

## Low-cost air travel

**Level:** Intermediate upwards

**Timing:** 90 minutes plus

**Material needed:** One copy of the student worksheet and Vocabulary record per student

**Group size:** Any

6. *filed suit*
7. *fleets*
8. *hubs*
9. *maintenance*
10. *debts*
11. *phenomenon*
12. *driving force*

**Extension:** Ask students to underline the main stressed syllable in words of more than one syllable.

### Overview

This lesson plan for both pre-experience and in-work business students is based around an original article first published in *Business Spotlight* Issue 1/2014. The article is about Southwest Airlines, the first US low-cost airline, and its business model.

The tasks in the student worksheet will help the students to understand the content of the article and the language used, particularly tricky pronunciation and prepositions. The worksheet also provides extra questions for discussion as well as a research task.

The teacher's notes provide suggestions for teaching and learning strategies as well as ideas on how to present the tasks in the classroom, any necessary answer keys and extension tasks (for in class or as homework).

### Lead-in

Get students to think about their answers to the questions and then discuss them as a group. If they can answer the first two questions but do not know the answers to the third and fourth, ask them to guess or give estimates.

If your students have never flown, ask them to answer the questions on behalf of their friends, colleagues or relatives, if possible.

### Key words

Students should scan or read this relatively short article to find the key words. The definitions are listed in the order that the words and phrases appear in the article.

**Key:**

1. *Federal regulators*
2. *package tours*
3. *commuters*
4. *no-frills*
5. *monopolies*

### Teaching and learning strategy: online dictionaries and pronunciation

Although relatively short, this article contains some words that may cause potential pronunciation difficulties. Some of these words have been highlighted in task 2, e.g. *suit*, *debts* and *phenomenon*.

Using an online dictionary such as <http://www.macmillandictionary.com>, go to the entries for the challenging words. Here you can check both the British and American pronunciation patterns in two ways. Firstly, you can click on the speaker icon after the word and listening to the audio file, and secondly, you can read the word in phonetic script (IPA) found immediately after the audio icon.

*Suit* is a commonly mispronounced word due to its similarities with the word *suite*, so it would be worth comparing and contrasting the two words. *Debt* has the silent *b* which many students insist on trying to pronounce, and *phenomenon* is simply tricky – or fun to say, depending on how you see it. Try playing both the British and American versions alternately. Ask the students to explain the difference in what they hear.

**Note:** on Macmillan Dictionary you can swap between American and British English at the bottom of each page. This link may also be helpful: <http://www.macmillandictionary.com/british-and-american-pronunciation.html>

### Understanding the article

Students answer the questions with information from the article and discuss their answers.

**Key:**

1. 1967, *Air Southwest Company*
2. *Texas, USA*

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3. *They were one of the first low-cost carriers.*
4. *By cutting services such as meals or baggage transfers, by flying just one type of aircraft (thereby saving on maintenance and training), by simplifying the ticketing service, by growing slowly and making themselves recession-proof, by focusing on commuter routes ...*
5. *The 'Southwest effect' was a phenomenon caused by the business model invented by Southwest Airlines. The growth and success of this airline resulted in dramatic changes in the US airline industry. Business schools now study the consequences of Southwest's business model, which was based on principles such as concentrating on commuter routes and flying to airports close to urban centres.*

### Looking at prepositions

Students should go through the article finding all the instances of 'by' and 'in' in the article and write them out, including the words that precede or follow them.

When they have done this ask them to identify any patterns they see in the use of these words.

For example that they are often used to talk about dates and times.

**Extension:** Do the same task with other prepositions.

#### Key:

##### By

*By the mid-1960s*

*travelled by air*

*doubling by the mid-1970s*

*dominated by big monopolistic players*

*cut costs by flying*

*fares fell by 70%*

##### In

*introduced in the late 1950s*

*In the early 1970s*

*In 1967*

*born in Texas*

*In 1968*

*in December 1970*

*In 1971*

*increase its business in bad times*

*Airfares in the markets*

*in 1993*

*studied in business schools*

*In 1993*

*in the US airline industry*

### Discussion questions

These three group discussion questions look at topics raised indirectly in the article. They encourage the students to think about passenger air travel in general as well as how they would feel about working for a low-cost airline.

### Webquest

This task can be done in class if you have internet access or at home if you do not. In either case, ask the students to research one of the three airlines mentioned in the last paragraph. Ask them to report back on whether the airlines still operate and, if so, on which routes. They should look for any particularly newsworthy events in the airlines' histories, find out who the owners are or were and talk about how they are perceived by the media and the rest of the aviation industry. Additionally, students may want to report on a low-cost carrier that they know well, have flown with or one that is local to their country or region.

### Vocabulary record

Here, students should be encouraged to record all of the new and useful vocabulary they have learned during the lesson, not only in the form presented in the article but also in related forms.

### Related topics on onestopenglish

For follow-up lessons on the same or related topics go to the following lesson plans in the Business and ESP sections on onestopenglish:

Business Spotlight: The sky's the limit

<http://www.onestopenglish.com/business/business-spotlight/the-skys-the-limit/552509.article>

Aviation: Air travel English

<http://www.onestopenglish.com/esp/other-professions/aviation/air-travel-english/153941.article>

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### 1 Lead-in

Answer the questions below.

#### Flying past to present

- When did you first travel by plane? \_\_\_\_\_
- Where did you fly from and to? \_\_\_\_\_
- Do you know how much the flight cost? \_\_\_\_\_
- What would the same flight cost today? \_\_\_\_\_

### 2 Key words

Read the definitions and find the key words in the article.

- official, national or state-authorized people or organizations whose job is to be certain that companies, systems, etc. act fairly and follow rules \_\_\_\_\_ (two words)
- holidays arranged by a travel company for fixed prices that include the cost of hotels and transport, and sometimes meals and entertainment \_\_\_\_\_ (two words)
- people who travel regularly to and from work, often using the same route \_\_\_\_\_
- nothing extra; only the very basics \_\_\_\_\_
- companies that have complete control of the product or service they provide because they're the only company that provide it \_\_\_\_\_
- began a legal action or lawsuit \_\_\_\_\_ (two words)
- groups of planes that are owned by one organization or person \_\_\_\_\_
- the most important places (in this case an airport) where a particular activity takes place or where a company is based \_\_\_\_\_
- work that is done to keep a plane repaired and in good condition \_\_\_\_\_
- amounts of money that you owe \_\_\_\_\_
- an event or situation that is impressive and / or surprising \_\_\_\_\_
- the person or thing that motivates or directs someone or something \_\_\_\_\_ (two words)

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### Low-cost air travel

by Vicki Sussens



Fierce competition in air traffic is especially challenging for low-cost carriers. VICKI SUSSENS follows the development of one of the pioneers of cheap flights.

1

#### The background

The air industry experienced dramatic growth when jets were introduced in the late 1950s. By the mid-1960s, over 100 million Americans had travelled by air, with that number doubling by the mid-1970s. Federal regulators found it difficult to control the increasingly complex industry, which was dominated by big, monopolistic players. Deregulation to remove government control over ticket prices, routes and route entry did not begin until 1978. In the early 1970s, air travel was expensive, with cheaper flights available only as part of package tours. In 1967, the Air Southwest Company was born in Texas, with a modern air-travel concept: providing commuters with cheap, 'no-frills' flights – without services such as meals and baggage transfers. It was one of the world's first 'low-cost carriers', the 'low' referring to operating costs.

2

#### The problems

Southwest's first challenge was to fight monopolies. In 1968, the Texas Aeronautics Commission gave it permission to fly to Dallas, Houston and San Antonio. However, three airlines filed suit to prevent it from flying. Its second challenge was to prove that customers would

choose price over service and that, if the company kept its operating costs low, it could be profitable. At the time, traditional airlines, which had large and expensive fleets and hubs, regarded service as key to winning customers.

3

#### The solutions

The new airline fought its case all the way to the US Supreme Court, which it won. That was in December 1970. In 1971, now called Southwest Airlines, it started operating its services. Southwest cut costs by flying just one type of aircraft to simplify maintenance and training. A well-trained and highly motivated staff increased productivity. While it cut services, Southwest focused on good customer relations. It set up 'culture committees' throughout the company to promote the 'Southwest way', which was to be customer-friendly but fun-loving. To meet the needs of commuters, it flew out of airports close to urban centres. It also simplified ticketing. Finally, it had a policy of growing slowly, meaning it avoided the debts that caused problems for many carriers during recessions. This policy allowed it to increase its business in bad times.

4

#### What happened next

Airfares in the markets that Southwest entered dropped. For example, when it started its service to Baltimore-Washington International Airport in 1993, fares fell by 70%, increasing passenger traffic to the airport. Called the 'Southwest effect', this phenomenon was studied in business schools. In 1993, a US Department of Transportation report wrote that the growth of the low-cost carrier Southwest was the "principal driving force behind the dramatic changes in the US airline industry". Because Southwest's low fares and focus on commuters increased passenger traffic wherever it flew, some businesses chose new locations based primarily on the availability of Southwest services. Southwest became a model for other low-cost carriers such as easyJet, Ryanair and Laker Airways, the first to offer a transatlantic service. Low-cost carriers opened up air travel to people who, before, could not afford to fly.

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### 3 Understanding the article

Read the article and answer the questions below. Discuss your answers.

1. When was the company founded and under which name?
2. Where are Southwest Airlines based?
3. Why have they earned a place in aviation history?
4. How did they keep their costs low? (Name as many reasons as possible.)
5. What is the 'Southwest effect'?

### 4 Looking at prepositions

Find all the instances of 'by' and 'in' in the article and write them out. Include the words that come before or after them.

*e.g. By the mid-1960s introduced in the late 1950s*

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### 5 Discussion questions

Discuss the questions below in small groups.

- Which of these things would you be willing to pay extra for when flying?
  - wider seats
  - more legroom
  - a higher luggage weight allowance
  - a choice of hot meals and drinks during the flight
  - anything else?
- How has the image and experience of flying changed during your lifetime?
- Would you like to work as part of the cabin crew on a low-cost carrier? Why / why not?

### 6 Webquest

Research and report on one of the other airlines mentioned in the last paragraph of the article.



