

Catch Word #178 – Touch and go

Episode description

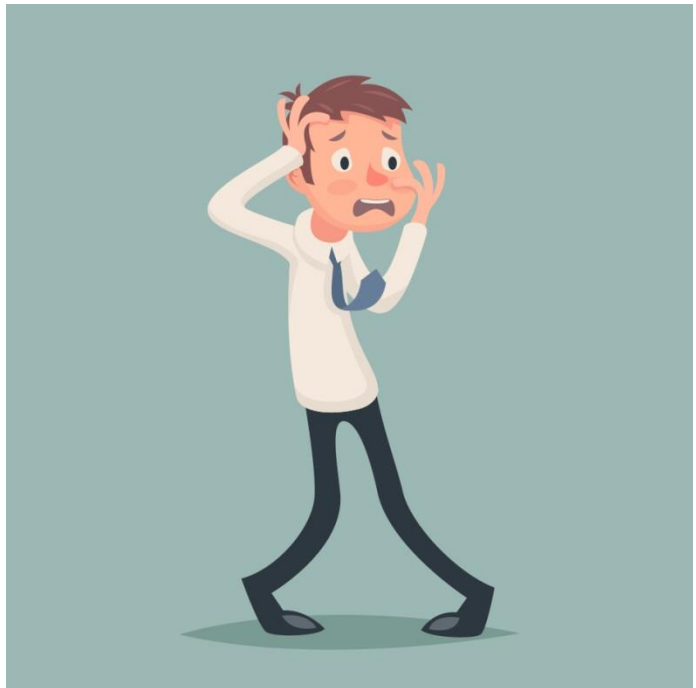
It's always good to plan ahead, but sometimes you just can't know what's around the corner! In this Catch Word episode, Andrew and Morag explain a couple of useful phrases for uncertain situations: *touch and go* and *up in the air*.

Fun fact

Touch and go can be used as an adjective—a word that modifies a noun or a pronoun. Although there is disagreement, some believe the expression *touch and go* originated as an allusion to ships that barely escaped disaster when they would touch the seabed or rub against rocks.

Expressions included in the learning materials

- Touch and go
- Up in the air
- Same old, same old
- To go with the flow
- A shout-out



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.

Morag: And my name is Morag.

Andrew: And we are back with another Culips episode.

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Andrew: Morag, what's new? How are you?

Morag: I'm doing pretty well, Andrew. But you know, **same old, same old**. How 'bout you?

Andrew: You know, I'm the same, **same old, same old**. My life is going well, but nothing major has happened to report on.

Morag: That's sometimes a good thing.

Andrew: Could be worse, right?

Morag: That is always true, yes.

Andrew: Well, I think we should jump right into today's episode because we have a lot to talk about. But just before we start, I want to throw **a special shout-out** to our Culips members. I want to dedicate this episode to them because we really rely so much on the support of our members. And yeah, we just really appreciate it, so thank you so much.

Morag: Yes, absolutely. So many thanks. And for anyone who is not a Culips member yet, you can learn how to sign up on our website, which is Culips.com.

Andrew: Of course, members get access to full transcripts, detailed explanations of the more difficult vocabulary that we use, and quizzes for each and every episode. And in my opinion, the learning materials are really one of the best ways to study with us. So if you're not a member yet, yeah, head on over to Culips.com and sign up. OK, so now, on to today's episode.

We are going to do a Catch Word episode. And this is where we talk about a couple of interesting expressions—slang expressions, idioms, this sort of thing. And we really look at them in detail. We define them for you, describe them for you, and give you some usage examples.

And today, our two expressions are related to uncertain situations, or situations where you don't really know what's going to happen. And our first expression is ***touch and go***, ***touch and go***.

Morag: Yeah, ***touch and go***, ***touch and go***.

Andrew: So ***touch and go*** describes a situation where the outcome is unknown or uncertain.

Morag: It usually has a negative connotation though, right, Andrew?

Andrew: To me, yeah, there's a negative feeling associated with this. If a situation is ***touch and go***, something bad could possibly happen. You're right.

Morag: Yeah, something bad could happen at any moment. Like, it might go bad, but it might be OK too.

Andrew: Yeah, so ***touch and go***. When I think of this expression, we use it a lot when we talk about somebody's health, the condition of somebody's health. We also use it to talk about travel plans, and also business situations, like maybe a sales meeting. "It was ***touch and go*** with the clients. We didn't know if we were gonna make the deal, and then in the end, we did." We could use it in this way.

Morag: I think I might've hit on it. It's where there is near failure.

Andrew: Yes.

Morag: Or very close proximity to failure.

Andrew: Mmhmm.

Morag: In the near future.

Andrew: That sounds exactly right to me.

Morag: If catching your plane was **touch and go**, you almost didn't make it, but you made it in the end.

Andrew: We use this expression to describe a situation where, ah, things almost went really badly.

Morag: Yeah.

Andrew: But then in the end, it was OK.

Morag: Yeah, I think we got it.

Andrew: Right on. Well, let's go to some examples then.

Relative 1: I got here as soon as I heard. How's Uncle Ron doing?

Relative 2: Well, the doctor told us that he's had a major heart attack. And it was **touch and go** for a bit, but thankfully, it looks like he's gonna be OK.

Relative 1: Ah, thank God. I was so worried.

Morag: So in this example, two relatives meet in the hospital and learn that their Uncle Ron has had a major heart attack. One of them says that Uncle Ron's condition was **touch and go** for a little while. But in the end, he's going to be OK. So it was unknown whether Uncle Ron would live or die, but thankfully, he's all right.

Andrew: Yay, Uncle Ron. Go, Uncle Ron.

Morag: Woo-hoo! All right!

Andrew: Yeah, so this is talking about his health condition, right? His health was **touch and go**. It was unknown whether he would be OK or not OK.

Morag: Mmhmm.

Andrew: All right, let's get to example number two.

Friend 1: Whoa, you made it to the party on time. I thought you were gonna be late.

Friend 2: Yeah, me too. Traffic was terrible. It was **touch and go** whether we'd make it on time. But hey, we're here.

Friend 1: Yeah, that's great. Well, we're just about to serve dinner.

Friend 2: Perfect timing.

- Andrew: In this example, a guest arrived at a dinner party just in time, right before dinner was served. And the guest was unsure if she'd be able to make it on time because of traffic. So it was **touch and go** because the guest didn't know whether or not she'd be late. In the end though, the guest arrived at the perfect time, right before dinner.
- Morag: So this is one of those examples where we talk about **touch and go** in terms of travel. We had health and now travel.
- Andrew: Definitely. And one more thing, you probably heard in this last example that, "It was **touch and go** whether we'd make it on time." *Whether*—so we use this construction a lot. It's **touch and go** whether or not something will happen. And of course, *whether* is an alternative way to say *if*, right?
- Morag: Mhmm.
- Andrew: It's conditional. You'll often hear **touch and go** used with the word *whether*. OK, let's move on. Let's get to expression number two for today. Morag, what is our second expression?
- Morag: Our second expression is **up in the air, up in the air**.
- Andrew: Yes, **up in the air, up in the air**. So if something is **up in the air**, it is unknown or undecided.
- Morag: Yeah, it hasn't been fixed. It is still unplanned, at least to a certain extent.
- Andrew: Mhmm, yeah. That's a great word, *unplanned*. Because we really use this expression often to talk about our future plans, or more specifically, the lack of future plans.
- Morag: Mhmm. "What are you gonna do next week?" "I don't know. It's all **up in the air**."
- Andrew: For me, this is a very fitting expression for my life because I sort of **go with the flow** quite often. A lot of things in my life are **up in the air**.
- Morag: I think that might be being in your late 20s because I feel very similarly, Andrew.
- Andrew: Yes, this is just a generational feeling perhaps, yeah. I think a lot of people are in this situation. Yeah, so when your future or your plans or the situation is **up in the air**, then it's just not fixed. It's not solid quite yet.
- Morag: And those things can be short-term, very immediate, or long-term, your whole future life plans.
- Andrew: Totally. OK, let's do some examples with this expression, **up in the air**.

Student 1: I know everyone hates being asked this question, but what are your plans after graduation? That's coming up soon, right?

Student 2: Yeah, yeah. I graduate at the end of the month, and to be perfectly honest, my plans are totally **up in the air** right now. Got a few ideas, but nothing solid yet. Thinking about maybe going travelling, or I might just look for a job right away. I don't know. Maybe I'll go to grad school. Yeah, everything's **up in the air**.

Student 1: Well, I mean all of those sound like good ideas. I'm sure you're gonna do something great.

Morag: In this example, a student gets asked about his future plans. He says his plans are **up in the air**. In other words, he has no solid plans. He might go travelling, he might get a job, or he might go to grad school. So because he has no set plans, his future is **up in the air**.

Andrew: OK, very good. Let's move on to our final example with **up in the air**.

Sibling 1: So did you make a decision? Did you decide to get a puppy or a kitten?

Sibling 2: Oh, I don't know. It's still **up in the air**. I'm not even sure if we should get a pet quite yet. It might be better to wait for a few years until my life is a bit more stable, and then we can dedicate more time to raising a pet.

Sibling 1: No, come on. Just go for it. I need a cute, little baby animal in my life.

Andrew: In this example, two siblings are having a conversation. The older sister tells her younger brother that her plans to get a pet are **up in the air**. She isn't sure if she should get a pet because she doesn't know if she has enough time to take care of it. And this disappoints the younger brother because he clearly wants his sister to buy a pet so that he can spend some time with it.

And I understand this situation. You know, it's nice when your friends or your siblings get a pet, and you can just hang out with it and skirt all the responsibility of pet ownership.

Morag: I actually did that with a friend's offspring the other day. It was good to hang out with my friend's baby, and I was like, "Great." And then got to pass her back. Kittens, babies, any baby things, it's nice to go hang out and not have to deal with them all the time.

Andrew: I'm with you on that one. Well, Morag, I think that brings us to the end of today's episode. Just to review, could you let us know the two expressions that we looked at today?

Morag: Absolutely. So we had ***touch and go*** and ***up in the air***.

Andrew: Yes. And again, ***touch and go*** and ***up in the air*** both describe unknown or uncertain situations.

Again, I wanna thank everybody for listening. And if you have any comments, questions, or suggestions for future episodes, drop us a line. Send us a message via our Facebook page, and you can find that at facebook.com/culipspodcast.

Morag: You can also always go through our website, Culips.com.

Andrew: We'll be back soon with another Culips episode. Bye.

Morag: Talk to you soon. Good-bye.

Detailed Explanations

Touch and go

The first key expression in this episode is **touch and go**, meaning risky or uncertain. **Touch and go** can be used when an outcome is uncertain. Specifically, if a situation is **touch and go**, the situation's outcome is unclear—there is a chance that the outcome will be bad, and there is a chance that the outcome will be good. In other words, **touch and go** means that the outcome, whether negative or positive, is unpredictable.

As Andrew and Morag mention, **touch and go** is most commonly used when speaking about major health issues or accidents. For example, if someone is so badly hurt that it is unclear whether they will live or die, then their situation is **touch and go**.

When travelling, there are many opportunities for things to go wrong, like missing your flight or bus, losing your luggage, or experiencing turbulence. In other words, when travelling, you may be put in a situation where there are two possible outcomes, one of which is positive and one of which is negative. So you will also often hear **touch and go** used in terms of travel.

Here are a couple more examples with **touch and go**:

Jessica:	It's so good to see you! Thanks for agreeing to pick me up at the airport.
Ron:	No problem. Did your trip go smoothly?
Jessica:	Actually, I was late arriving to the airport, and it was touch and go whether or not I'd make it through security in time for my flight. I was really scared I was going to miss my flight.
Ron:	I'm glad everything worked out in the end.

Bernice:	You're late!
Pete:	I got pulled over by the cops!
Bernice:	What for?
Pete:	Well, I was speeding, but not by that much! I was only going 10 kilometres over the speed limit. The officer was really hard on me. It was touch and go whether or not I was going to get a big ticket. Luckily, the officer didn't fine me in the end.

Up in the air

The second key expression in this episode is ***up in the air***. This expression is similar to ***touch and go*** because it can be used when the outcome of a situation is unknown. However, ***up in the air*** does not imply that there is the possibility of only a good outcome or a bad outcome. Instead, ***up in the air*** means that something has not been decided upon or that all the details have not been worked out.

When a situation is ***up in the air***, you have no idea how it will turn out. So if something is ***up in the air***, then something is unresolved. In other words, if there is still more work to be done and more decisions to be made before a situation is resolved, then the situation or outcome is ***up in the air***.

Here are a couple more examples with ***up in the air***.

Harold: Have you decided if you're going back to school?

Francesca: Oh man, that's completely ***up in the air***. I haven't even heard back from the university yet. I can't make a decision before I know whether or not I got in!

Joyce: So did your parents make a decision regarding the house, and whether or not they want to sell it?

Dean: Nope! It's driving me crazy. Everything is still ***up in the air***. My dad wants to sell, but my mom wants to stay. They've lived in the same house for the last 25 years, so I can imagine that the decision is not easy.

Joyce: Making a decision like that and working out all the details is definitely not an easy thing. I know a great realtor if they ever do decide to sell the house.

Dean: Thanks Joyce!

Same old, same old

Same old, same old is an informal expression that means nothing has changed, whether it is a situation or someone's behaviour. It's important to note that **same old, same old** is used to indicate an unchanging situation or behaviour that is boring, annoying, or disappointing. For instance, you wouldn't say something is **same old, same old** if it were the same, but still fun and exciting. If nothing has changed, and everything has been wonderful for a long time, it would not be appropriate to use **same old, same old**. However, if nothing has changed, and everything feels mundane and dull, then you could say, "Everything is **same old, same old**."

In this episode, when Andrew and Morag ask each other how they are doing, they both respond by saying, "**Same old, same old**." So both Andrew and Morag are saying that nothing has changed. There is nothing new or noteworthy that is happening in their lives.

Here are a couple more examples with **same old, same old**:

Judy:	How was your dinner with your sister?
Ralph:	Frustrating! She's really unhappy right now, but won't make any changes in her life. It's just the same old, same old . She complains and complains, but won't listen to any of my advice.
Judy:	That's really annoying!

Sanjay:	Have you heard from Tom lately?
Dave:	Yeah, I talked to him just the other night.
Sanjay:	How's he doing?
Dave:	Same old, same old . Nothing has changed. He's still living by himself and working at the same call centre. Poor guy, he really leads the most boring life.
Sanjay:	What he needs is a girlfriend.
Dave:	My girlfriend definitely keeps my life interesting!

To go with the flow

When you **go with the flow**, you relax and go along with a situation. This expression is easier to understand if you picture it. Imagine that you are floating down a river; the water is gently flowing and pushing you along. If you **go with the flow**, you travel at whatever speed the water is travelling. You are not fighting to go slower or faster—you are moving with the water. So **to go with the flow** means to go along with a situation. This can be a positive or a negative thing.

You can use **to go with the flow** to tell someone not to be apprehensive or worried about the future or an uncertain situation. In other words, the expression can be used as advice to tell someone to relax and not worry. For instance, if someone is worried about having dinner with their in-laws, you could reassure them by saying, “Try **to go with the flow**,” which is another way of saying, “Try to relax and just accept the situation, not control it.”

However, **to go with the flow** can also mean to conform or to do something because other people are doing it too, like in peer-pressure situations. In this context, accepting a situation because it’s the easiest thing to do, **to go with the flow** is not always a positive thing.

Here are a couple more examples with **to go with the flow**:

Russell:	Are you still dating Carl?
Pam:	Yeah, we’re still dating. The whole thing is kinda freaking me out right now though.
Russell:	Why is that?
Pam:	I don’t know if we’re moving too fast or not. We’ve only been dating for 2 months, and I’m meeting his parents tomorrow. We’ve also already talked about moving in together!
Russell:	I don’t think there are really any rules for this sort of situation. You two should just go with the flow and see where you end up.

Austin:	I’m so upset right now. There was a meeting at work, and it was decided that we’re going to a steak house for our staff party.
Caroline:	Why didn’t you tell anyone that you’re a vegetarian, and won’t be able to eat there?
Austin:	I don’t know! I just went with the flow , and this is how it ended up.

A shout-out

A shout-out is a noun that means a message or greeting of gratitude, support, or thanks. **A shout-out** is an expression of appreciation to a particular person. An important part of **a shout-out** is that it is done in a public setting. If you give **a shout-out** to someone, you express your thanks to someone in a situation where other people will hear it, like on the radio or on the television.

For example, in this episode, Andrew gives **a shout-out** to Culips members for their support. So Andrew is publically thanking and expressing his appreciation of Culips members. If Andrew had said to Morag privately that he appreciates Culips members, this would not be **a shout-out**. So if you are saying thanks to someone in private, it is not **a shout-out**.

Another important thing to note is that **a shout-out** is an informal term. While it's always nice to thank someone publically, it would be strange to call thanking someone publically **a shout-out** in very formal situations.

Here are a couple more examples with **a shout-out**.

Radio host: Well, Ramone, thanks for coming on our show today. Is there anything you'd like to say before we say goodbye?

Ramone: Yeah, I'd like to give **a shout-out** to my girlfriend. She has been a great source of support to me over the past few years. I don't know what I would do without her!

Talia: Did you enjoy Mark's show last night?

Will: I enjoyed it a lot! His band was amazing.

Talia: That's great! I'm glad you had fun.

Will: He also did a pretty cool thing at the end; he gave **a shout-out** to me!

Talia: Oh cool! I bet you felt really special.

Will: Yeah, it was so nice of him to thank me for helping him in front of the whole crowd.

Quiz

- 1. If a situation is same old, same old, it is unchanging and _____.**
 - a) exciting
 - b) boring
 - c) complex
 - d) frightening

- 2. If you're talking about a situation where the outcome is unknown because there are decisions that still need to be made, you can say the situation is _____.**
 - a) down in the dumps
 - b) up in the air
 - c) high in the sky
 - d) out in the field

- 3. What is a shout-out?**
 - a) a public greeting or thanks
 - b) an expression of frustration or anger
 - c) a private greeting of admiration
 - d) an expression of guilt or blame

- 4. Sammy's wife is pregnant. He is very stressed about what kind of father he will be. What would be an appropriate thing to say to Sammy?**
 - a) "Don't be up in the air."
 - b) "Don't be touch and go."
 - c) "Try to go with the flow."
 - d) "Try to give a shout-out."

- 5. True or false: If a situation is touch and go, it is unclear which of two positive outcomes will happen.**
 - a) true
 - b) false

Quiz Answers

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

Episode credits

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