

EPISODE 1: Welcome to the UK

Hello, and welcome to the first episode in this series of presentations that are for you if you are preparing for the “Life in the UK” test, or simply if you would like to practise your English. The course is designed for people who already have at least an upper-intermediate/advanced (B1-C1) level of English, but I hope you find something useful and interesting, whatever your current level – and of course I hope you continue to improve.

Each week, we’ll cover a specific topic that you need to know about for the citizenship exam, and we’ll also take a look at something that is currently in the news. I’ll try to avoid controversial topics, so this week, for example, it’s all about the eclipse.

Over the coming weeks we're going to discover the history, culture, traditions and institutions that have shaped modern Britain. This, I hope, will help you pass the Life in the UK Test. But life is not just about passing exams: I'll help you understand more about the country of my birth, and my current place of residency.

You can use this purely as a listening resource, or you can download the accompanying PDF document for extra support and notes that you can keep.

So, here we go. Let’s talk about the UK...

On my passport it says that I am a British citizen. Does that mean that the name of my country is Great Britain?

Short answer: No.

Great Britain

- A **geographical** term.
- The largest island in the British Isles.
- Consists of **three countries**:
 - **England**
 - **Scotland**
 - **Wales**
- Does **not** include Northern Ireland.

The British Isles – Geography & Terminology

- A **geographical** term, not political.
- Includes **two main islands**: Great Britain and Ireland.
- Plus **over 6,000 smaller islands** (Isle of Wight, Anglesey, Hebrides, Orkney, Shetland, Channel Islands, Isle of Man).



United Kingdom (UK)

- A **political** term.
- Full name: **The United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland**.
- Made up of **four countries**:
 - England
 - Scotland
 - Wales
 - Northern Ireland
- Has one central government (Westminster), plus devolved governments in Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland.

Ireland

- The island of Ireland contains **two jurisdictions**:
 - **Republic of Ireland** (independent country)
 - **Northern Ireland** (part of the UK)

And then it gets really complicated:

Crown Dependencies

- Not part of the UK, but under the British Crown. These are self-governing, and they include:
 - **Isle of Man / Jersey / Guernsey**

I'm afraid I can't give you expert insight into this, mainly because I don't know anyone who is a native of any of these places – I just know people who have relocated there (dare I say, for tax purposes?!)

And then, there's another layer of complexity:

Overseas Territories

- They are not part of the UK, but under UK sovereignty.

This is where it gets even more controversial, so I'll give the examples quickly:

- Gibraltar, Bermuda, Falkland Islands, Cayman Islands.

Recap:

- **British Isles** = geographical region.
- **Great Britain** = the big island (England + Scotland + Wales).
- **UK** = political state (GB + Northern Ireland).
- **Ireland** = island (Republic + Northern Ireland).
- **Republic of Ireland** = independent country.
- **British** = people from the UK.
- **English / Scottish / Welsh / Northern Irish** = national identities within the UK.

Interesting Facts

Before we finish, here are five facts that you might find interesting, and that we could explore further in future episodes:

- The London Underground is the oldest underground railway in the world.
 - English has borrowed so many words and grammar points from so many languages over the centuries, that it sits in its own language family: Germano-Romance or Romano-Germanic (I've seen them both used), meaning it is basically a Germanic language, but has been so heavily influenced by French and Latin that it can no longer be classed alongside other Germanic languages, such as German, Dutch and the Scandinavians
 - British scientists, writers, inventors and artists have made contributions that have influenced people around the world.
 - Reading, Berkshire – where I currently live – is the largest town that is not a city.
 - England's flag is the cross of St George – a historical figure who never set foot in the UK... and the king who is often near the top of the list for the most popular monarch is Richard the Lionheart. Unfortunately for true patriots, he didn't speak English, openly stated that he preferred being in his native France, meaning he spent a total of six months of his ten-year reign in our "green and pleasant land". He basically used England as a cash-point!
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Quick Quiz *Answers at the bottom of this document*

1. How many countries make up the United Kingdom?
2. Which UK country is NOT part of Great Britain?
3. Roughly how many little islands are there as well as the two main ones?
4. What is the full official name of the UK?
5. Describe the flag of St George.

Exercise 1 – Vocabulary Matching

Match the words on the left with the correct definitions on the right.

1. citizen	a. A country ruled by a king or queen
2. kingdom	b. A place where people choose their government
3. history	c. The main city of a country
4. government	d. Someone who legally belongs to a country
5. democracy	e. Made up of many different cultures or groups
6. capital city	f. A custom followed for many years
7. tradition	g. The people who run a country
8. diverse	h. Events from the past

Exercise 2 – Complete the Sentences

Choose the correct word or phrase from the list.

Great Britain • United Kingdom • London • Edinburgh • Cardiff • Belfast • history • democracy • citizens • story

1. The capital of England is _____.
2. The capital of Scotland is _____.
3. The capital of Wales is _____.
4. The capital of Northern Ireland is _____.
5. England, Scotland and Wales together are called _____.
6. Great Britain plus Northern Ireland equals the _____.

7. The course teaches the _____ of Britain.
8. Britain is a _____ where people vote.
9. People who legally belong to a country are called _____.
10. Britain's past is one long _____.

Exercise 3 – Grammar Focus

Present Simple or Present Continuous?

Complete the sentences with the correct form of the verb, as in the example:

e.g. *The students all **understand** ~~are understanding~~ (understand) the point the lesson.*

1. Britain _____ (have) four countries.
2. Many people _____ (prepare) for the Life in the UK Test at the moment.
3. The lesson _____ (begin) with a simple question.
4. We _____ (learn) about British history this week.
5. The United Kingdom _____ (include) Northern Ireland.
6. The students _____ (watch) the video right now.
7. London _____ (be) the capital of England.
8. More and more people _____ (study) online these days.
9. The presenter _____ (show) a map of Britain.
10. Many visitors _____ (come) to Britain every year.

Extension (Speaking)

Work with a partner. Ask a native speaker (or someone with an excellent level of English) to put these questions to you, after you have already prepared an answer.

1. Why are you studying for the Life in the UK Test?
2. What surprised you most about today's lesson?
3. Which place in Britain would you most like to visit?
4. How much do you already know about British history?
5. Why is it useful to understand British culture as well as pass the test?

Language points: (1) **Welcome**

This is one of the first words you ever learn as a student of English, or as a visitor to an English-speaking place, but it is much more versatile than you probably realise. It can be used...

- a. ...as a single-word greeting or part of a sentence
- b. ...in many fixed phrases
- c. ...as a verb
- d. ...ironically!

Everyday expressions

- **You're welcome** — standard reply to “thank you.”
- **Welcome aboard** — used when a new colleague is joining a team, or a project.
- **Welcome home** — greeting someone returning after time away. You wouldn't say this to a family member as they return from school or work – it's too formal for that.
- **Welcome back** — returning after an absence.
- **Welcome to the family** — joining a close-knit group or organisation.
- **Welcome to my world** — “now you understand my struggles.”

More colourful / figurative expressions

- **A welcome change** — something refreshing or positive.
- **A welcome distraction** — something that pleasantly interrupts.
- **A welcome addition** — something that improves a situation.
- **Make yourself welcome** — this sounds a bit old-fashioned, but it is an older form of “make yourself at home.”
- **You're welcome to it** — “go ahead, take it; I don't want it.”
- **You're welcome to join us** — polite invitation.
- **You're welcome to try** — often slightly challenging or ironic.

Slightly sarcastic / humorous fixed phrase

- **You're welcome to your opinion** (This is classic British English: the wording is polite, but there is an air of passive-aggression in the meaning!)
- **You're welcome to it!** – This is a sarcastic way of saying “I don't want it, you have it!”

Formal / institutional phrases

- **A warm welcome to...** — used in speeches or announcements.
- **We extend a welcome to...** — formal greeting.
- **A welcome opportunity** — diplomatic phrasing.
- **A welcome development** — often used in news or politics.

Phrasal patterns that behave like fixed expressions

- **To be “welcome to do something”** – You're welcome to use the room. (It's no problem at all for you to use the room)
- **To be “more than welcome”** – You're more than welcome to join us. (A very polite and kind way to make someone feel included in a group)
- **Be welcome here** – Everyone is welcome here. (“This is a very inclusive group”)

Language points (2) **Islands, isolation and insulation**

Why is there an “s” in *island*?

The s in *island* is actually not original. It was added by mistake.

The real story

- Old English had the word *īegland* / *igland*, meaning “water-land” or “land by water”.
- There was no s in it.
- In Middle English, scribes wrongly assumed the word was related to *isle* (from French *île*, Latin *insula*).
- As was the convention of the time, they added an ‘s’ to make it look more “Latin-ish”, even though the words are unrelated.

So the ‘s’ in *island* is a spelling error from the Middle Ages that became permanent.

In some languages, the words for *isolation* and *insulation* are the same. In English, these two are linked, etymologically, but they are used differently. Take a look at these other closely related words and their meanings:

1. Isle / Islet

- *Isle* — poetic/literary word for “island”.
- *Islet* — a very small island.

2. Insular

- Literally “island-like”.
- Figuratively: narrow-minded, isolated, inward-looking.

3. Insulate

- Originally: “to make into an island”.
- Now: protect from heat, cold, electricity, or influence.

4. Insulation

- Material that “isolates” something from external influence.

5. Isolate

- To set apart as if on an island; to separate from others.

6. Isolation

- The state of being alone or cut off — metaphorically “islanded”.

7. Peninsula

- From *paene* (“almost”) + *insula* (“island”).
- Meaning: land almost surrounded by water.

Answers to the (easy) quiz

1. How many countries make up the United Kingdom?

Answer: Four. England, Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland

2. Which UK country is NOT part of Great Britain?

Answer: Four. England, Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland

3. Roughly how many little islands are there as well as the two main ones?

Answer: Four. England, Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland

4. What is the full official name of the UK?

Answer: Four. England, Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland

5. Describe the flag of St George.

Answer: Four. England, Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland

Exercise 1

1. **citizen** → d. Someone who legally belongs to a country
2. **kingdom** → a. A country ruled by a king or queen
3. **history** → h. Events from the past
4. **government** → g. The people who run a country
5. **democracy** → b. A place where people choose their government
6. **capital city** → c. The main city of a country
7. **tradition** → f. A custom followed for many years
8. **diverse** → e. Made up of many different cultures or groups

Exercise 2

1. The capital of England is **London**.
2. The capital of Scotland is **Edinburgh**.
3. The capital of Wales is **Cardiff**.
4. The capital of Northern Ireland is **Belfast**.
5. England, Scotland and Wales together are called **Great Britain**.
6. Great Britain plus Northern Ireland equals the **United Kingdom**.
7. The course teaches the **history** of Britain.
8. Britain is a **democracy** where people vote.
9. People who legally belong to a country are called **citizens**.
10. Britain's past is one long **story**.

Exercise 3

1. **Britain has four countries.**
Explanation: We use the **present simple** for facts that are always true.
2. **Many people are preparing for the Life in the UK Test at the moment.**
Explanation: "At the moment" → **present continuous** for something happening now.
3. **The lesson begins with a simple question.**
Explanation: Present simple because this is a fixed, repeated classroom routine.
4. **We are learning about British history this week.**
Explanation: "This week" → temporary activity → **present continuous**.
5. **The United Kingdom includes Northern Ireland.**
Explanation: Present simple for a permanent fact.
6. **The students are watching the video right now.**
Explanation: "Right now" clearly indicates **present continuous**.
7. **London is the capital of England.**
Explanation: Present simple for a permanent fact.
8. **More and more people are studying online these days.** *Explanation:* "More and more" + "these days" → a changing trend → **present continuous**.
9. **The presenter shows a map of Britain.**
Explanation: Present simple for a typical action in a presentation.
10. **Many visitors come to Britain every year.**
Explanation: "Every year" → repeated habit → **present simple**.