

Podcast 113 - Greetings in Australia

by Rob McCormack - Saturday, August 17, 2019

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Learn English while learning about daily life in Australia, with Rob McCormack

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Hi,

Greetings are usually a little different from one country to another. What might be considered acceptable and polite in one country may not be considered to be polite in another. In this podcast, I would like to tell you a little about some of the ways Australians greet one another in daily life.

Perhaps the most important greeting is when you meet someone for the first time. In Australia, a handshake is the normal thing to do, both for men and for women, while at the same time looking the person in the eye, smiling and saying – ‘Pleased to meet you’ or ‘Nice to meet you’. A more formal thing to say, and not used very much these days, would be – ‘How do you do’. You might hear this from older people. While this is actually a question, it is not meant to be answered. It’s just an older way of saying that you are pleased to meet them. It would be perfectly acceptable to say in return, ‘How do you do’. Sometimes you are unable to shake someone’s hand because at the time of the introduction, you are busy cooking, cleaning or perhaps doing a messy job. For example, you might be preparing food or have grease on your hands from working on a car, in which case you would say ‘I won’t shake your hand right now, because my hands are not clean’. But importantly, you would then immediately say – ‘Pleased to meet you’. It would be considered impolite to shake hands if your hands were wet or dirty.

Greetings amongst friends are of course different. Amongst most Australian men, a handshake is also the way male friends and acquaintances will greet each other whenever they catch up, and also sometimes when they leave after their catch up. This has become quite common today, although when I was young I don’t recall using it so much.



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A point about the handshake for men - most Australian men have been taught (me included) to shake another man's hand with firmness, rather than a soft or limp hand. The idea is that it conveys a strong character and a sincere greeting. However, obviously it should not be so firm that it hurts the other person. This is especially important when shaking the hand of a woman, where it would be more appropriate for a man to have a softer handshake.

When Australian women meet as friends, it is very common for them to politely embrace while kissing each other just once on the right cheek. Often this becomes only a slight touch of the two cheeks rather than a proper kiss. Of course when two women friends are really close and they haven't seen one another for a long time, the embrace might be more vigorous and be called a proper hug, in which case the kiss on the cheek is sometimes omitted.

When an Australian man catches up with a woman friend or acquaintance, it is usual to give a polite embrace and a kiss on the right cheek. I find it interesting that, while men would shake each other's hand, the man's greeting to a woman friend is different. But I think this is changing, especially amongst younger Australian men. I have noticed in the last few years that young male friends will not only shake hands but will also give what is called a 'man hug'. It starts with a handshake but progresses to half a hug, generally with the left hand reaching around the right shoulder of the other person and giving a pat on the back and lightly touching your chest up to the chest of your friend. I notice that my youngest son does this with his close friends and I must say, it feels sort of special when I give him this type of handshake and half hug which I have started doing recently. Of course, women have always been into

this hugging business, so I think it is great that men are now also showing more outward affection for their male friends.

Also of interest are the greetings which Australians give when they are out walking for recreational purposes on say a hiking track, next to a roadway or on a suburban footpath. The key point here is that the walkers are doing recreational walking. These greetings don't seem to apply in other types of walking or other situations. This recreational walking seems to bring with it an expectation that you will greet strangers who are doing the same thing. Not to greet someone can be seen as being unfriendly, although not every Australian takes this view. I have quite a bit of experience in recreational walking and I must admit to feeling a little rejected if someone fails to give me eye contact and greet me when I am out walking. After all, life is too short not to be friendly whenever you get the opportunity, even to strangers.

Let's assume you are out for your morning or evening walk and there is another walker or a couple coming in the other direction, obviously also out for a recreational walk. The first thing that happens as you approach the other person is that you get eye contact. As you pass, you will smile and use one of several typical greetings, such as 'Hi', 'Hello', 'G'day', 'Good Morning' or 'Good Evening' or sometimes just 'Morning' or 'Evening'. There is no correct way to greet somebody in this situation, so any of these greetings, or any other polite greeting, will be fine. Some people even like to make a quick comment about the weather. For example, some people might say 'Great day for it', meaning the weather is perfect for walking.

While Australians have certain greetings, the overriding point is that you should approach the greeting in a positive and friendly way. That way, even if you say something which is unusual or not expected, the fact that you are positive and friendly will be obvious and will hopefully help build a friendly atmosphere.

If you have a question or a comment to make, please leave it in the comments box at the bottom of this page. Or, you can send me an email at rob@slowenglish.info. I would love to hear from you. Tell me where you live, a little bit about yourself and what you think of my Slow English podcast. I will write back to you, in English of course. If you would like to take a short quiz to see if you have understood this podcast, you will also find it on my website. Goodbye until next time.

Rob

[WpProQuiz 115]

Vocabulary

acceptable = when people accept or agree with something

acquaintances = people you know who are not really friends

actually = really

affection = when you like somebody and you show it

amongst = between

approach = (here) the way you plan to do something

approach = to go towards someone

appropriate = correct, right

assume = you imagine something

atmosphere = the overall feeling

catch up = when friends meet

character = (here) the good or bad things about a person's personality

cheeks = the side of your face

close = near

considered = thought to be

conveys = sends a message

couple = (here) two people, usually a man and a woman

dirty = has dirt on it

expectation = you think that something will happen

experience = when you have done something before

eye contact = when two people look at each other

firmness = how strong something is

formal = (here) when things are done according to strict rules used by officials

grease = a thick black or brown liquid used in a motor of a car or truck

handshake = when each person puts forward their right hand and shakes the right hand of someone else – a way to show friendship and respect

hiking = walking for fun and for fitness away from the town or city

hug = when you put your arms around another person to show love or affection

hurts = feels pain or causes pain

immediately = straight away, now

impolite = unfriendly

introduction = when you meet someone for the first time

kissing = using the lips to touch another person, to show affection

limp = when something is not strong and can easily bend

male = men and boys are males, women and girls are females

messy = not clean

not meant = (here) not required to be, not designed to be

noticed = seen

obviously = when something can be easily seen or understood

omitted = left out

opportunity = when you can choose to do something

overriding = the main or most important

pat = to touch with your hand in an up and down movement

perfectly = (here) fully

point = (here) a piece of information

polite = friendly, nice

proper = correct

purposes = the reason you do something, your goal or objective

recall = remember

recently = not very long ago

recreational = just for fun (not part of your job or work)

rejected = when someone says no

several = many

sincere = true

situations = when something is happening

soft = when something is not strong or hard

sort of = (here) very

suburban = is located in a suburb of a city or town

typical = something that you see many times

view = (here) opinion

vigorous = when something is done strongly or actively

wet = has water on it

working on a car = repairing a part of a car