



AEP - Episode #151 - Expression: To Steer Clear

Words that are highlighted in **red** are the terms I suggest learning. Their definitions are at the end of this PDF.

Hi, everybody. My name is Shana and this is the American English Podcast. My goal here is to teach you the English spoken in the United States. Through common expressions, pronunciation tips and interesting cultural snippets or stories, I hope to keep this fun, useful and interesting. Let's do it!

Hi everyone. Welcome to Season 4. I'm really excited if you can't hear it from the tone of my voice. I'm really excited for the next 50 episodes that are going to be in this season. We're going to learn a lot about the language and culture of the United States as we have in previous episodes.

In front of me, there's a list of 100 different ideas, different topics, some that I came up with, others that you recommended. And I can tell you right now there are some related to food, psychology, business, science. There's some about pop culture, trends, music, and, of course, fascinating people.



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Stay with me along this ride, and I know you'll have plenty of interesting stories to retell the next time you're at a dinner party in the United States. All of these topics would be interesting for native English speakers, at least if they're curious people.

This lesson has a free PDF with the transcript and a listening comprehension quiz. Be sure to check out the episode notes to access that.

Remember, a transcript is the full text form for audio. It's not called lyrics. Lyrics is the text for songs, and subtitles is the term we use to describe text on videos. So lyrics for songs, subtitles for videos. Transcripts is the full text form for audio.

Check out the free PDF with the transcript. I picked out ten challenging words and phrases for you to master! Once again, you'll find that in the episode notes.

Now, this lesson has two parts. In part one, you'll learn the common English expression "to steer clear," you'll hear a joke and you'll do some pronunciation exercises.

In part two, we'll be talking about moose in the US. You know what a moose is, right? It's a large mammal in the deer family. It has big antlers — these sort of long, pokey branch-like things that stick out of their heads — and they live in many northern states in the United States. Often these massive creatures and humans interact with each other, which can be funny, scary and very real. So I want to share some of those stories with you, as well as a lot of information about these incredible creatures. Be sure to stay tuned for part two in order to hear that.

For now, let's begin today's episode. We'll be discussing the expression to steer clear. As usual, let's start with a joke.

What do you call a bear without teeth?

Any idea?

A gummy bear.

Do you get it? What makes this joke funny is the wordplay. First, we have the term "**gummy**," which is an adjective used to describe a texture that is chewy, soft, and somewhat sticky, maybe even rubbery. I'm sure you know what a gummy bear is; it's a small, chewy, bear-shaped candy that comes in a



variety of different flavors. Haribo makes billions of gummy bears every year. Okay, so that's one meaning.

Secondly, in English, we have the word **gums**. Our gums are in our mouths, they support our teeth. Gums are soft tissue that we keep healthy by **flossing** and brushing regularly. So they're that pink or reddish tissue above our teeth; they are gums. Now, if a bear doesn't have teeth, he might only have gums. [00:05:00] Technically, we could say he's a gummy bear.

So let's hear the joke one more time.

What do you call a bear without teeth?

A gummy bear.

Hope you enjoyed that. On a side note, if you are interested in learning more about bears in the United States, check out episode number 10, it's called "Bear with Me."

Let's move to the expression of the day "to steer clear." We'll go through the individual words first.

To steer: To steer is a verb that means to guide or direct. For example, if you're driving a car, you put your hands on the steering wheel to steer the car. In other words, to make it go in the direction that you want. You steer the car. A boater steers a boat or maybe a **helmsman**, if you want to use a fancy term. A pilot steers a plane.

And you can also get creative with this: The CEO of Netflix steers the company's decisions. In other words, he guides them, he makes the company move in the direction of his choice. He steers them.

Now, **clear** is an adjective that means transparent or free from obstruction. If the ocean water is clear, you might see colorful fish, coral and sea life below.

A clear view is an **unobstructed** view. There's nothing blocking your vision or what you can see. The water is transparent, it's clear.

To steer clear as an expression means to avoid, to **bypass** or keep one's distance.

The first use of "to steer clear" is unknown because it's been used for centuries. Most records indicate that it has nautical origins; the idiom was born at sea. Ship captains have historically told their



helmsman (remember the fancy word to say "the person that steers the ship") to steer clear of certain areas in the ocean because they are **hazardous**. Maybe there are rocks or icebergs. By steering clear, the helmsman avoids danger, he bypasses it.

Today, we use to steer clear as a warning to stay away from any person, place or situation that is not good, it's hazardous.

Let's go through three examples of how we would use this expression in everyday situations.

Example #1. At the start of the Covid pandemic, many people wore face masks and steered clear of large events and gatherings. In other words, they avoided large events and gatherings because they saw it as a hazard. They didn't attend them for fear of getting sick. They decided to steer clear.

Example #2. Not too long ago, Lucas and I watched a documentary on Netflix called "Poisoned," which is about the food industry in the United States. Now, we enjoyed it for the most part, although it made me a little paranoid about what I buy and eat. Since then, I've steered clear of romaine lettuce grown in the Central Valley in California and in Yuma, Arizona. I bypass it at the supermarket for fear of its potential exposure to **e. coli**. You're smart. You watch that documentary if you want to, and form your own opinions, of course.

So there we go, we can steer clear of certain foods. I might steer clear of unhealthy, fatty food when I'm on a diet. In other words, I avoid it.

Example #3. Imagine you're driving through the mountains during winter time and you come to a road that's covered in ice. It's a hazard. It's dangerous, even for your car with four-wheel drive. Now [00:10:00] imagine you stop at a restaurant, maybe up in the mountains somewhere, and you meet some tourists. It would be nice of you to warn them of the icy road. You could say "If I were you, I'd steer clear of road 27, it's icy. In other words, avoid it; don't go there if you don't have to, it's dangerous. Steer clear of road 27.

There are plenty of things in life we might steer clear of: Bad people, perhaps people that might have a bad influence on us. Bad investments. Scary neighborhoods. Roads with ice, or a lot of traffic, maybe roads with moose on them. Old food, unhealthy food. I could go on! Remember to steer clear means to avoid. To avoid any person, place or situation that is hazardous or not good for us.



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Let's move on to the pronunciation exercise. We'll use the sentence: I steered clear of the sketchy neighborhood. Repeat after me.

I steered.

I steered clear of.

I steered clear of the sketchy neighborhood. (2x)

And sketchy, by the way, is slang in American English to mean scary or sort of questionable. People can be sketchy or may be an area of town can be sketchy.

And the conjugation. Repeat after me:

I steer clear of Jake's parties.

You steer clear of Jake's parties.

He steers clear of Jake's parties.

She steers clear of Jake's parties.

It steers clear of Jake's parties.

We steer clear of Jake's parties.

They steer clear of Jake's parties.

So notice how you can barely hear of in there. They steer clear of Jake's parties. Be subtle with it. So poor, Jake. Why do you think people are steering clear of his parties? Are they sketchy? Are they scary? What's happening there? So write your response in this week's post on Instagram, you can find me @americanenglishpodcast.

Remember, you can also get the transcript and little quiz for this audio. Check out the episode notes for that link. Hope you have a nice week and stay tuned until the next episode, which will be all about Moose!

Enjoy your day. Bye.

Thank you for listening to this episode of The American English Podcast. Remember, it's my goal here to not only help you improve your listening comprehension, but to show you how to speak like someone from the States.

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Suggested Vocabulary

This section was created with AI and reviewed to ensure accuracy.

To steer: To guide or direct a vehicle or course in a specific direction.

- *She had to steer the boat carefully through the narrow canal.*

Clear: Transparent; free from obstruction or clutter.

- *The water in the lake was so clear you could see fish swimming beneath the surface.*

To bypass: To go around or avoid something, especially by using an alternative route or method.

- *We bypassed the congested highway and took a scenic route in the countryside.*

Helmsman: The person who steers or controls a ship or boat.

- *The experienced helmsman skillfully navigated the vessel through the stormy seas.*

Hazardous: Involving risk or danger; unsafe.

- *Working with hazardous chemicals without proper safety equipment can be extremely dangerous.*

Gummy: Having a chewy, soft, and somewhat sticky texture.

- *I love eating gummy candies because they are so chewy and flavorful.*

Gums: The soft, pink or reddish tissue in the mouth that surrounds and supports the teeth.

- *Healthy gums are essential for maintaining good oral hygiene.*

E. coli: Short for Escherichia coli, a type of bacteria found in the intestines of humans and animals. Some strains can cause foodborne illness.

- *Contaminated food can lead to an E. coli infection if consumed.*

Unobstructed: Not blocked or hindered; allowing for clear passage or view.

- *The view from the mountaintop had an unobstructed panorama of the valley below.*

To floss: To clean between teeth with a thin piece of string or dental floss to remove food particles and plaque.

- *It's important to floss daily to maintain healthy gums and prevent cavities.*

