ENGLISH STORY PODCAST

English at the Restaurant

Order food, ask for help, and pay the bill with confidence

EPISODE 11 | LEVEL A2-B1

Listen and read with Mia and Jake. Then practise useful English for getting a table, ordering food, solving a problem, and paying.

Today's Small Win
Think of your favorite meal and order it aloud: “I'll have the pizza, please.” Add: “Could I have some water, please?”

Episode Guide

What you will learn

• How to ask for a table and talk about a reservation.

• Natural ways to order food and ask for recommendations.

• How to explain a mistake politely and ask for help.

• How to request the bill, pay, and talk about tips.

Word Box

menu	the list of food and drinks available at a restaurant
order	to ask for food or drink in a restaurant
bill	the paper showing how much you must pay
tip	extra money given to restaurant staff to say thank you

Say It Like This

“Do you have a table for two?”

“What do you recommend?”

“I'll have the chicken, please.”

“Excuse me, I think there's a mistake.”

“Could we have the bill, please?”

Listen & Read Transcript

Read along while you listen. Audio-performance tags have been removed for easier reading.

JAKE	Waiter. Chicken. Now.
MIA	Jake. Is that how we order food?
JAKE	Okay, okay. I was hungry, and my English was hungry too.
MIA	Hello everyone, and welcome to the English Story Podcast. I'm Mia.
JAKE	And I'm Jake, the worst customer in the world.
MIA	Today we're learning English at the restaurant. You will hear the exact words you need to get a table, order food, ask for help, and pay the bill.
JAKE	By the end of this episode, you'll be able to walk into a restaurant, and speak politely and calmly, even if the menu is long and the waiter speaks fast.
MIA	And before we start, a quick tip. You can read the full transcript of this episode on our website, and listen to the audio while you read. The link is in the description, along with our free ebooks.
JAKE	Lots of valuable help, and all of it is free. So make yourself comfortable, get a cup of tea, or something delicious, and just listen to us talk.
MIA	Let's start with a small idea. Restaurant English is actually very predictable. The waiter asks the same questions, and you give the same kinds of answers.
JAKE	So you don't need a lot of English. You need the right small sentences, in the right order.
MIA	Exactly. And the most important thing is to sound polite. A polite customer gets a smile, and often a better meal.
JAKE	I like that rule. Politeness equals dessert.
MIA	Okay, it's time for our Word Box. These are four useful words for today. Listen, and then repeat after us.
JAKE	The first word is menu. A menu is the list of food and drinks that a restaurant has.
MIA	Menu. For example, could I see the menu, please?
JAKE	The next word is order. To order means to ask for food or drink in a restaurant.
MIA	Order. For example, I'm ready to order.
JAKE	The next word is bill. The bill is the paper that shows how much you must pay.

MIA	Bill. For example, could we have the bill, please?
JAKE	And the last word is tip. A tip is a small extra amount of money that you give to the waiter to say thank you.
MIA	Tip. For example, I always leave a tip when the service is good.
JAKE	Let's say them one more time. Menu.
MIA	Menu.
JAKE	Order.
MIA	Order.
JAKE	Bill.
MIA	Bill.
JAKE	Tip.
MIA	Tip.
MIA	Great job, everyone. You will hear these words again in the story.
JAKE	Now let's go to the restaurant. First, we are at the door. I will be the customer, and Mia will be the host, the person who welcomes you and finds you a table. Are you ready, Mia?
MIA	Ready. And I promise I won't make you wait too long for your food.
JAKE	Wonderful. Let's begin.
MIA	Good evening, and welcome to the Garden Restaurant. Do you have a reservation?
JAKE	Good evening. No, I don't. Do you have a table for two?
MIA	Yes, we do. Would you like to sit inside or outside?
JAKE	Inside, please. And could we sit by the window?
MIA	Of course. Please follow me. Here is your table.
JAKE	Thank you. This is lovely.
MIA	Here are your menus. Your waiter will come in a moment.
JAKE	Thank you very much.

MIA	Let's pause for a moment. Did you notice how Jake asked for a table?
JAKE	Yes. I said, "Do you have a table for two?" If you are alone, you can say, "A table for one, please." If you have a big group, "A table for six, please."
MIA	And do you remember how he asked to sit by the window?
JAKE	"Could we sit by the window?" You can also say, "Could we have a quiet table?" That is useful if the restaurant is noisy.
MIA	And one more small tip. A reservation means you called or booked a table before you came. If you didn't, just say, "I don't have a reservation." That is completely normal.
JAKE	Good. Now let's order some food.
MIA	Now, our customer is at the table, and the waiter arrives.
MIA	Hello, my name is Anna, and I'll be your waiter tonight. Can I get you something to drink first?
JAKE	Hello, Anna. Yes, please. Could I have a glass of water, and a lemonade?
MIA	Of course. Still or sparkling water?
JAKE	Still water, please.
MIA	Great. I'll bring those in a moment. Would you like some time to look at the menu?
JAKE	Yes, please. Thank you.
MIA	A few minutes later, Anna comes back.
MIA	Are you ready to order?
JAKE	Almost. I have a question. What do you recommend?
MIA	Our chicken with rice is very popular. And the vegetable soup is fresh today.
JAKE	That sounds good. Is the chicken spicy?
MIA	No, it isn't spicy. It's mild, and it comes with a salad.
JAKE	Perfect. I'll have the chicken with rice, please.
MIA	And what would you like to drink with it?
JAKE	I'll stay with the lemonade, thank you.

MIA	Would you like anything to start, like soup or bread?
JAKE	Yes. I'll have the vegetable soup, please.
MIA	Excellent. So that's one vegetable soup, and one chicken with rice. Is that correct?
JAKE	Yes, that's right. Thank you.
MIA	You're welcome. It will be ready soon.
JAKE	Let's stop here. Did you hear the different ways we order?
MIA	Yes. Jake said, "I'll have the chicken with rice." That is the most natural way. "I'll have" is short, friendly, and very common.
JAKE	You can also say, "I'd like the soup, please." Or, "Could I have the soup, please?" All three are polite, and all three are correct.
MIA	And Jake asked a very useful question. "What do you recommend?" This is perfect when you don't know what to choose.
JAKE	Also, "Is it spicy?" is a great question. You can change the last word. "Is it sweet?" "Is it hot?" "Is it big?"
MIA	And one more important thing. If you don't eat some foods, you can say, "I'm vegetarian. Does this have meat in it?" Or, "Does this have nuts in it?" It's always okay to ask.
JAKE	Yes. It is your meal, so ask with confidence.
MIA	Now, the food arrives, but there is a small problem.
MIA	Here is your vegetable soup. And here is your chicken with rice. Enjoy your meal.
JAKE	Thank you. Excuse me, Anna, I'm sorry, but this isn't what I ordered. I ordered the chicken, and this is fish.
MIA	Oh, I'm so sorry. Let me check. You're right, that was a mistake. I'll bring you the chicken right away.
JAKE	Thank you very much. No problem.
MIA	A few minutes later, she returns.
MIA	Here is your chicken. I'm sorry again for the wait.
JAKE	That's okay. Thank you. Could I also have some more water, please?
MIA	Of course. I'll bring it now.
JAKE	And could I have a little salt?

MIA	Yes, of course. Here you are.
JAKE	Thank you. This is delicious.
MIA	I'm so glad you like it.
JAKE	Did you notice how kind the conversation stayed, even with a mistake? I said, "I'm sorry, but this isn't what I ordered." That is polite, and clear.
MIA	And Anna said, "I'm sorry," and fixed it quickly. When something goes wrong, a calm voice and a smile help a lot.
JAKE	You can also say, "Excuse me, I think there's a mistake." Or, "I didn't order this."
MIA	And if the food is cold, you can say, "Excuse me, my soup is cold. Could you heat it up, please?"
JAKE	Short, polite, and perfect.
MIA	When Jake finishes his chicken, Anna comes back to the table.
MIA	Are you finished? May I take your plate?
JAKE	Yes, please. It was delicious.
MIA	I'm glad. Would you like to see the dessert menu?
JAKE	Yes, please. What desserts do you have?
MIA	We have chocolate cake, apple pie, and ice cream. The apple pie is made fresh every morning.
JAKE	That sounds wonderful. I'll have the apple pie, please. And could I have a cup of tea with it?
MIA	Of course. Would you like milk or lemon with your tea?
JAKE	Milk, please. Thank you.
MIA	Let's stop for a second. Did you notice, "Would you like to see the dessert menu?" That is the waiter's polite offer. You can answer, "Yes, please," or, "No, thank you, just the bill, please."
JAKE	And when a waiter asks, "Are you finished?" you can say, "Yes, thank you." Or, if you are still eating, "Not yet, thank you. I'm still eating."
MIA	That is a very useful sentence. It tells the waiter to wait, and it is very polite.
JAKE	Good. Now, after the apple pie, it's time to pay.
MIA	Now it's time to pay. Anna comes to the table again.

MIA	Was everything all right with your meal?
JAKE	Yes, it was wonderful, thank you. Could we have the bill, please?
MIA	Of course. Here you are. Would you like to pay by cash or by card?
JAKE	By card, please.
MIA	No problem. Here is the machine. Please enter your number.
JAKE	Okay. Done.
MIA	Thank you. Here is your receipt. Have a lovely evening.
JAKE	Thank you. You too. Goodbye.
JAKE	Now, a small word about tips. In some countries, like the United States, people usually leave a tip of about fifteen to twenty percent for the waiter. In other countries, a small tip is nice, but not expected. And in some places, the service is already included in the bill.
MIA	So it's a good idea to ask. You can say, "Is service included?" or, "Is the tip included?"
JAKE	And you can also say "Keep the change," if you pay in cash, and you want the waiter to keep the small coins.
MIA	Great. And now, let's talk about one more small situation. What if you want to ask for something, and the waiter is busy?
JAKE	You can say, "Excuse me," and wave a little. You do not need to shout.
MIA	And you can ask, "Could I get another fork, please?" Or, "Could we have some more bread, please?"
JAKE	Remember, "Could I have" and "Could we have" are the same pattern we practiced in our episode about could, would, and should.
MIA	Exactly. That small pattern works almost everywhere.
JAKE	And what if you can't finish your food? That happens to me never, but it can happen to you.
MIA	Of course. You can say, "Could I have a box for this, please?" In some places, people say, "Could I get this to go?" That means you take the food home.
JAKE	Another useful phrase. "To go" also works for coffee, pizza, and sandwiches. "A coffee to go, please."
MIA	And if you eat inside, you can say, "For here, please." Short and easy.
MIA	Now it's time for our segment called Say It Like This.

JAKE	Here are five phrases you can use at any restaurant. Repeat after us. Do you have a table for two?
MIA	Do you have a table for two?
JAKE	What do you recommend?
MIA	What do you recommend?
JAKE	I'll have the chicken, please.
MIA	I'll have the chicken, please.
JAKE	Excuse me, I think there's a mistake.
MIA	Excuse me, I think there's a mistake.
JAKE	Could we have the bill, please?
MIA	Could we have the bill, please?
MIA	Very good. Now you have five small phrases, and each one helps you eat out with confidence.
JAKE	And now it's time for our Mini Story. This is a short story with today's new words inside it.
MIA	Our story today is about a woman called Sara. Sara moved to a new country for her job, and she didn't know the language very well. She was excited about the food, but a little afraid of restaurants.
MIA	On her first weekend, she went to a small restaurant near her apartment. The menu was long, and the waiter spoke quickly. Sara felt her heart beat fast. For a moment, she wanted to leave.
MIA	But then she remembered her English lesson. She took a breath, and she said, "Hello, could I see the menu, please?" The waiter smiled and gave her the menu. Then she asked, "What do you recommend?" And the waiter said, "Our soup is wonderful today."
MIA	Sara ordered the soup, and it was delicious. When she finished, she said, "Could I have the bill, please?" She paid, and she left a small tip, because the waiter was so friendly.
MIA	As she walked home, Sara smiled. She had spoken only a few sentences, but she had a whole dinner, and a new feeling. Restaurants were not scary anymore. In fact, she already knew where she wanted to go next weekend.
JAKE	I love that story. Brave Sara, with her little soup.
MIA	And lucky waiter, with a happy customer.
JAKE	Did you notice our words? Menu, order, bill, and tip were all in the story.

MIA	That is why we tell stories. When you hear new words inside a story, they are easier to remember.
JAKE	Can you remember what Sara asked the waiter when she didn't know what to eat?
YOUR TURN	Pause and answer aloud.
MIA	She asked, "What do you recommend?" Short, polite, and perfect.
JAKE	And now it's time for our last segment, called Your Turn.
MIA	Okay, now it's your turn. I will describe a situation, and you will answer in your head, or out loud.
JAKE	Ready. Question one. You arrive at a restaurant with a friend. The host asks, "Do you have a reservation?" What do you say?
YOUR TURN	Pause and answer aloud.
MIA	Here's one idea. "No, I don't, but do you have a table for two?"
JAKE	Question two. You don't know what to choose from the menu. How do you ask the waiter for help?
YOUR TURN	Pause and answer aloud.
MIA	"What do you recommend?"
JAKE	Question three. You are ready to order, and you want the pasta. What do you say?
YOUR TURN	Pause and answer aloud.
MIA	"I'll have the pasta, please."
JAKE	Question four. Your soup is cold. What can you say, politely?
YOUR TURN	Pause and answer aloud.
MIA	"Excuse me, my soup is cold. Could you heat it up, please?"
JAKE	Question five. You finished your meal, and you want to pay. What do you say?
YOUR TURN	Pause and answer aloud.
MIA	"Could we have the bill, please?"
JAKE	And one last question. Think of your favorite food. How would you order it in English?

YOUR TURN	Pause and answer aloud.
MIA	If you answered even a little in English, then you just practiced for a real restaurant. Congratulations.
JAKE	Before we finish, let's remember our four words. Menu, order, bill, and tip.
MIA	And our most useful phrase. "What do you recommend?"
JAKE	And remember, you don't need perfect English at a restaurant. Short, polite sentences are always enough.
MIA	Before we go, here is Today's Small Win. A small win is a very small task that you can finish today, and it makes you feel good.
JAKE	Today's Small Win is this. Think of your favorite meal. Then say it out loud in English. "I'll have the pizza, please." Or, "I'd like the soup, please." It only takes five seconds.
MIA	And if you want a bigger challenge, add one more sentence. "Could I have some water, please?"
JAKE	Now, we have a question for you in the comments. What would you order at a restaurant today? Write one sentence, and start with, "I'll have."
MIA	We read the comments, and we love to see your sentences. So please write them, even if you feel shy. You can do it.
JAKE	And remember, you can read the full transcript of this episode on our website, and listen to the audio while you read. The link is in the description, with our free ebooks.
MIA	If this episode helped you today, please give it a like, and share it with a friend who is learning English. And if you haven't subscribed yet, please subscribe to the English Story Podcast, so you can find our next episode.
JAKE	Thank you so much for spending this time with us.
MIA	Keep listening, keep practicing, and remember, your English is already better than it was yesterday.
JAKE	Take care, everyone.
MIA	And Jake, could we have the bill, please?
JAKE	The bill? Mia, I think I forgot my wallet.
MIA	Jake. Don't worry. I'll pay this time. But next time, you're paying.
JAKE	Deal. Goodbye, and see you in the next episode.

Practice Exercises

1. Match the Word

1. menu 2. order 3. bill 4. tip

A. extra money for the waiter B. ask for food or drink C. list of food and drinks D. paper showing what you must pay

2. Complete the Sentences

1. Do you have a table _____ two?
2. What do you _____?
3. I'll _____ the chicken, please.
4. Excuse me, I think there is a _____.
5. Could we have the _____, please?
6. Would you like to pay by cash or by _____?

3. Build Your Restaurant Order

Do you have a table for _____?

Could I have _____?

I'll have _____.

Could we have _____, please?

4. Choose the Best Answer

1. You need a table for two.
A. Do you have a table for two? B. Give table two.
2. You cannot choose a meal.
A. What do you recommend? B. You choose food.
3. The waiter brings the wrong dish.
A. Excuse me, this isn't what I ordered. B. Wrong!
4. You are ready to pay.
A. Could we have the bill, please? B. Money now.

Speaking Practice

5. Practise Your Answers Aloud

1. Ask for a table for two.

2. Ask to sit by the window.

3. Ask the waiter for a recommendation.

4. Order your favorite meal and a drink.

5. Politely explain that your soup is cold.

6. Ask for the bill and say you will pay by card.

6. Listening Check

1. Where does Jake ask to sit? _____
2. What food does the waiter recommend? _____
3. What wrong dish is brought to Jake? _____
4. What dessert does Jake order? _____

Answer Key & Sample Answers

1. Match the Word

1-C, 2-B, 3-D, 4-A

2. Complete the Sentences

1. for 2. recommend 3. have 4. mistake 5. bill 6. card

4. Choose the Best Answer

1-A, 2-A, 3-A, 4-A

6. Listening Check

1. By the window 2. Chicken with rice and vegetable soup 3. Fish 4. Apple pie

Useful Restaurant Phrases

- Do you have a table for two?
- What do you recommend?
- I'll have the chicken, please.
- Could we have the bill, please?