

Introduction

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<http://www.britishcouncil.org/learnenglish-podcasts-themes.htm>

This support pack contains the following materials:

- the article that you can listen to in the podcast
- an optional language activity based on the article
- links to other activities on the LearnEnglish website on this theme (gambling).

Read the article

Gambling

by Richard Sidaway

Human beings have spent large amounts of money trying to beat the laws of probability for centuries. More than thirty countries currently have legalized gambling in the form of national lotteries or private casinos. In the last ten years this addictive pastime has been generating millions more via the internet.

So how do you become a successful gambler? – back in 1873, engineer Joseph Jagers won \$300,000 dollars in three days at the casino in Monte Carlo by noticing that the mechanical faults in their roulette wheels made certain numbers come up more often than others. More recently, an Australian wrote a software programme to help him spot winners on the horses in Hong Kong and has supposedly won \$150 million over the last 20 years.

What's the biggest lottery jackpot ever? – the record is currently \$350 million, won by two people in the USA in May 2000. This, of course, is peanuts. It costs \$444 million a year just to keep an aircraft carrier in the water... The biggest single win on a national lottery was \$314.9 million in the Powerball game in 2002 by a man who had already made a fortune in the sewer business. Another American won \$39.7 million from a slot machine in a Las Vegas casino in 2003 after putting in about \$100 worth of coins. The lucky man had actually only gone to watch a basketball match.

Why do lotteries exist? – often to make money for the state. The Chinese had a lottery over 2000 years ago to raise money to build the Great Wall. King James I of England set one up to finance the new colony of Virginia in America in the 17th century. The British Museum in London was also built this way.

Which city earns the most from gambling? – Las Vegas, of course. Before gaming was legalized there in the 1930s it was a small desert town; today it has 35 million visitors and earns seven and a half thousand million dollars from its casinos every year. What do they do with the profits? Build hotels, it seems – the world's biggest is the MGM Grand Hotel & Casino with 5,005 rooms. In fact somebody estimated it would take one person 329 years to sleep in every hotel room in Vegas.



What's the least successful bet? – politician and fraudster Horatio Bottomley went to Belgium in 1914 and bought all six horses in a race. He also paid the jockeys to cross the finishing line in a particular order. Then he put huge amounts of money on all the horses. Unfortunately, the race meeting was by the sea and a mist came in and covered the entire course. The jockeys couldn't see each other and the judges couldn't make out who had won. Bottomley lost a fortune.

What's the longest-running bet? There was a ten-year bet between writer Paul Ehrlich and businessman Julian Simon that the price of certain metals would be higher in 1990 than in

1980. Ehrlich lost when copper, chrome, nickel, tin and tungsten dropped in price. Simon was trying to make the point that the world is not heading for catastrophe and that we are not using up the world's resources as Ehrlich had predicted. He refused, however, to agree to a second bet that in the following ten years there would be an increase in greenhouse gases and AIDS victims and a decrease in tropical rainforests, agricultural land and human sperm counts.

What's the strangest bet ever made? Here's one which started a hundred years ago in a London club, presumably after a certain amount of alcohol had been taken. An American

businessman bet a British investor \$100,000 that it was not possible to walk around the world without being recognised. A certain Harry Bensley agreed to take up the challenge. He had to wear an iron mask for the whole trip and pay his way by selling pictures of himself. While travelling, he also had to find a woman who would marry him, to push a pram and carry only one change of underwear! He set off from London in January 1908 and was arrested a few miles down the road for selling postcards without a licence. He supposedly got most of the way round the world and was in Italy on his way home in 1914 when the First World War broke out and he had to call the whole thing off.

After reading Exercise 1

All the phrasal verbs in the left-hand column below appear in the article. Match a verb on the left with its meaning on the right

Phrasal verb	Meaning
1. come up	a. accept
2. set up	b. go in the direction of
3. make out	c. appear
4. head for	d. cancel
5. take up	e. start/establish
6. set off	f. start suddenly
7. break out	g. see/distinguish
8. call off	h. start on a journey

More activities on this topic

You'll find links to all the following activities connected to the theme of gambling at:
<http://www.britishcouncil.org/learnenglish-central-themes-gambling.htm>

- **Article: Gambling.** The National Lottery, Scratch Cards, Fruit Machines, Bingo, Casinos, The Football Pools, Horse Racing, Raffle Tickets, Stocks and Shares ... Easy ways to get rich quick? Or just different ways to throw away your money?
- **Word games: Horse racing reading puzzle.** The race is ending, but which horses finish in which places? Read the text and work it out!
- **Poem: Tom Beatty** - this poem by Edgar Lee Masters from his acclaimed Spoon River Anthology compares gambling and life.
- **Trivia:** Everything you (n)ever wanted to know about gambling.
- There is also a gambling-related cartoon, a poll, and some carefully selected external links.

Answers to activity 1: 1. c; 2. e; 3. g; 4. b; 5. a; 6. h; 7. f; 8. d.