

Real Talk #047 – What to say if you are stopped by the police

Episode description

You're driving down the street and notice the police car behind you has just turned on its siren and flashing lights. You need to pull over. What do you do? What should you say? Getting pulled over by the police while driving can often be a stressful situation, even if you haven't done anything wrong.

In this Real Talk episode, Andrew and Kassie gives you some key English expressions to help you deal with getting pulled over. You will hear what it means to dispute a ticket, to grab your registration, and to write someone up.

Fun fact

Even though traffic stops occur on a daily basis, Stanford University's Open Policing project has found that the average driver has about a 1% chance of getting pulled over in a year.

Expressions included in the study guide

- To act rashly
- To get pulled over
- To grab your registration
- To weasel [one's] way out of [something]
- To dispute a ticket
- To write [someone] up



Transcript

Note: The words and expressions that appear in **bold text** within the transcript are discussed in more detail in the Detailed Explanations section that follows the transcript. The transcript has been edited for clarity.

Andrew: Hello there, everyone. My name's Andrew.

Kassy: And I'm Kassy.

Andrew: And this is the Culips English Podcast.

Hello there, friends. Welcome back to Culips. Today's episode is a Real Talk episode, and this is the Culips series where we teach you the English expressions that you need to know for real-world situations.

And today, we are going to look at a situation that is realer than real, because it's kind of a serious situation. It is what to say if you get stopped by the police at a traffic stop. And I wanted to give a shout-out to one of our listeners from Germany, Maximilian, who requested that we talk about what to say when you interact with the police. So thank you for requesting this topic, Maximilian. We will try our best to explain how you can talk to the police in this episode. And, everyone, I'm not alone today here, I am joined by my cohost, Kassy. Hey, Kassy, what's up?

Kassy: Hey, Andrew. Doing well.

Andrew: Perfect. We'll get started with the episode in just a moment, everyone. But before we do, I want to let you know that the best way to study with this episode is with the study guide that we have made to accompany this episode. And inside the guide, you'll find a transcript, detailed vocabulary explanations, real-life usage examples, and a comprehension quiz, plus more. And you can download it and follow along as you listen. It's available for all Culips members. So sign up, become a member, and get the study guide by visiting Culips.com.

Kassy: So today, we're going to be learning some practical expressions that you can use when you are stopped by the police, most typically for a traffic stop. Now, we should first define what is a traffic stop. Andrew, can you explain?

Andrew: I'd love to, yes. So a traffic stop is what happens when a police officer stops your car because you have done something illegal while driving. So maybe you were speeding, driving too fast. Or maybe you failed to stop at a stop sign or traffic light. Or maybe you changed lanes without turning on your blinker. Or there are so many different ways that people could break the law while driving. And whenever a police officer stops you because of one of these infringements, then we call this a traffic stop.

Now, Kassy, you mentioned that we're going to learn some practical expressions for this kind of situation. And I think what's important to make clear here before we start is that it's a really good idea to know what the police will say to you and ask you in this situation. So everyone, yes, you're going to want to learn how to respond to the police, but it's very important to know what the police will ask of you because, you know, it's a stressful situation for both police officers and for people, in general, when they **get pulled over**.

And you don't want to mess this up, right, Kassy? You want to make sure that everybody stays safe. And sometimes with dealing with the police in North America, it can be high tension, a little bit stressful. So it's best to remain calm and cool, and by understanding what the police officer says to you, then, you know, you can reduce your stress level a little bit.

Kassy: Yeah, that's right. And a lot of times the police are just as stressed as you, right? They don't know if you are a threat. They're trying to protect themselves. So they might **act rashly**, if you do something quickly as well. So the more calm you are, the readier you are for the situation, the smoother, it will go.

Andrew: Exactly. So what we'll do now is listen to an example conversation between a driver and a police officer. And the driver **gets pulled over** because he was speeding. So we'll listen to the conversation. And then after we listen to it, we'll break it down and go through all of the key parts and explain them so that everyone knows how to deal with this situation, just in case you encounter it at some point in your life, in the future. But hopefully you don't ever have to. So let's listen to the example conversation now.

Kassy: Let's do it.

Driver: Oh, great. I think this cop's **pulling me over**.

Police officer: Hello, sir.

Driver: Hi, how are you doing?

Police officer: Good. Can I see your driver's licence, registration, and insurance, please?

Driver: Yes. I'm just gonna **grab it** from my glove box. Here you are.

Police officer: Thanks. So the reason I stopped you today is that you were going a bit too fast.

Driver: Yeah, I know.

Police officer: Are you just heading home?

Driver: Yup.

Police officer: OK. Can you stay here for a second?

Driver: Yup.

Police officer: OK, here's your driver's licence back.

Driver: Thank you.

Police officer: So the reason I stopped you is for speeding. You were going 90 in a 70 zone. If I wrote that ticket, it'd be \$190. But you **pulled over** and cooperated, and you don't have a history of speeding. So I just **wrote you up** for going 10 over. So that 190 is only \$95.

Driver: OK. Thank you so much.

Police officer: Here's the ticket. Instructions for how to pay or **dispute it** are on the back.

Driver: Thank you, officer.

Police officer: Have a nice day and drive safely out there.

Driver: Thanks. You, too.

Andrew: OK, Kassy. So let's break down this example conversation that we just heard. In the conversation, a driver **gets pulled over** by the police for speeding, for going too fast on the road. And when we say **pull over**, this means that the cop turns on the siren and the police lights on the car, flashes the lights and signals for you to stop your car on the side of the road, right? So this is what we call **getting pulled over**. When the cop signals you to pull your car to the side and stop your car, this is **getting pulled over**. So the car **gets pulled over**. And the officer and the driver talk. And what is the first question that you can expect to be asked by the police? And the first question that we heard in this example, as well.

Kassy: Yeah, the first thing police always ask is can I see your driver's licence, registration, and insurance?

Andrew: Right. So these are the three documents that you are required to have in your car when you are driving to make sure that you are driving legally and are licensed to drive, right?

Kassy: Mm-hmm.

Andrew: So I think this police officer was very polite, right? She asked can I see your driver's licence, registration, and insurance? And now the police will always ask for these three documents, but the way that they ask might be a little bit different from officer to officer.

Kassy: Yeah, that's right. Depends on personality, you know, how their day is going. It all depends.

Andrew: How many traffic stops they've done that day. So a lot of times when I watch movies, I hear the police just say licence and registration.

Kassy: It gives me the chills just hearing that.

Andrew: Right. So if they're not as friendly with you, they might just say licence and registration. And that means give me your driver's licence, your registration, and your insurance. That's just kind of the quick way that they could say it. So you may hear that, listeners, keep your ears open for that if you **get pulled over** by the police. And when the driver responds to this question, he said, "Yeah, I'm just going to **grab it** from my glove box." Now the glove box is the little drawer or cargo area on the passenger-hand side of a car, right?

And, Kassy, before we started recording here, you told me a story about one of your students. And it really relates exactly to why you need to tell the police officer this information. I'm just going to **grab it** from the glove box. So maybe you could share the story with us. And we could talk about why you need to tell this to the police officer.

Kassy: Yes. So I had a student from Korea travelling in America, and he **got pulled over** by the police for a traffic stop. And he didn't know that you're supposed to keep your hands visible until the police officer tells you to move. So my student just went to **grab his licence** right away. And the police officer freaked out. He said, "Put your hands up." And then he put his hands behind his back and even got out his gun because, in the US, police officers always expect the worst. Like, as soon as people move their hands, it could be because that person has a weapon.

Andrew: Exactly.

Kassy: So, especially in the US, you must keep your hands visible and not moving until the police tell you to do so.

Andrew: Right, exactly. So I think the safest thing to do is just to keep your hands on the steering wheel so that the police officer can see them. And definitely don't try to get out of your car or meet the police officer if you **get pulled over**. You are expected to just stay in your car, roll down your window so that the police officer can see you and talk with you easily. And just keep your hands where the police officer can see them, especially these days.

You know, I don't know, listeners, if you follow current events in the USA too much. But for the last year or so tensions between the police and citizens have been very high. And it's just a stressful situation for everyone involved. You just want to make sure that everything is cool, calm, and that you don't have any issues. And you can avoid those by keeping your hands visible to the police.

Now, that is why you should tell the police when you're going to move your hands, because if you just suddenly move your hands to **grab something** from the glove box, the police officer could assume, oh, he's getting a weapon or he's hiding something. And you don't want them to assume this. So just be clear with what you're going to do and tell the officer so you can avoid any issues.

Kassy: Yeah, that's right. And do it for everything. So you could say, I'm going to **grab my registration** from the glovebox, but I'm **grabbing my driver's licence** from the wallet in my pocket.

Andrew: Exactly, just be clear, and then there will be no problems.

So then after the driver **grabs his licence and registration** and gives it to the police officer, the police officer tells the driver why he was stopped. And in this instance, it is that he was going a bit fast. He was speeding. So usually at this point, Kassy, what the officer will do is return to their car and check your police file, check your record to make sure that you are not a criminal or that the car that you're driving has not been stolen or that you are not on the run from the police or something. And they will also check your criminal history or your driving history, right? Do you have many speeding tickets on your file or is this your first one? They'll check all of that information, and sometimes they can be gone for a long time.

Kassy: Yes, several minutes.

Andrew: Yeah. Twenty minutes even, so you just have to be patient. Gotta sit there, gotta wait. It kind of sucks, but it's what happens.

By the way, Kassy have you ever been **pulled over** while driving?

Kassy: I've only been **pulled over** one time and it was my first day of university. I was so sad.

Andrew: Did you get a ticket?

Kassy: I was very lucky. They told me that I'd turned left on a red light, which I did not do. It might have been yellow. Anyway, I did not have a ticket but I did get a warning.

Andrew: You got a warning. OK. Yeah, Kassy, I've also been **pulled over** before for speeding a couple of times. And one time for driving with expired insurance. That was not good, but kind of not my fault, because it was my friend's car and I was doing him a favour to move the car just down the street to park it in a different parking spot. Anyways, let's let bygones be bygones. What's in the past is in the past. And we'll get back to our conversation at hand here.

So the police officer goes to their police car. Sometimes we call it a cruiser, police cruiser, and then comes back to the driver's car and hands them their licence back. And then, really, the officer explains the whole situation in detail. And I think we should break down this part specifically, Kassy. So could you go through it for us one more time?

Kassy: Yeah. So when the police officer comes back, first, she mentioned again why that person was **pulled over**. So it was for speeding.

Andrew: Right, for speeding.

Kassy: Step two, she mentions how much over the speed limit that person is going.

Andrew: Exactly. So the officer says you were going 90 in a 70 zone. So this means going 90 kilometres an hour in a 70 kilometre per hour zone. If it was in the USA—I'm imagining this is happening in Canada, since it's in kilometres per an hour—if it was in the USA, maybe they would say something like you are going 30 in a 20 zone or something like that.

Kassy: Yes. And this is important, because the amount you're going over will change the price of the ticket that you have to pay.

Andrew: Yeah, exactly. So a ticket is what we call a fine that you must pay when you break the law when driving. So a speeding ticket is a fine for speeding. And in this case, the driver does get issued a ticket. And usually if you are going just a kilometre or just a little bit over the speed limit, then you don't get a ticket. But in this case, it was 20 kilometres over. So it's significant. And in that situation, it would be a \$190 ticket.

Kassy: Not small money.

Andrew: Not small money at all. But the driver got lucky, I think, Kassy. Why did the driver get lucky in this situation?

Kassy: Sometimes when a person **gets pulled over**, they might complain or try to **weasel their way out of it**, try not to get that ticket. But this person was very polite. They handed over their licence, registration, insurance, and followed the protocol. So the police officer said, you know what, I only **wrote you up** for going 10 over. What does **wrote you up** mean, Andrew?

Andrew: Yeah, **to write somebody up** is to issue them a ticket, essentially, to give you a fine, to give you a ticket. And it's like they went back to their car and pulled out their computer and wrote that information into the computer that you broke the law and that you are getting a ticket, so police can **write you up** for breaking the law. And in this situation, the officer **wrote the driver up** for only going 10 kilometres over the speed limit, for only going 10 over. So this means that the fine that the driver has to pay is reduced. So that \$190 has been cut down to \$95. It's a much more affordable fine, even though still expensive.

Kassy: Yeah, and this happens a lot. Like I said, when I was **pulled over**, I was very polite to the police officer. I said, oh, really? I'm sorry, I didn't realize I turned left in a red light. Here's my registration. I was very polite. And she only gave me a warning. She didn't give me a ticket.

Andrew: Yeah, you're absolutely right. It really depends on so many different things. The officers have that flexibility to give you a fine or to let you go with a warning or charge you even more money if they thought you were being really, really dangerous. It all depends on that unique situation.

Now, the example conversation that we heard in this episode, everyone, is modelled after a real-life conversation that I heard on YouTube. And if you're interested in learning more about how to interact and speak English with police officers, I'd recommend you all to check out YouTube because, you know, these days, so many people have cameras and black boxes in their cars so that when they do **get pulled over** by the police, you can hear the whole conversation. It's really cool. And I modelled this conversation, pretty much word for word, based on a real-life traffic stop. So this is exactly the kind of thing that police officers say in real life.

Kassy: Yes. And going back to the example conversation, I think there's one more thing we should mention. And after she issued the ticket to the speeder, the last thing she said was, "The instructions for how to pay or **dispute this ticket** are on the back."

Andrew: Yeah, exactly. So the ticket is actually a small piece of paper that tells you all of the information about your traffic stop, what time it happened, who the officer was, what their badge number is, all of these details are there. And then if you look at the back of the ticket, there is a ton of small print and very detailed information that is not only hard to read, but hard to understand, even for English native speakers sometimes, because it is a very official document. But it will tell you how to pay the ticket. Now, usually you can do this over the phone or on the internet. Or you can go to the police station and pay or go to the courthouse and pay or even send the money in the mail. There are many different ways to pay, and it gives you instructions about how to do that, because you can't just give the money to the officer, can you, Kassy?

Kassy: No, that would be like bribery, which is a big no-no in the west.

Andrew: Yes. So the instructions for how to pay are on the back of the ticket, or also how to **dispute it**. OK, so if you feel like the traffic stop and the ticket were unfair, like maybe you think you weren't speeding and the police officer was mistaken.

Well, you are legally allowed to go to court and argue your case and say I'm innocent. I don't deserve to pay this ticket. And you can go in front of a judge and the judge will hear your case and make a judgment and a decision about that. So if you feel like the ticket was unfair, then there are the instructions for how to **dispute it** printed on the back of the ticket.

Kassy: Yes, that's right. Andrew, have you ever **disputed a ticket**?

Andrew: Nope. I haven't, not yet.

Kassy: No, me neither.

Andrew: Well, everyone, that about brings us to the end of today's episode, but before we go, we should summarize what we covered.

Kassy: OK, so today we learned about what to do when **getting pulled over** by the police.

Andrew: That's right. And we learned that the officers will always ask you for your driver's licence, registration, and insurance, that you should be very clear with your words and your movements when talking to the police officer, and that the fine that you get for breaking the law on the road is called a ticket. There are many types of tickets that you can be issued, depending on what kind of infringement you do while driving. And the best way to avoid those is just to follow the traffic rules.

Kassy: Yes. And finally, we learned that the instructions for how to pay or **dispute your ticket** are in small print on the back of the ticket you receive.

Andrew: So that's it for this English lesson. Thank you for listening, everyone. We hope you learned a lot with us today.

Kassy: Our website is Culips.com. If you want to get the study guide, including the transcript and practice exercises for this episode, check out the website to give it a download.

Andrew: Becoming a Culips member is a great way to support us. But it's not the only way. You can also support us by leaving a five-star rating and a nice review on your podcast app, telling your friends about Culips, or following us on social media.

Kassy: And to stay up to date with Culips, you can do that by following us on Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, or Twitter. Our email address is contact@Culips.com. And if you'd like to leave us a message, feel free to do that. We'd love to hear from you. We'll be back soon for another brand-new episode. Talk to you then.

Andrew: Goodbye.

Detailed Explanations

To act rashly

Phrasal verb

At the beginning of this episode, our hosts talk about the importance of remaining calm during a traffic stop. If you make sudden movements, the police officer might **act rashly** as a response. **To act rashly** is to act quickly and without much thought. It is acting on impulse. During a traffic stop, you want to be calm and have your movements slow and clearly seen by the police officer. This way, the police officer will not **act rashly**.

To act rashly also applies to everyday life. Any time you make a decision or do something based on emotion and without much thought, you can say you **acted rashly**.

Here are a couple more examples with **to act rashly**:

Father: Now remember, Thomas, if a police officer pulls you over, make sure you remain calm at all times and do what they say.

Thomas: I know, Dad.

Father: Because if you **act rashly**, you can be certain that the police officer will also **act rashly**. That could be dangerous.

Thomas: I know. Don't worry. I'll be careful.

Sara: Do you want to go shopping this afternoon?

Wendy: Actually, I have plans. Why don't you go with your boyfriend?

Sara: I can't go shopping with him anymore. No way.

Wendy: Why is that?

Sara: Whenever he sees something he kind of likes, he **acts rashly** and buys it without thinking twice. It ends up costing both him and me way too much money.

To get pulled over

Phrasal verb

The main topic of this episode is what to say when you **get pulled over** while you are driving a vehicle. If a police officer **pulls you over**, they ask you to stop your vehicle and park on the side of the road.

There are several ways a police officer will indicate they want **to pull you over**. They might be driving behind you and flashing their lights. They might call out to you through their loudspeakers. They might even be on the side of the road and make hand gestures for you to stop. When this happens, you should slow down, put on your turn signal, and stop at a safe area on the side of the road.

Here are a couple more examples with **to get pulled over**:

John: Oh no.

Shawna: What's wrong?

John: You see that cop car behind me? It just turned on its lights.

Shawna: And?

John: I think I'm going **to get pulled over**.

Shawna: But you didn't do anything wrong.

John: I know. Oh well. We'll just have to wait and see what the issue is.

Patrick: Congratulations on getting your licence!

Dora: Thanks. I can't believe it took me three tries.

Patrick: The important thing is that you can drive now. Are you confident that you can?

Dora: Sure.

Patrick: Do you know what to do if you ever **get pulled over**?

Dora: Of course. You should remain calm and do as the police officer says. Pretty easy.

To grab your registration

Idiom

Whenever a police officer pulls you over during a traffic stop, you will be asked to provide certain documents. You should always know where these documents are and have them ready. The police officer will usually ask for the car's registration papers, your driver's insurance, and your driver's licence.

To grab your registration or other documents is a common way of describing the action of getting those documents. It is a good idea to say you will be **grabbing your papers** to the police officer before you make any movements.

Here are a couple more examples with **to grab your registration**:

Phil: Hello, sir. What seems to be the problem?

Police officer: Licence and registration.

Phil: OK. I'm going **to grab my registration** from my glove compartment. One second.

Police officer: And your licence?

Phil: It's here in my right pocket. One second, please. There you go. The picture isn't very good, I know.

Police officer: Do you know how fast you were driving?

Phil: Um ...

Salim: I heard you got pulled over yesterday. Did they write you a ticket?

Kelly: No. One of my lights was broken, so I got a 24-hour warning.

Salim: Oh, that's not bad.

Kelly: Yeah. But I hate getting pulled over. It's so uncomfortable. I get especially nervous when I have **to grab my registration**. I've seen too many videos online of situations gone wrong.

To weasel [one's] way out of [something]

Idiom

In this episode, Kassy mentions how some people try to talk their way out of receiving a ticket. She says that some people try **to weasel their way out of getting a ticket**. **To weasel [one's] way out of [something]** is to try very hard to get yourself out of a bad situation. The implication of this expression is that you want to use cunning or deceit to avoid something bad. You might want to trick your way out of the situation, as opposed to honourably accepting your penalty.

This expression is based on an animal called a weasel. A weasel is small, slender, and quick. It is very difficult to catch a weasel with your hands. Because of their size and speed, they can escape quickly when they are threatened.

Here are a couple more examples with **to weasel [one's] way out of [something]**:

Mark: Did I hear you got pulled over last week? How much did it cost you?

Rudy: Nothing. I'm not proud of it, but I **weaseled my way out of the ticket**.

Mark: What did you say?

Rudy: I made up a long story about going to the hospital because my mom is sick. I even cried a little bit.

Mark: You're terrible! Didn't your parents teach you to never lie to a police officer?

Kirk: Wait a moment. I thought Jack was supposed to be working on the project with us today.

Crissy: He was supposed to be here.

Kirk: So what happened?

Crissy: He went to the boss and **weaseled his way out of coming**.

Kirk: Oh well, that's his character. I don't think he's going to last long at this company if he continues like that.

To dispute a ticket

Phrase

After receiving a ticket from a police officer, you have the right to challenge it in court. **To dispute the ticket** is another way of saying this. Most often, **to dispute** means to have a heated argument. But in this context, **to dispute** means to question the validity of something, especially in a court of law. As our hosts mention, information on how **to dispute a ticket** is usually printed on the back of the ticket.

Here are a couple more examples with **to dispute a ticket**:

Ben: Did you get another ticket?

Liza: Yeah.

Ben: What happened this time?

Liza: The police officer said I was parked in a particular spot for too long. The sign says you have a maximum of 30 minutes. But I'm pretty sure I was only parked for about 15 minutes. I went into a store, bought something really quickly, and popped back out.

Ben: Are you going **to dispute the ticket**?

Liza: I'm thinking about it. I should go to the store and check their security cameras to see how long I was parked.

Marie: You're nicely dressed. What's the happy occasion?

Darla: Not happy at all. I'm going to court.

Marie: What? Oh, sorry about that. Is everything OK?

Darla: Yeah. It's just small claims court. I'm **disputing a ticket** I got last month. I'm kind of nervous.

Marie: I remember you telling me about that ticket. I hope everything goes well.

To write [someone] up

Idiom

In this episode's example dialogue, the police officer **writes the driver up** for speeding. **To write [someone] up** is to write them a ticket. Traffic tickets are usually handwritten by a police officer, so the phrase **to write [someone] up** means to issue that person a ticket, a fine, a notice, or a written warning.

Here are a couple more examples with **to write [someone] up**:

Carrie: You don't look too happy. What's up?

Harland: I got pulled over on my way here.

Carrie: Oh, that's not good. What happened?

Harland: The police officer said I went through a red light, but it was yellow when I was in the intersection.

Carrie: What did the police say?

Harland: He agreed that it was yellow, but then he said I was driving too slowly to get through the intersection before it turned red. So he **wrote me up** anyways.

Quentin: Look at that guy.

Jill: What's the problem?

Quentin: He's parking in a spot reserved for pregnant women or disabled people.

Jill: I hate when people do that.

Quentin: Me too. It's a big problem in my neighbourhood. I wish I were a police officer. I would **write all those cars up**.

Jill: You should offer your part-time services.

Quentin: I tried. It's not at all possible.

Quiz

1. What does to act rashly mean?

- a) to act impulsively
- b) to act slowly
- c) to act strangely
- d) to not do anything at all

2. What should you do when you get pulled over by a police officer?

- a) you should avoid talking
- b) you should drive faster
- c) you should park your car on the side of the street
- d) you should make the police officer laugh

3. Which of the following will a police officer likely NOT ask you to show them?

- a) your driver's licence
- b) the car's registration papers
- c) your driver's insurance
- d) your driving test's score

4. True or false? To weasel your way out of something is considered an honourable thing to do.

- a) true
- b) false

5. What does to dispute a ticket mean?

- a) to challenge the ticket in court
- b) to avoid going to court
- c) to argue with your parents about the ticket
- d) to never get a ticket again

Writing and Discussion Questions

1. How do you act when dealing with people in positions of authority, such as police officers or airport officials?
2. How would you describe your experiences with police officers in general?
3. What's the funniest story you've heard about a traffic stop?
4. Are you the type of person who tries to weasel your way out of bad situations?
5. What kind of documentation do you always have with you, whether you are in a car or just walking down the street?

Quiz Answers

1. a 2. c 3. d 4. b 5. a

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