

Speak English Now Podcast

Episode #356

State Name Series (Northeast)

Hi! I'm Georgiana, and I'm back with a new episode of the Speak English Now podcast—the podcast that helps you speak English fluently, with no grammar and no textbooks.

Welcome back, travelers! Did you bring your bags? Good — because our journey continues.

This is part two of our series about US state names. Today, we'll explore the Northeast: Connecticut, Delaware, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, and Vermont.

That's eleven states in total! And today I'll focus on: New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Massachusetts, and Rhode Island. You'll hear stories of English kings, Dutch settlers, and Native American words that still live on today.

Let's keep moving — the Northeast is waiting for us!

Remember, in part one we visited the Southeast. We talked about Florida, Georgia, Tennessee, and Alabama. Today, we're traveling north — to the Northeast of the United States.

This area is famous for big cities like New York and Boston, for old history, and of course... for cold winters! So, let's discover the stories behind some state names in the Northeast.



New York

Let's start with New York.

You probably know New York City — the city that never sleeps. But why is it called New York?

A long time ago, the Dutch controlled this area. They called it *New Amsterdam*. Later, the English took control. To honor the Duke of York, they renamed it *New York*.

So New Amsterdam became New York. Simple name change — big history.

By the way, if you ever visit New York, don't be surprised: people walk fast, talk fast, and drink coffee even faster.



New Jersey

Next door to New York is New Jersey.

This state was named after an island in the English Channel, near France, called Jersey or "Jersey" in French. When English colonists came to America, they wanted to bring a little piece of home with them. So they called the new land New Jersey.

So now we have Old Jersey in Europe... and New Jersey in America. Twice the Jerseys, twice the attitude.

And if you meet someone from New Jersey, they will proudly say: "I'm from Jersey!"



Pennsylvania

Now, let's go to Pennsylvania. This one is interesting.

"Penn" comes from William Penn, the man who founded the colony. "Sylvania" means "woods" in Latin.

So, Pennsylvania really means *Penn's Woods*. Easy, right?

And yes, there are a lot of trees there!

Today, Pennsylvania is famous for the Liberty Bell, for Amish communities, and for delicious cheesesteaks in Philadelphia. (If you're hungry now, sorry 😊).

Massachusetts

That's a long name, right? Don't worry—even Americans sometimes have trouble spelling it.

The name comes from a Native American tribe, the Massachusett. It probably means “near the great hill.”

Today, Massachusetts is famous for the city of Boston, for Harvard University, and for the Boston Tea Party in 1773. This was an important event before the American Revolution.

Can you try to spell Massachusetts? Don't worry—most students can't.

Rhode Island

And finally, Rhode Island.

Here's the funny part: Rhode Island is the smallest state in the US. Really, it's tiny.

The name probably comes from the Dutch word *Roodt Eylandt*, which means “red island,” because of the red soil they saw there.

But don't be confused — it's not really an island. It's connected to the mainland.

So, Rhode Island is small, not an island, and has a Dutch name. Confusing? Yes. But that's history for you!

Wrap-up

So, what did we learn today in the Northeast?

New York was named after the Duke of York.

New Jersey was named after the island of Jersey in Europe.

Pennsylvania means “Penn's Woods,” and it comes from

the name of William Penn.

Massachusetts comes from a Native American tribe.

Rhode Island comes from Dutch words that mean “red island,” even though it is not really an island.

The Northeast has some of the oldest history in the US. Its state names remind us of England, Holland, Native American tribes, and even Latin.

Now, let’s practice with a **point of view story**.

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Point of View-Story

(Learn Grammar)

Now, let's practice with a **Point of View Story**.

I will tell you the same story, but in different points of view. This will help you practice grammar in a natural way.

First, I'll tell you the story in the future tense. Let's go!

Next spring, I will take a trip to the Northeast of the United States.

My first stop will be New York. I'll imagine Broadway shows, yellow taxis, and bagels. But instead, I'll spend most of the time running after my coffee, because everyone in New York will walk faster than me, talk faster than me, and yes — drink their coffee faster than me.

"The city that never sleeps?" I'll say. "More like the city that never slows down."

Then, I will visit New Jersey. I'll expect something very new and exciting. But someone will remind me: "Hey, New Jersey was named after old Jersey in Europe." I'll laugh and say: "So it's basically New... Old Jersey?"

People from Jersey will just roll their eyes at me and say: "We're Jersey, that's enough."

Next, I'll go to Pennsylvania. I'll want to see history and maybe a cheesesteak. But when I try to pronounce "Pennsylvania," I'll get lost somewhere in the middle. "Pennsylv... Pennsylv-what?"

A local will kindly explain: "It just means Penn's Woods." I'll nod politely while secretly thinking: "Next time, I'll just order a cheesesteak and keep quiet."

After that, I'll arrive in Massachusetts. The name will scare me. Too many letters. Too many "s" sounds. I'll try to spell it and fail three times. Then, someone will tell me about the Boston Tea Party in 1773. People threw tea into the water to protest against taxes. It was an important moment before the American Revolution. I'll smile and think: wow, even tea can change history! If you can spell Massachusetts correctly, you already speak advanced English.

Finally, I'll visit Rhode Island. I'll expect a real island. But I'll discover it's not actually an island at all. "Wait a second," I'll say. "Rhode Island is not an island?"

The locals will shrug: "Nope. But we're still the smallest state, so that's something."

When I return home, my friends will ask: "So, how was your trip to the Northeast?"

I'll smile and say:

"Well, New York will exhaust me, New Jersey will confuse me, Pennsylvania will tongue-tie me, Massachusetts will spell-check me, and Rhode Island will trick me.

But hey... at least I'll never forget the state names!"

POV Story – Past (Plural)

Last spring, we took a trip to the Northeast of the United States.

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"The city that never sleeps?" we said. "More like the city that never slows down."

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reminded us: "Hey, New Jersey was named after old Jersey in Europe." We laughed and said: "So it's basically New... Old Jersey?"

People from Jersey just rolled their eyes and said: "We're Jersey, that's enough."

Next, we went to Pennsylvania. We wanted to see history and maybe eat a cheesesteak. But when we tried to pronounce "Pennsylvania," we got lost somewhere in the middle. "Pennsyl... Pennsyl-what?"

A local kindly explained: "It just means Penn's Woods." We nodded politely and thought: "Next time, we'll just order a cheesesteak and keep quiet."

After that, we arrived in Massachusetts. The name scared us. Too many letters. Too many "s" sounds. We tried to spell it and failed three times. Then, someone told us about the Boston Tea Party in 1773. People threw tea into the water to protest against taxes. It was an important moment before the American Revolution. We smiled and thought: wow, even tea could change history! If you could spell Massachusetts correctly, you already spoke advanced English.

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When we returned home, our friends asked: "So, how was your trip to the Northeast?"

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"Well, New York exhausted us, New Jersey confused us, Pennsylvania tongue-tied us, Massachusetts spell-checked us, and Rhode Island tricked us.

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