difficult and expensive. Cars also use a lot of gasoline, which costs money and affects the environment.

Although cars cause problems, a car means freedom for many Americans. It lets people go where they want, when they want. At any moment, they can get in their cars and drive to the store or take a day trip. Some cities have trains and buses, but car culture in the United States is still very strong, and many Americans do not really want it to change.



Comprehension Questions

Answer the following questions based on the passage. (See “Answer Key” for the answers.)

1. Why do Americans depend on cars?
 - a. Cars are cheap in the United States.
 - b. They need them to get around.
 - c. Americans like to drive.
2. Which of these are problems that cars create in the United States? (*Choose all correct answers.*)
 - a. The traffic can get very heavy in big cities.
 - b. It is difficult to find gasoline.
 - c. Streets are dangerous for people.
 - d. Large cities have no buses.
3. Many Americans spend many hours in their cars every day.
 - a. True
 - b. False
4. What does Franco say about drive-throughs?
 - a. Drive-throughs are very popular in the United States.
 - b. Drive-throughs are only for fast-food restaurants and banks.
 - c. People use them to get food or medicine without leaving their cars.
5. When do you need a car **the most** in the United States? (*Choose all correct answers.*)
 - a. If you live in the suburbs.
 - b. If you live in a big city.
 - c. If you live in a small town.



Vocabulary Lesson and Quiz

Key Vocabulary List

1. **depend** /dɪˈpɛnd ən/ (verb) • to need something often; to need something to live or to be able to do something else. Examples:
Young children **depend** on their parents for everything.
Many Americans **depend** on their cars to get to work.
2. **freedom** /ˈfri dəm/ (noun) • the state of being free to do what you want. Example:
Many Americans feel that their cars give them **freedom** to do anything they want.
Americans believe people must have the **freedom** to say negative things about the government.
3. **lifestyle** /ˈlaɪf, staɪl/ (noun) • the way a person lives. Example:
She has a healthy **lifestyle** with lots of exercise and good food.
4. **public transportation** /ˈpʌblɪk ˌtrænsˌpɔːrˈteɪʃən/ (noun) • transportation such as buses, trains, and subways that many people use at the same time. Example:
I take **public transportation** to school every day.
5. **suburb** /ˈsʌbərb/ (noun) • a town or neighborhood outside a big city; the part of a city that is just outside the center of the city. Example:
They moved to a **suburb** to have more space and a backyard.
6. **commute** /kəˈmjut/ (verb) • to travel from home to work or school and back; also a noun, meaning the trip to work or school. Examples:
He **commutes** one hour each day to get to work.
His **commute** to work is long, but he likes his job.
7. **traffic** /ˈtræfɪk/ (noun) • the cars and other vehicles on a road. Example:
We were late because of heavy **traffic**.
8. **gasoline** /ˈgæsəˌlɪn/ (noun) • fuel for cars. Example:
The car needs more **gasoline** before we can drive to the store.
9. **drive-through** (sometimes spelled drive-thru) /ˈdraɪv ˌθru/ (noun) • a service where you stay in your car to order food, coffee, etc. Example:
We got lunch from the **drive-through** because we were in a hurry.
10. **parking** /ˈpɑːkɪŋ/ (noun) • a place where cars stop and wait. Example:
It's hard to find **parking** downtown during the day.



Vocabulary Quiz

Complete each sentence using one of the words in the vocabulary list. Some words may appear more than once.

commute • drive-through • depend • gasoline • lifestyle • parking •
public transportation • suburb • traffic

1. Many Americans _____ on their cars to go places.
2. Some American cities have little or no _____ transportation, so people must drive everywhere.
3. Many Americans feel that their cars give them _____ to do anything they want.
4. Many Americans have long _____ to work and school every day.
5. Heavy _____ can make people late for work or school.
6. When they are in a hurry, Americans often get food from a _____ restaurant.
7. It can be hard to find _____ downtown during the day because there are so many cars.
 - a. True
 - b. False
8. Using a car to go everywhere is part of many people's _____ in the United States.
 - a. commutes
 - b. lifestyle
 - c. lifestyles
9. Long commutes, eating in the car, and drive-through restaurants and banks are part of the American car _____.
 - a. freedom
 - b. commute
 - c. culture
10. In big cities, people sometimes sit in their cars for hours every week because of heavy _____.
 - a. transportation
 - b. traffic
 - c. freedom



Answer Key

Reading Comprehension

1. b. They need them to get around. (*Americans like to drive, but that is not why they **depend** on cars.*)
2. a. The traffic can get very heavy in big cities.
c. Streets are dangerous for people.
3. True. (*Franco writes that, "Some people commute for hours every day, and they spend most of that time sitting in traffic."*)
4. c. People use them to get food or medicine without leaving their cars. (*You can guess that drive-throughs may be popular, but Franco does not say that. Franco mentions that drive-throughs are for restaurants, banks, and pharmacies.*)
5. a. If you live in the suburbs.
c. If you live in a small town.
(*If you live in a big city, they have some public transportation.*)

Vocabulary Quiz

1. Many Americans **depend** on their cars to go places.
2. Some American cities have little or no **public** transportation, so people must drive everywhere.
3. Many Americans feel that their cars give them **freedom** to do anything they want.
(also: **the freedom**)
4. Many Americans have long **commutes** to work and school every day.
5. Heavy **traffic** can make people late for work or school.
6. When they are in a hurry, Americans often get food from a **drive-through** restaurant.
(also: **drive-thru** in informal English)
7. **True**
8. **a. lifestyles**
9. **c. culture**
10. **b. traffic**

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