Keep On Trucking



EAE Learning objectives for this lesson

Learn and practice vocabulary related to shipping and goods transport.
Reading and listening comprehension practice.

Activity One - Discussion Questions

Ask and answer the questions with your partner or teacher.

1. What is your job?
2. What kind of goods do you transport?
3. What challenges have you encountered in your line of work?
4. What do you enjoy about your work?
5. What advice would you give to someone starting your job for the first time?

Activity Two - Vocabulary words and definitions

Match the words to the correct definition. Then use some of the vocabulary to explain how your job works.

1. To scramble
2. To haul
3. To avoid
4. To realise
5. Profitable
6. Insight
7. Freight
8. Cheap
9. Reliable
10. To lift
11. To prod
12. Tough
13. To plummet
14. To handle
15. Amid
16. Input
17. Output

a. to be beneficial in terms of money
b. it can be trusted (something, someone)
c. goods transported by truck, train, ship, etc.
d. information going out from a machine system
e. to pull something (a trailer, etc.) behind a truck
f. to push someone to do something
g. surrounded by, in the middle of
h. to decrease a lot
i. difficult
j. to stay away from something
k. to raise something up to be loaded
l. information coming in to a machine system
m. to manage something or someone
n. to mix things up
o. to understand something
p. accurate, deep understanding through reflection
q. not expensive

Activity Three - Reading Comprehension

Read the article at home and answer the questions which follow. With your teacher or partner, identify the vocabulary from Activity 2 in the text and discuss what you understood.

The humble shipping container built global trade — and now it's blocking it

On April 26, 1956, the Ideal-X, a converted tanker left over from the Second World War, sailed from Newark, New Jersey, to Houston, Texas, with 58 aluminium containers on its deck. The Ever Given, now infamous for scrambling world trade since its grounding in the Suez Canal on Tuesday, is carrying roughly 200 times as much cargo as the ship that set off the container revolution. In that 65-year interval, the container has transformed the business of shipping goods — and the world economy.

The story of the modern shipping container begins with a haulier from North Carolina called Malcom McLean. Starting with a single lorry during the Great Depression, McLean built one of America's largest road transport companies, hauling tobacco and textiles along the Atlantic coast.

By the 1950s, though, he worried that increasing traffic congestion was delaying his drivers. He first proposed to sail his lorries along the coast, avoiding the traffic. He soon realised it made more sense to lift only the trailers aboard ship. Regulations barred a road haulier from owning a shipping line. McLean sold his company and bought a small domestic shipping line, betting his fortune on his untested idea.

McLean was in no sense the inventor of the container; the concept had been around for two centuries, to little effect. His accomplishment was to place the container at the heart of a profitable business. His insight — mundane today, but revolutionary in the heavily regulated world of the time — was that freight shippers didn't care about ships and lorries and trains. They simply wanted their freight delivered cheaply and reliably. Containers could do that.

Making it happen was the task of an engineer named Keith Tantlinger. At the time, Tantlinger worked for a trailer manufacturer. McLean summoned him to a meeting, revealed his plan and hired him on the spot. Tantlinger was to design not only the containers themselves but also the methods for lifting them aboard ship, securing them in place and attaching them to lorries and trains. Eventually, he would have more than 100 patents to his name.

Tantlinger's innovations enabled McLean's company, renamed Sea-Land Service, to survive as a small domestic shipping line. Other US lines started carrying containers as well. The result was chaos. A container made for one carrier would not fit on another carrier's ships, and none of them fit easily aboard freight trains.

Prodded by the US Navy, which had the right to commandeer merchant vessels in time of war, engineers for shipping, railways, and container manufacturers convened in 1958 to set industry-wide standards. This domestic negotiation soon turned international. In meeting after smoke-filled meeting, the experts argued over mind-numbing details of container construction. Agreeing that the standard container should be 40ft long was relatively easy. Agreeing on the shape of the fittings by which containers could be lifted at their corners was much tougher, until, in 1963, McLean released key patents at no charge. All containers would use the same fitting, and customers could rest assured that wherever their container was bound, there would be a crane able to lift it.

The new standards lit a fire under the shipping industry. Investment poured in to build vessels that carried only containers. Service between America and Europe began in 1966, and within three years traditional ships had all but vanished from the North Atlantic. Sea-Land won a contract to carry war

supplies to Vietnam in 1967, and service to Japan and Hong Kong followed quickly. The savings were immense, and claims of stolen or damaged cargo dropped sharply. Dockers were made redundant by the tens of thousands, no longer needed in the container age.

By the mid-1980s, with both transport and communications costs plummeting, companies discovered they could save money by manufacturing in poor countries to serve markets in rich countries. For two decades, international trade expanded at twice the rate of the world economy. Containership tonnage mushroomed as companies, often with generous subsidies, ordered ever-larger vessels to move intermediate goods — partially completed products being shipped for further processing — along increasingly complicated supply chains. By 2016, according to the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTD), shipping a pair of athletic shoes from Indonesia to Italy cost 9½ US cents, an engine pump from Korea to Germany $1.22. Rich-country consumers won; rich-country factory workers did not.

Since then, the ships have grown even bigger; the largest — 12 nearly identical vessels being built for the Korean company Hyundai Merchant Marine, with considerable state aid — will each be able to carry nearly as much cargo as 12,000 long-distance lorries. In container-speak, that is 24,000 TEUS — 20ft equivalent units. The ports have grown as well. In 2019, seven of the world's ten largest were in China — none was in Europe — with Shanghai, handling more than 43 million TEUs, easily leading the list.

According to the UNCTD, which keeps track of such things, the 5,304 container ships operating in 2019 moved 811 million TEUs through the world's ports. With the pandemic putting the kibosh on restaurant meals, concerts and holidays, rich-country households are spending like crazy on imported consumer goods, and this year's totals may be even higher.

Long supply chains, though, reached their peak importance amid the financial crisis in 2008. Since then, trade in manufactured goods, while still growing, has declined as a share of the world's output. One of the causes may be that long-distance supply chains aren't quite as reliable as corporate bean-counters assumed. The line of ships that must now queue for days to pass the Suez Canal illustrates the point.

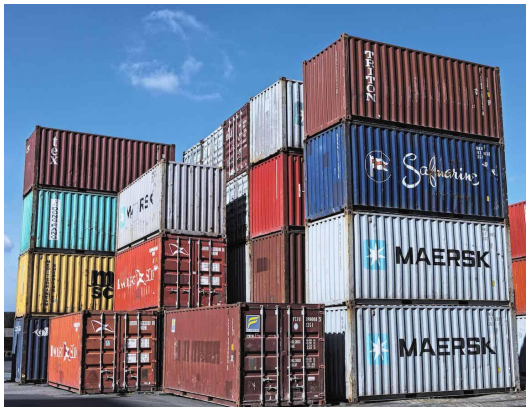
Marc Levinson is a historian and economist in Washington and the author of Outside the Box: How Globalization Changed from Moving Stuff to Spreading Ideas (Princeton)

Comprehension Questions:

1. Who was at the origin of the modern shipping container in the United States ?
2. What period did this new way of shipping start ?
3. What became a challenge for McLean's road transport company in the 1950s?
4. Was McLean the inventor of the container?
5. Why did Keith Tantlinger start working with McLean and what was his job?
6. What was the U.S. Navy's role in the transportation industry? Explain.
7. When did transportation service between America and Europe begin?
8. Did workers lose jobs in the new container age? Can you find an example nowadays of this type of situation and how it affects our workforces?
9. What did the companies discover in the mid-1980's to reduce shipping costs?
10. What is TEU?
11. Cite 1 challenge for ships delivering freight nowadays.

Activity Four - Match with appropriate word

Goods – Trailer – Peak – Crane – Lorry – Container – Haulier – Supply Chain



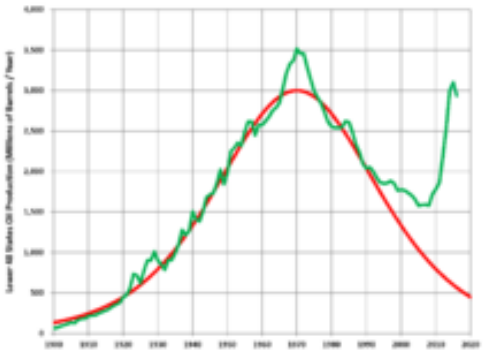














Activity Five - Sing Along!

Listen to the song and try to find the missing words, then answer the questions.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wKTbcoLs5yk - *Keep On Truckin'* by Eddie Kendricks

Keep on truckin', baby
I got to keep on truckin'
Got to get to your [1]_____ lovin'
Shame, A double [2]_____ on me, yeah
Love, Love, I let it [3]_____ me, yeah
I've got a fever rising with desire
It's my love jones and I feel like I'm on [4]_____
And I'll keep on truckin', baby
I got to keep on truckin'
I got to get to your good lovin'

Feelin' good
No, you can't [5]_____ the feelin', No, na, na
Keep on keep on truckin', babe
I'm the red ball [6]_____ of lovin'
[7]_____-powered straight to you, I'm truckin'
In old Temptation's rain, I'm duckin'
For your love through sleet and [8]_____, I'm truckin'
Ain't nothin' holdin' me [9]_____, nothin'
I'll keep right on, right on truckin' *(x2)*

Questions:

1. What do you think it means to 'keep on trucking'?
2. What is the metaphor in this song?
3. What is he really singing about?
4. What do you think of this style of music?

Activity Six - Dialogue

Read the dialogue with your teacher or a partner then complete the conversation.

Linda: Hello, WeTruck4You, how can I help you?

Paul: Hi Linda, how are you? This is Paul from London Construction. I had a truck to transport some heavy machinery from London to Marseille last week and there seems to be some equipment missing.

Linda: Hello again Paul. Oh no! What was the weight of the load on pickup and drop-off?

Paul: It was 7 metric tons of construction equipment. I've got a crane on site here, so I loaded the truck in London myself. Upon arrival the weight was 6 metric tons...

Activity Seven - Role Play

Act out the scenarios with your teacher or a partner using the vocabulary you learned in this lesson.

A. A delivery is late so you call the lorry driver to find out what the problem is and when he will be there.
B. You are checking a shipment that just arrived with a co-worker and you realize an entire container is missing! You call the supplier to find out what happened and find a solution.
C. Your manager needs you to handle a big shipment so you discuss the details with them so that you are prepared for all the moving parts.

