

**The Secret Rules of Being an American**  
**<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J5i7Zp9qpSc>**  
**Transcript: <https://dontveter.com/ec/secretrules.pdf>**

Yeah, but you're not even in my league mate.

America, the land of the free and home of the brave, and for reasons I've still not figured out, ranch dressing on everything.

I moved here 16 years ago and while I've since discovered that a flannel is called a washcloth, nobody prepared me for the secret rules of being an American.

And I'm not talking about stuff that I saw on the citizenship test.

No, these are the bizarre unwritten social codes that govern everyday life, like the fact that “what’s up” isn't an actual question, but a stand in for “hello”.

I had to learn that the hard way after responding with “not too good after last night's White Castle”.

Meanwhile, one of my own not so secret rules is if you're not yet subscribed to this channel do that now.

In the meantime, here are the secret rules of being an American that nobody talks about, except me, and occasionally, Reddit.

In recent times I've become aware of a particular American, or perhaps even Midwestern phenomenon: the front porch wave.

This one appears to be most common in the suburbs.

On several occasions since I moved into this house, I've been walking through my neighborhood, you know, minding my own business, when suddenly a stranger who's sitting on their porch will raise their hand and wave at me.

My British instincts kicked in and I immediately thought, do I know this person? did I miss a social engagement? do they have posters of me on their wall?

Of course it turns out I didn't know them.

In America you wave at people that you don't know, it's just a sign of neighborliness.

Stop generalizing Americans, Lawrence, because only a total weirdo would wave at a stranger, and I've just realized I'm pointing at a stranger.

But the first few times it happened I panicked and waved back with all the confidence of a hammer covered in milk.

The front porch wave is part of a broader tradition of American suburban politeness and sometimes it's even more horrifying than that.

I was just strolling down an ordinary American sidewalk when it happened, a stranger, uh, someone I had never met, had no prior connection to, and honestly had no logical reason to interact with, looked me in the eye and said, "hello".

I panicked. Where I come from this interaction only ever involves a confused tourist, or maybe an overenthusiastic charity worker.

You don't expect it from somebody who lives around the corner, but in America the gregarious pedestrian is wide rfee.

On a separate occasion, another passer by nodded and confidently uttered the phrase, "how's it going?"

I was mortified at first. I thought I'd stumbled into a small town where everybody knew each other.

But it wasn't that, because this was a thriving cityscape known as Indianapolis.

Americans, these remarkably sociable people, seem to have perfected the art of the passing greeting.

Damn it, I've lived here my whole life and I have never greeted somebody while walking. I also don't walk.

Whether it's a simple nod, a "hey there", or the slightly more advanced, "how you doing?", which, again, requires no meaningful response.

My therapist told me that the best way to overcome your fears is to face them, so I've reluctantly started doing it myself about once a week while walking the dog.

I issue my own "hello" to passers by, unless it happens, happens to be Suburban Sue, in which case I pretend I haven't seen her.

Of course, my new found politeness has led to some confusion when I visit home and accidentally greet strangers.

Who then assume that I am a confused tourist, and I suppose in a weird way I am, thankfully, something that alleviates this problem, and means that I don't have to ask for directions in my own country is GPS.

Something I'd only recommend using overseas if you have a good data plan.

And that is why I've partnered with today's sponsor, Saily.

Saily is a new eSIM service app, with affordable eSIM lands in over 160 countries and eight regions.

Thankfully, one of those countries is a place that I'll be visiting later this year, my homeland of Britain.

Given that my wife and I always get lost in fields there, it's good to know that Saily will keep us connected when there's no free Wi-Fi to bail us out, which is sort of a chief characteristic of fields.

Also, it's really easy, you only have to install it once, instead of every time you go to another country.

I'll definitely take advantage of that the next time we decide to visit Ireland, England and Paris in the same year,

That makes me sound out of touch if you're traveling abroad and don't want to rely on old road maps from 2003.

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Again, that's the code, pond, download the Saily app or go to [saily.com/pond](https://saily.com/pond), the link is in the description below.

Small talk in Britain usually consists of two people agreeing that those clouds over there don't look too good, do they?

If you took away weather from the national district discourse, British people would recoil in horror at the mere thought that small talk is even happening, but in America small talk is like the fifth most popular sport just ahead of soccer.

Some Americans will talk to anyone, anywhere, about anything.

Except for the millions who do not, because talking is overwhelming and people are dumb.

Standing in line at the grocery store, expect a full conversation about your purchases, your weekend plans, and occasionally whether or not you're that guy from YouTube.

At first I didn't know enough small talk to keep up, which forced me to Google what does "da Bears" mean?

The trick, though, is mastering the right topics, food safe, sport, absolutely, but never, and I mean never, bring up politics unless that person has a bumper sticker that you happen to agree with, then it's fine.

No, I don't want to make it sound like Americans aren't capable of deep conversation, I mean I've been the subject of many, it's just they've also turned surface level chatter into an art form.

And it's only once you've mastered it yourself that you can bring up the important stuff, like, "hello, where can I get edibles for a friend that's into that sort of thing?".

He's still on the phone, did you hear that just now?

Right, I'm trying to make a video, so can you hang up?

We'll get mommy and daddy to hang up then.

But over time I've come to appreciate American small talk for what it is, it's basically about building a brief human connection, or destroying one if they don't get British sarcasm.

If there's one thing that Americans guard more fiercely than their freedom, it's their personal space.

In Britain, we're used to cozy queues and cramped public transport, but in America there seems to be an invisible bubble around everyone.

If you stand too close to someone at the grocery store, they'll give you a look, usually reserved for pickpockets, or my wife's cousin Chad.

This obsession with space extends to every aspect of life, cars are bigger, roads are wider and personal space isn't just a concept, it might as well be a constitutional right. Am I right?

You obviously didn't go to school here.

Back when I was a stage actor, I thought it would be perfectly fine to hug everybody after the show, which is the only time that hugging is acceptable in Britain.

But the American actors just weren't into it, and honestly neither was I, so absolutely no one won.

If you stand too close while chatting, the other person will slowly retreat, especially if you've run out of Old Spice.

And if you think this is somehow a criticism, think again, because I also like my space.

I mean, why do you think I keep you all 6 feet away from the camera?

Aha, yes, the infamous American smile, a beacon of warmth friendliness and dental insurance.

Now I'll admit I don't encounter beaming grins ever since I moved to Chicago, but in Indiana, people would flash them pearly whites all the time.

They don't speak like that, I mean, all teeth look immaculate to a British person, and such smiles might be accompanied by a greeting, such as, "oh my God, are you British?"

Or, hello, welcome to Applebees.

Actually, when it comes to this particular stereotype of Americans, restaurant servers do do a lot of the heavy lifting.

Americans I've known who've worked as wait staff, often tell me that they have to force this smile, when, for instance, a customer thinks they're being original by saying, "my beer glass has a hole in the bottom".

Hilarious, but it did stand out to me when I first moved here because in Britain not only do wait staff not usually smile, but you don't normally see them for about an hour, ironically to give you personal space.

And British people in general aren't as likely to smile at strangers.

Actually, given our dental makeup, that's probably how we keep crime down.

A smile in America says, I'm friendly, I'm approachable, and I'm in no way here to sell you double glazing. Actually it can mean that.

And finally, the Midwestern goodbye, a phenomenon that's so drawn out it makes Return of the King look like a short story.

My father-in-law had it down to a science.

First of all there's the initial goodbye.

This is where somebody claps their hands together and says, well, we better get going.

And this is a lie, the only thing that gets going is more conversation, because next we enter the standing in the kitchen phase.

This is where everybody pretends to be leaving, but instead forms a conversation huddle by the fridge.

Then comes the porch descent, and there's no waving here, this is where you all finally migrate to the door.

But not before bonding over, I don't know grandma's recent bowel issues, and just when you think you're free, it's time for the driveway chat, while standing next to your car, hoping they don't notice your bumper stickers.

And finally the reverse goodbye.

This is when you pull out of the driveway with your windows down, exchanging emotional words like you're in a Hallmark movie.

"Call me when you get there, tell your mom I said hi, Steve drive safe", and just like that, it's it's it's 2: A.M.

Okay this one actually is accurate.

Now part of me almost didn't include the Midwestern goodbye on this list, after all the theme of this video is secret rules of being an American, not Midwestern.

And then it occurred to me that while this is a Midwestern stereotype, it's probably something that people experience in other parts of the country too. Let me know if your family does this.

Until the next video good bye, but actually, no, that's not it if you have not yet seen my video about American inventions that changed Britain forever.

Part two is coming very soon, so watch part one now.

Until the next video, goodbye. No I was talking to my audience.