

Chatterbox #191 – Luck

Episode description

Do you believe in luck, or do you believe that there is no such thing as luck? In this Chatterbox episode, Andrew and Suzanne talk all about luck, and explain some interesting and useful expressions related to luck. Don't miss your chance to join them!

Fun fact

The horseshoe is associated with good fortune in North America. Some people believe that it is good luck when the ends of the horseshoe point upwards and bad luck when the ends point downwards. Interestingly, other people believe the opposite!

Expressions included in the learning materials

- A stroke of luck/sheer luck
- To be out of luck/to be down on your luck
- The fruits of [someone's] labour
- A flagship
- A claim to fame



Transcript

Note: The words and expressions that appear in **bold text** within the transcript are discussed in more detail in the Detailed Explanations section that follows the transcript.

Andrew: Hey everybody. My name is Andrew.

Suzanne: And my name is Suzanne.

Andrew: And we're back with another Culips episode.

Hey Sue.

Suzanne: Hey Andrew! How are you?

Andrew: I am doing really good. How do I sound?

Suzanne: You sound happy.

Andrew: Well, I am happy because I just got a new microphone, and I'm testing it out for the first time today. So I hope that my voice sounds nice and cheery and clear to everybody that's listening right now.

Suzanne: It sure does. It sounds great all the way over here in Montreal.

Andrew: Well, that's lucky, isn't it?

Suzanne: It sure is. It's not always easy to get a good connection.

Andrew: Suzanne, I was trying to segue into the topic of our episode today. I'm not sure if I did a great job at that or not, but our topic for today's Chatterbox episode is luck.

Suzanne: Ooh, that's a good one.

Andrew: Mmhmm. So in a Chatterbox episode, we have a natural conversation. It's unscripted. We chat. We use totally colloquial slang and expressions just like we would in our everyday lives. And you guys, the audience, get to listen in. You get to eavesdrop on us. So this is what we'll do today. We will talk about luck, L-U-C-K, luck.

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- Andrew: I was thinking that we should start off, Suzanne, by defining luck, OK? Now, what is luck?
- Suzanne: Well, luck is when good things or good fortune happens to you without you trying, so by accident. It's just by chance. It's lucky.
- Andrew: Mmhmm. You're not working hard for anything. You're not putting in a lot of effort, and all of a sudden something really amazing happens to you. This is luck.
- Suzanne: Yes, so it's not when you're working hard on your paper, and you get a good grade. That's not luck. That's putting in hard work and working for it. Whereas you're sitting around and someone hands you a delicious ice cream cone, just because it's your lucky day, and you're like, "Wow! I didn't even have to work for that. I just got that for no reason."
- Andrew: Exactly. That's totally what luck is. Now, in English, we have many, many, many expressions that use luck. And I wanted to just quickly run through some of them before we start our chat here, Suzanne, 'cause it's good to know these very common expressions.
- And the first one is **a stroke of luck**.
- Suzanne: Nice.
- Andrew: **A stroke of luck**, yeah. I have an example sentence that I wrote and gave to Suzanne ahead of time. Maybe you could read that example sentence for us, Suzanne.
- Suzanne: Sure. "It was **a stroke of luck** that I managed to make it to work on time. I slept right through my alarm."
- Andrew: Yeah, so **a stroke of luck** just means that you are lucky. You have a little piece of luck that happened to you.
- Suzanne: It's like a quick, short moment of luck.
- Andrew: Exactly. Now, the next expression is similar. It's **sheer luck, sheer luck**. Suzanne, could you read the example with **sheer luck**.
- Suzanne: "It was **sheer luck** that Jonathan scored 100 percent on his exam."
- Andrew: OK, and sheer is spelled S-H-E-E-R, **sheer luck**. Now, when something is **sheer luck**, it means it's really, really lucky. It's completely lucky.
- Suzanne: Yeah, it's 100 percent only from luck. Like, there was no other way that that could've happened unless that person was lucky.

Andrew: Yeah, so this guy, Jonathan, sounds like he didn't study at all for his exam. Maybe it was a multiple-choice quiz, and it was **sheer luck** that somehow he guessed all of the right answers and got a 100 percent grade.

Suzanne: Yeah. My gosh, that's really lucky if you're guessing all the answers.

Andrew: Now, we can talk about good luck, and we can also talk about bad luck. And we have two expressions that are about bad luck here. And the first one is **to be out of luck, to be out of luck**. Suzanne, could you read the example sentence please?

Suzanne: Yeah. "I tried to buy a Nintendo switch the other day, but I was **out of luck**. They were all sold out."

Andrew: A Nintendo switch is this new Nintendo gaming console, and the person who is trying to buy this was **out of luck**. He wasn't able to buy the Nintendo because they were all sold out.

So if you're **out of luck** it means you're unlucky, right?

Suzanne: Yeah, it means that you happen to be on the side, the opposite side, of being lucky.

Andrew: We could think of it as being the opposite of **a stroke of luck—to be out of luck**. OK, and the final luck expression that we will quickly examine today is **to be down on your luck**.

Suzanne: That's not good. That's not a fun one.

Andrew: It is not a fun one at all. Suzanne, could you read us the example, please?

Suzanne: Yeah. "Frank is going through a really hard time right now. He's **down on his luck**, and I'm worried about him."

Andrew: He's **down on his luck**. And if you're **down on your luck**, it means you are unlucky financially. Maybe you made a bad investment or you lost your job. There could be a million reasons why, but for some reason, you're in a bad financial state. This is **to be down on your luck**.

So those are four luck expressions that we commonly use when we're having an everyday conversation. But now, Suzanne, I wanna know more about you. This is my favourite part of the chat. And I wanna know, do you believe in luck?

Suzanne: Hmm, I don't totally believe in luck, actually.

Andrew: OK.

- Suzanne: I'm not a big believer in luck. I feel like we make choices, and those choices lead to better outcomes or not good outcomes. Hmm, I don't know because sometimes I do feel lucky and sometimes I feel like I've made my own luck, you know?
- Andrew: Yeah, I definitely can agree with you there. I think it's important to put yourself in a position where you can be lucky. Let me throw an example out there to maybe illustrate what I'm trying to say. Let's pretend you are a young, aspiring actor. Now, it's possible that a talent agent will see you walking the street and just be blown away with you and give you a role in a major movie. It's possible, but it's very, very unlikely, right? This would be just **sheer luck** if this happened.
- Suzanne: Hmm.
- Andrew: But if you are a young, aspiring actor and you go to every audition that you can and you work your butt off, and finally you get a role in a major motion picture, well, this is lucky because it doesn't happen to very many people.
- Suzanne: Yeah.
- Andrew: But it's also something you worked towards, right? So it's kind of creating your own luck.
- Suzanne: Exactly. I feel like ... In fact, Oprah used to say that luck is just opportunity meets preparation.
- Andrew: Hmm, that's a good quote.
- Suzanne: You're prepared and then you just happen to get the right opportunity, but you've been preparing for that. So when you get that opportunity, you know how to take it.
- Andrew: You can jump on it.
- Suzanne: Yeah.
- Andrew: Now, I happen to agree with you, Suzanne, that I don't really believe in luck. But when I reflect on my life, there are some things that are very lucky. I think I'm lucky to be a Canadian, to grow up in a safe country, in a clean country. This is something that maybe all of our listeners are frustrated about, but I'm lucky to be an English speaker too. This is something that's a privilege for me—is to be able to speak a global language.
- Suzanne: That's true. I agree.

- Andrew: And so I do believe in that aspect of luck, the luck that I just had no control over. But in terms of my everyday life, I don't really believe in luck.
- Suzanne: Yeah, as far as everyday, day-to-day moments, I think you really make your life what it is.
- Andrew: So I think I might know the answer to this question already, Suzanne, or at least ...
- Suzanne: OK.
- Andrew: I can predict what you're going to answer. But what do you think is more important? Hard work or luck?
- Suzanne: Hmm, I definitely believe in hard work or work in general. I think that when you work hard at something you love, then good things come to you. And it's maybe ... It maybe can look like luck from the outside, but you have worked hard to attract those positive things.
- Andrew: I agree with you there, Suzanne. I think that work is more important than luck because hard work almost, not always, is a good way to guarantee success. If you just work on something long enough and hard enough, to an extent, I think almost everybody will be successful. But if you rely on luck you might never achieve success. And maybe you won't even appreciate it if you do become successful.
- Suzanne: And many times, when we compare ourselves to others, it's so easy to think that other people are lucky and you're not lucky because you're only seeing the outside perspective or **the fruits of their labour**, as opposed to all the labour that they may have gone through in order to get to the point in which they're at.
- Andrew: The inspiration for this episode was a picture that I saw on the website Reddit.
- Suzanne: Yeah?
- Andrew: And it's titled, "The Secret of Success." And this is actually a graph that displays what the different class groups in North America attribute to success. So what makes a successful person? This question was asked to upper-class people, rich people, middle-class class people, and lower-class, poor people.
- And the answers were fascinating. Rich, upper-class people said that success is due to an individual's abilities, their hard work ethic, and their spirit.

- Suzanne: Hmm.
- Andrew: The middle-class said that success is caused by a high education and luck.
- Suzanne: Hmm.
- Andrew: And poor people attributed success to cheating, connections, and initial capital. So I saw this and I thought, "Wow, that's really interesting."
- Suzanne: Wow.
- Andrew: And I didn't know where to place myself because when I thought of this question, I agree with rich, middle, and poor people.
- Suzanne: Yeah.
- Andrew: I thought, "You know what? I think it's a little bit of everything. All of those things can lead to success."
- Suzanne: Yeah, it's true. And if you think about the quote from Oprah, being in the right place at the right time can seem lucky. But for example, if you didn't have connections or education or hard work, or spirit or ability, you might not be able to succeed, even if you're in the right place at the right time.
- Andrew: Suzanne, there's a great lead-in to a story that I wanted to share with you, a story of luck. Now, I'm sure that not very many people will recognize this name, but Canada's top news anchor, the host of the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation's **flagship** news program, called The National, the host, his name is Peter Mansbridge.
- Peter Mansbridge is a really famous guy in Canada. Almost everybody will recognize him, but I don't think this is the case outside of Canada. But anyways, he has a really interesting story about how he was discovered and how he became Canada's top news anchor. Shall I share this story with you, Suzanne?
- Suzanne: Yeah, please. It sounds awesome.
- Andrew: All right. Well, do you know where Churchill, Manitoba is?
- Suzanne: No, I don't.
- Andrew: Churchill, Manitoba is a really small place. Maybe less than 1,000 people live there. It's in the top of Manitoba, the northern part of Manitoba, in Central Canada, right on the Hudson's Bay. And Churchill's **claim to fame** is that there are tons and tons of polar bears that live there, and it's kind of the polar bear capital of the world, I think even.

Andrew: And so this dude, Peter Mansbridge, was a young guy right out of high school, and he was living in this small city of Churchill, Manitoba. And actually, he was working at the airport as a front desk customer service representative. And one day, the head of the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation was flying to Winnipeg, but for some reason, because of bad weather, he had to be redirected to Churchill, Manitoba.

So he was waiting in Churchill, Manitoba for his connecting flight at the airport, and Peter Mansbridge got on the PA system to make an announcement. And the head of the CBC heard Peter Mansbridge's voice and said, "Oh, it's the voice of an angel. It's the voice I'm looking for. It's a great voice for radio and for TV."

So he went up to the counter, and he demanded to know whose voice that was, offered him a job, and the next thing you know he is a Canadian celebrity hosting Canada's most popular news show.

Suzanne: Wow! That's amazing.

Andrew: So this is very lucky, I think, right? This changed Peter Mansbridge's life.

Suzanne: I think so, but here's the thing. I feel like his ability was going to lead him into something like that at some point. I feel like that was his destiny to do stuff with his voice. Similarly, I got into voiceovers very easily and quickly, and all of my friends were like, "I want to do that. How did you do that?" And I said, "I don't know. I just sent my stuff to the agents, and it worked. And they called me, and I started working." And they're like, "But that never happens to anyone." I said, "Well, it happened to me."

And it was just because I think I was destined to work with pronunciation, with voice, with podcasts, with voiceovers. I think it may have happened for him, maybe not on that scale, but in some way, even if he didn't get that opportunity maybe.

Andrew: Yeah. I guess we'll actually never know.

Suzanne: We'll never know. We'll never know.

Andrew: But it is something that's interesting to think about.

Suzanne: Yeah!

Andrew: And everybody that's listening out there, I'd be really interested to hear your opinion. Do you believe in luck? Do you think that Peter Mansbridge was a very lucky guy, or do you think that it was his destiny to become a broadcaster? I would be super interested to hear your opinion.

And the best way to share your thoughts with us is by visiting our website, Culips.com; our Facebook page, Culips.com/CulipsPodcast; or even shooting me an email at Andrew@Culips.com.

Suzanne: That brings us to the end of today's episode. We hope you have enjoyed it. Thank you so much for spending your time listening to us. Remember our website is Culips.com. And if you want to learn more about how you can study with us and improve your English, visit Culips.com.

Andrew: Yeah, Culips.com is the place where you can become a Culips member and get access to our learning materials, which include full transcripts, detailed vocabulary explanations, and quizzes for each episode. And I highly recommend becoming a Culips member. We put a lot of time and efforts into making the best learning materials we can because we really do want to help you guys reach the next level with your English studies. So head on over to the website, and check it out for more info.

That's it for now. We'll talk to you next time. Bye everybody.

Suzanne: Bye!

Detailed Explanations

A stroke of luck/sheer luck

A **stroke of luck** and **sheer luck** are two similar expressions related to good luck.

A **stroke of luck** means an occurrence of good fortune. The expression is used to describe situations where something happens because of sudden, unexpected, unpredictable good luck or good timing. If you get a **stroke of luck**, you are suddenly lucky.

When placed before a noun, **sheer** is an adjective that emphasizes the size or degree of something. So if something happens by **sheer luck**, it happens because you are very, very lucky. As Andrew and Suzanne mention in this episode, if something happens because of **sheer luck**, it happens completely from luck and from having a huge quantity of luck.

Here are a couple more examples with **a stroke of luck/sheer luck**:

Mark:	You're late today. Did something happen?
Ann:	I got on the wrong bus this morning, and didn't realize for 20 minutes!
Mark:	That's not good. How did you end up making it here?
Ann:	By a stroke of luck , the bus I got on by accident stops right in front of here. It was just a longer ride.

Steve:	Maria, can you believe it? I just got my dream bartending job!
Maria:	Wow! How did that happen?
Steve:	I was just hanging out and having a drink with my friend at my favourite bar when one of the bartenders quit—right in front of us!
Maria:	Oh my!
Steve:	I know! The manager just happened to be sitting next to us at the bar, and when he started complaining about having to look for a new bartender. I told him that I would love to work there. Bam, I got the job.
Maria:	Talk about sheer luck ! You were really in the right place at the right time.

To be out of luck/to be down on your luck

To be out of luck and **to be down on your luck** are two similar expressions related to bad luck.

To be out of luck means to be unlucky. This is an easy expression to picture. Imagine that luck is a limited resource, and you only have so much of it. Every time that you get lucky, you use some of your luck. Until one day, you have no more luck left to use. When you're **out of luck**, you are unlucky because you have no luck left! So the next time you're unlucky, you can say that you're **out of luck**.

To be down on your luck means to be unlucky, but for a longer period of time. When you're **down on your luck**, you're unlucky and you've been unlucky for a while. For example, if you lose your job, and you can't find a job for a long time, then you can say, "I am **down on my luck**."

Here are a couple more examples with **to be out of luck/to be down on your luck**:

Brenda:	Good morning, Jon.
Jon:	It's not a good morning.
Brenda:	Oh, why's that?
Jon:	I wanted to treat myself to a nice breakfast, but the bakery by my house ran out of my favourite pastries this morning.
Brenda:	That's not so bad. You were just out of luck this morning. The day will get better!

Joanna:	How's your sister doing these days? I haven't seen her in a while.
Bruce:	She's not doing great. She's been down on her luck lately.
Joanna:	Oh no! What happened?
Bruce:	She really wanted to go back to school, but so far, she hasn't been accepted by any of the universities she's applied to. It's been a rough couple of months for her, with all the rejection letters.
Joanna:	Poor girl, that sounds difficult.

The fruits of [someone's] labour

The fruits of [someone's] labour means the positive results of one's hard work. This expression is most easily understood if you picture it. Imagine that there's a tree that is fed by your hard work, not by the soil or the sun. When you work hard, the tree grows. The more you work, the more the tree grows, eventually producing delicious fruit. The fruit is the outcome of your hard work. In other words, the fruit is the result you created by working hard.

In this episode, Suzanne mentions that sometimes other people seem lucky because you can only see **the fruits of their labour**, not all the hard work they put in to create **the fruits of their labour**. In other words, if you only see the positive outcome someone has worked to create, it can look like they simply got lucky.

So the next time that you get to enjoy the positive results of your hard work, you can say, "I'm enjoying **the fruits of my labour**."

Here are a couple more examples with **the fruits of [someone's] labour**:

Liam:	How's the band coming, Lauren? I hear you're getting popular.
Lauren:	Yeah, we're doing really well.
Liam:	Oh cool! Is that because you guys started to play shows?
Lauren:	Actually, we've been playing shows regularly for a couple years now. It took a long time to build up a fan base, but now we're enjoying the fruits of our labour .
Liam:	Good for you!

Brett:	I don't know if I can keep doing this job. It's really hard.
Megan:	I thought you loved your job. What happened?
Brett:	It was interesting at first, but now I feel overwhelmed. I'm not that good at it, and there's a lot of pressure to get better.
Megan:	If it's something that you enjoy doing, you should keep working at it. You'll never be able to see the fruits of your labour if you give up now.
Brett:	Good point. I'll keep trying.

A flagship

The term **flagship** originally was a naval term. In the navy, the main ship is called **the flagship**. Thus, **the flagship** means the key thing in a series or a network, or the main product of a company.

For example, in this episode, Andrew talks about how Peter Mansbridge, the host of The National, the Canadian Broadcast Corporation's (CBC's) **flagship** news program. Andrew describes The National as the **flagship** program because it is the main, most important news program that the CBC runs. Another common use of **flagship** is to describe a company's main store or building. If you hear someone talk about **a flagship** store, you know that it is the main, most impressive store or building they own.

Here's one more example with **a flagship**:

Rachel: Are you excited for your vacation?

Joe: So excited! We're staying at this fancy hotel. Apparently, it's the hotel company's **flagship** location, so it's bound to be amazing.

A claim to fame

A claim to fame means the reason why a person or a place is famous, noteworthy, or interesting. The expression **a claim to fame** is often used when there is only a single thing notable about a person or place.

For example, in this episode, Andrew mentions a small Manitoba town called Churchill. He says that it's **claim to fame** is that there are a lot of polar bears there. In other words, the most notable and interesting about Churchill is that it has a lot of polar bears.

So the one thing that makes a person or place interesting is their **claim to fame**.

Here's one more example with **a claim to fame**:

Branden: Are you enjoying the party? You were talking to that weird guy for a while.

Kylie: It's OK. You're right about that guy, though. He's pretty strange. He tried to convince me that his **claim to fame** is that he invented Kleenex. I don't think that I believe him.

Quiz

1. **The fruits of [someone's] labour means the _____ results that come from hard work.**
 - a) bad
 - b) good
 - c) acceptable
 - d) lucky

2. **Which of the following expressions means the reason why a person or a place is famous?**
 - a) a claim to fame
 - b) a right to fight
 - c) a crown to renown
 - d) a train to Spain

3. **Which of the following expressions is NOT related to good luck?**
 - a) sheer luck
 - b) out of luck
 - c) a stroke of luck
 - d) beginner's luck

4. **Which of the following expressions is NOT related to bad luck?**
 - a) to be down on your luck
 - b) to be out of luck
 - c) a streak of back luck
 - d) a stroke of luck

5. **Which of the following expressions means the main, most important in a series or network?**
 - a) leadship
 - b) warship
 - c) flagship
 - d) battleship

Quiz Answers

1.b 2.a 3.b 4.d 5.c

Episode credits

Hosts: Andrew Bates and Suzanne Cerreta

Music: *Something Elated* by Broke For Free

Episode preparation/research: Andrew Bates

Audio editor: Andrew Bates

Transcription: Transcript Heroes Transcription Services

Learning materials writer: Morag St. Clair

English editor: Stephanie Minelga

Business manager: Tsuyoshi Kaneshima

Project manager: Jessica Cox