

Catch Word #182 – I'm an open book

Episode description

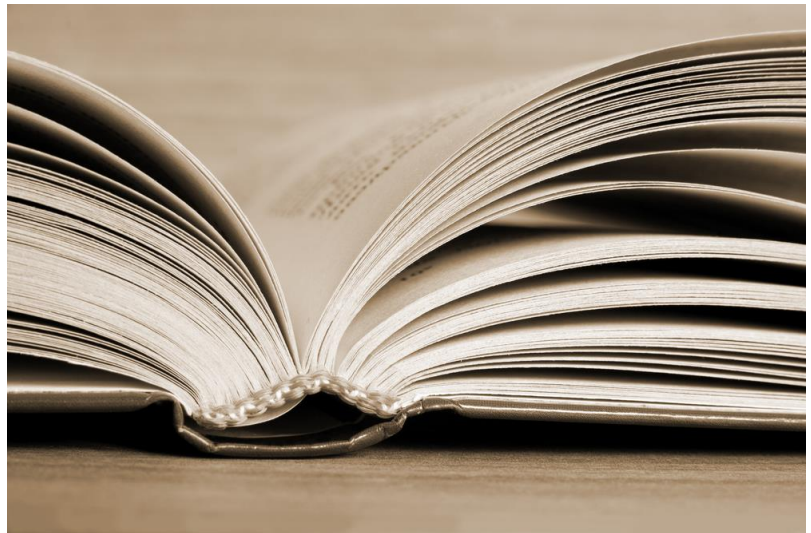
Understanding idiomatic expressions can be difficult, but Culips is here to help! In today's Catch Word episode, Andrew and Morag explain two useful expressions to describe honest people: to be an open book and to be a straight shooter.

Fun fact

Did you know that physical book sales rose in 2016 for the first time in 5 years? Despite the media saying that print books will soon be a thing of the past, it was actually e-book sales that went down in 2016.

Expressions included in the learning materials

- To be an open book
- To be a straight shooter
- To be out in the open
- Common knowledge
- The best of both worlds



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: Hello everybody. My name is Andrew.

Morag: And my name is Morag.

Andrew: And we are back with another Culips episode.

Announcer: If you want to learn English for everyday use, you've come to the right place. At Culips, we help make English understandable. By listening to our podcast, you can learn natural expressions and conversational structure. If you're interested in learning more about Culips and what we do, check us out on Face-book or our website, Culips.com. That's C-U-L-I-P-S.com. Thanks for listening. We hope you enjoy this episode.

Andrew: Hey Morag. How are you?

Morag: I'm doing pretty well, Andrew. How are you? What's new?

Andrew: Morag, I have to tell you about a really interesting documentary that I watched this week.

Morag: Hmm!

Andrew: Do you like documentaries?

Morag: I do really enjoy documentaries.

Andrew: This documentary was about an uncontacted tribe living in the rainforest of Brazil.

Morag: Whoa.

Andrew: And I know we have a lot of Brazilian listeners out there, and I'm sure they know much more about this situation than I do. But it totally blew my mind to watch this documentary about these people who live in the jungle very, very traditionally. They've never had contact with the outside world before.

And actually, in this documentary, you saw the uncontacted tribal people meeting Western civilization for the very first time.

Morag: That's crazy!

Andrew: It was really crazy. And one of my favourite parts of the documentary was when the tribal people first came into contact with the modern-day people, the modern Brazilians. They had a couple of linguists in the team, and the linguists didn't know how to communicate with the tribal people.

So what they did was they started singing to them. And when they started singing, the tribal people went a little bit crazy. They started yelling and looking agitated, and nobody knew what they were saying so they just sort of left it as is. And it took the linguist 2 years to translate and to work out what the tribal people were saying.

And it was really funny, the translation, when they figured it out. The tribal people were complaining about how horrible the linguists were at singing. They were like, "All these guys are the worst singers! Oh, they call this singing? Oh, my ears!"

And so this was really funny to me, you know. The linguists, they thought, "Oh, we're getting this great linguistic data." And the tribal people were just making an everyday complaint, so.

Morag: They're just saying like, "shut up," you know?

Andrew: Exactly. I guess at the end of the day, you know, even though modern people and these tribal people, we seem like we're very different. I think at the end of the day, we have still a lot in common. We all hate horrible singing.

Morag: Oh, that's great. Thanks for sharing that, Andrew.

Andrew: Hey, no problem. I think everybody should check this documentary out. It's on Netflix. But anyways, Morag, we're going to do a Catch Word episode today. And in a Catch Word episode, we take a close look at a couple of related idioms or slang expressions, and we define them and describe them, tell you how they can be used in a natural way.

And today, we will look at two expressions that are used to describe honest people.

Morag: That's right, Andrew. And just before we get started, I want to let you all know that the transcript and learning materials for this episode, and every other Culips episode, is available to download on our website for all Culips members.

Andrew: That's right. And we think that using the learning materials is the best way to study with us. So head on over to Culips.com to learn about becoming a member.

Andrew: OK, Morag. So two expressions that we can use to describe honest people, people who are honest. What is our first expression?

Morag: Well, Andrew, our first expression is **to be an open book, to be an open book**.

Andrew: **To be an open book**, OK.

Morag: Hmm.

Andrew: You can sort of get the visual of this one. Maybe a book on a desk and it's open in the middle, right? You can see inside the book.

Morag: Yes, you can see some of the content and some of the words.

Andrew: What does it mean then if a person **is an open book**?

Morag: Well, it means that you can see some of their personality, and some of the details about them and about their life.

Andrew: Mmhmm. So a person who **is an open book** is very straightforward about all of the details of their life. They don't really keep any secrets.

Morag: Mmhmm. They would always answer a question honestly. They don't try and hide anything.

Andrew: Yeah. And there are some interesting nuances with this expression. Because if you say, "My life **is an open book**," say Morag. "Ask me anything you want. My life **is an open book**."

This means that I will be very honest with you. Any question that you ask me, I am willing to share the answer with you. But if I were to say that somebody else's life **is an open book** ... Like maybe let's pick a really big celebrity. Let's say Brad Pitt.

Morag: Hmm.

Andrew: If I say Brad Pitt's life **is an open book**, this means that we know all the details about Brad Pitt's life. But this doesn't necessarily mean that he was honestly telling everybody the details. We just know the details because he's a celebrity.

Andrew: So when we use it to describe ourselves, it means we're honest. When we use it to describe other people, it might mean they're honest or it might mean that the details of their life are just known, that they're **out in the open**.

- Morag: When you use this phrase to describe yourself, it implies that you're happy to share. Whereas with another person, it is just that it is already shared.
- Andrew: Yes. It's out there, and people know it's **common knowledge**.
- Morag: **Common knowledge**, yeah.
- Andrew: Well, I think we should give some examples with this expression, **an open book**.

- Co-worker 1: Hey, do you mind if I ask you a personal question?
- Co-worker 2: No, not at all. **I'm an open book**. Ask whatever you like.
- Co-worker 1: OK, great. Well, I was just wondering if you had any tattoos? I have been thinking about getting one and was hoping that you could recommend an artist for me.
- Co-worker 2: Sorry, I actually don't have any tattoos. I'd love to help you out, but I don't think I can. Sorry.

- Andrew: In this example, we hear two co-workers having a conversation, and one of them asks a kind of awkward personal question. He asks his co-worker if she has any tattoos. Now, some people might be hesitant to answer a personal question like this, but not his co-worker. She says that her life **is an open book**.

This means that she doesn't mind sharing the details of her life. She has no secrets to keep and will answer any question about her life honestly, even questions about her personal life.

OK, Morag. Let's give one more example with this expression, **to be an open book**.

- Friend 1: Man, it must be tough to be a celebrity.
- Friend 2: Come on. Are you kidding? They're rich and famous. What's tough about that?
- Friend 1: Yeah, but what about all the tabloids and paparazzi following you around everywhere? I mean when you're a celebrity, your **life is an open book**.
- Friend 2: Mhmm, that's totally true. I guess you're right. That would be pretty difficult.

- Morag: In this example, two friends are talking about the lifestyles of celebrities. They both agree that being a celebrity must be pretty difficult because, when you are a celebrity, your life **is an open book**.
- So in other words, all of the details of your life are public information. You can't hide it. Whether you like it or not, personal and secret details of your life are available to everyone. You **are an open book**.
- Andrew: Yes. No secrets, no privacy.
- Morag: I know. I wouldn't like that at all.
- Andrew: I wouldn't like that at all, but I would like the money.
- Morag: Yeah, but sometimes you're a celebrity and not even rich, so.
- Andrew: You know, we have the expression **the best of both worlds**, but that is completely the opposite. It's the worst of both words. I don't think we can say that, but ...
- Morag: It's a twist. It's a twist.
- Andrew: It's a twist.
- Morag: Yeah.
- Andrew: OK, good. Well, let's move on to our second expression for this episode. And Morag, would you please introduce it for us?
- Morag: Absolutely. So our second expression about honest people is **to be a straight shooter, to be a straight shooter**. And **a straight shooter** is a very honest person, someone who tells it like it is.
- Andrew: Exactly. They are very direct. They get right to the point. They don't hold anything back. They're just straightforward, no nonsense. They will tell you the truth. They **are a straight shooter**.
- Morag: Mmhmm. They're blunt even.
- Andrew: Yeah. Now I'm curious, Morag. When you think of this expression, **to be a straight shooter**, do you get a visual image of something?
- Morag: I do. I have a little sort of cartoon guy shooting a shotgun.
- Andrew: Kind of like an Elmer Fudd character?
- Morag: Yeah, but in a suit.

- Andrew: OK.
- Morag: I imagine like a business ... Like a strange business character shooting a gun at someone, but not in a harmful way. A very literal image.
- Andrew: I also can picture somebody shooting a gun.
- Morag: Mmhmm.
- Andrew: And I think the reason why we call **a straight shooter** “**a straight shooter**” is because if you shoot a gun, the bullet will go straight towards the target. It doesn't take an indirect path, it just goes directly to the target. So when we think of somebody **being a straight shooter**, it's the words that they say. They go straight to the truth.
- Morag: Yeah.
- Andrew: Right? There's no runaround. There's no indirectness.
- Morag: That makes a lot of sense.
- Andrew: I like it. I like people who **are straight shooters**.
- Morag: Me too. It's a very valuable quality to know somebody that is just that honest, no matter what.
- Andrew: Definitely. OK, let's do a couple of dialogue examples with this expression, **to be a straight shooter**.

- Friend: Sarah, I can't wait for you meet my friend, Aaron. You guys are going to really hit it off.
- Sarah: Oh man, I can't wait either. You told me so many good things about him.
- Friend: Yeah, he's the best. He's a super nice guy and **a real straight shooter**, just like you. I think you'll find you have a lot in common.

- Morag: In this example, two friends are talking about a guy named Aaron. One of the friends is acting as matchmaker and is planning on setting Aaron up on a date with his friend, Sarah, who we heard.
- The matchmaker thinks that Sarah and Aaron would be a good match because they have lot in common, and **they're both straight shooters**. And so that means they're both honest and straightforward people, so they won't hesitate to tell the truth as they see it.
- Andrew: Morag, do you think two **straight shooters** make a good couple?

- Morag: I'm going to go with it depends, because ...
- Andrew: Aw, you took the easy way out.
- Morag: Yeah, I know. Um, if **they're straight shooters** and empathetic and communicative, then yes. If they're just really, really honest about sort of negative things, then no.
- Andrew: You raise a good point, actually. Because sometimes **straight shooters** can be a little insensitive.
- Morag: Mmhmm.
- Andrew: They might be too honest and risk hurting somebody's feelings.
- Morag: But you know, it's a very honest thing to go up to someone and say, like, "Hey Andrew, you look terrible today. What's going on?" You know, but that's not very nice, you know?
- Andrew: Right, yeah. Exactly.
- Morag: It's not the way to win friends and influence people.
- Andrew: It might be true, but it's still not the nicest thing to hear if you're on the receiving end. So I still think it's a good quality overall.
- Morag: Me too.
- Andrew: OK, let's get to this final example.

- Friend 1: Um, I'm really sorry I couldn't make it out to the book club last week. How'd it go?
- Friend 2: It was interesting as it always is. Jason had some pretty strong reactions to the book. Let's just say he didn't hesitate to share his opinion.
- Friend 1: He **is a straight shooter**, isn't he? Whether you agree with what he says or not, he'll tell you what he honestly thinks of just about anything.

- Andrew: In this example, two book club members are talking about the last book club meeting, and one of the other book club members, Jason. Now, Jason is very opinionated, and he's also **a straight shooter**. So at book club meetings, he always shares his opinion directly. If he hated the book, he won't hold back. He'll let everyone know. And it's the same if he loves a book. He will sing its praises.

Morag: Again, really lovely and helpful if they're open to what other people would think as well. But can be very annoying if **the straight shooters** are convinced that they know the truth.

Andrew: Yeah. It really helps when you agree with the opinion of **a straight shooter**.

Morag: Yeah. That's a good point.

Andrew: When you're on their side, these people are great. And when you disagree with them, they can be very frustrating.

Morag: Mmhmm.

Andrew: Morag, that brings us to the end of this Catch Word episode. And I want to thank everybody for listening. We really hope that you learned something new today. And if you have any comments, questions, or suggestions for future episodes, drop us a line.

The best way to contact us is through our Facebook page, which is facebook.com/culipspodcast. Or if you don't use Facebook, why don't you just send me an email? It's andrew@culips.com.

Morag: Or you can always reach us through our website, Culips.com.

Andrew: We will be back very soon with another Culips episode. So stay tuned.

Morag: Talk to you all soon. Goodbye!

Andrew: Bye.

Detailed Explanations

To be an open book

The first key expression in today's episode, **to be an open book**, has two related meanings.

If you are talking about yourself, **to be an open book** means to be honest and open to sharing personal and private details about your life. For example, if someone asks if they can ask you a personal question, and you are willing to answer their question, you could reply by saying, "**I'm an open book.**" In other words, you're saying that you're happy to honestly answer their personal question.

If you are talking about someone else, **to be an open book** means to have the details of someone's life, or their feelings and views, accessible and known to other people. So when you call someone **an open book**, it doesn't necessarily mean they're honest. It can also mean that their feelings and the facts about their life are **common knowledge**.

Here's one more example with **to be an open book**:

Stacey:	Hey Dan. I heard your sister is a nurse. I'm thinking of becoming a nurse too. Do you think she might be willing to go for coffee with me, so I can ask her about her work?
Dan:	Oh, I'm sure she would be happy to answer any questions you have. She's an open book.

To be a straight shooter

To be a straight shooter means to be upfront, truthful, or blunt. When someone **is a straight shooter**, they are honest and direct when communicating with other people.

So if you know someone who is always honest and clear about their feeling and opinions, you can call them **a straight shooter**.

Here's one more example with **to be a straight shooter**:

Kyle:	I'm glad you were in that meeting, Jessica. I was afraid to talk to our boss honestly about the office drama. I'm glad you explained everything to her so I didn't have to.
Jessica:	Well, I'm a straight shooter . I'm always honest about things like that.

To be out in the open

When something **is out in the open**, it is not a secret. So **to be out in the open** means to be known, to be exposed, or to be **common knowledge**.

For example, in this episode, Andrew says that when someone **is an open book**, the details of their life **are out in the open**. In other words, the details of their life are known to others, not kept hidden.

It's common to use **to be out in the open** when talking about sharing something that was once a secret. If you want to tell someone something that you've been hiding, you might begin the conversation by saying, "I want to get something **out in the open**." By beginning the conversation this way, you are saying that you want to reveal or make known something that was once a secret.

You can also use **out in the open** to mean clearly visible or physically uncovered. For example, if you keep your car outside, you could say, "My car is **out in the open**."

Here are a couple more examples with **to be out in the open**:

Hannah:	Hey, do you want to hear some juicy gossip?
Paul:	Sure!
Hannah:	You know Sean, right? Did you hear that he's dating Julia, the receptionist?
Paul:	Oh, I know that. They aren't keeping their relationship a secret. It's totally out in the open .

Georgia:	How's it going?
Steve:	Not too well. I'm under a lot of stress at work lately.
Georgia:	I'm sorry to hear that.
Steve:	And to make things worse, my dad is really sick, and I don't know what to do about it.
Georgia:	It might be a good idea to let your boss know about your family problems. It's usually best to get things like that out in the open so other people know why you might not be at your best.
Steve:	Thanks, I think that's good advice.

Common knowledge

If something is **common knowledge**, it is public knowledge, or information that many or most people know. In other words, **common knowledge** means widely known information.

There are many facts that are so well known that they are **common knowledge** among almost all people. For example, the fact that the Earth is round is something that you can expect a lot of people to know. Therefore, it is **common knowledge**.

However, among more specific groups of people, different things are considered **common knowledge**. Take for example the fact that the Montreal metro system shuts down at 1:00 a.m. each morning. Because most Montreal residents are aware of this fact, it is **common knowledge** to Montreal residents. However, because non-Montreal residents are unlikely to know this fact, it would not be **common knowledge** to non-Montreal residents.

So **common knowledge** refers to facts or information that many people know, and what is considered **common knowledge** can change and depend on the group of people.

Here are a couple more examples with **common knowledge**:

Kurt:	I just finished booking our airline tickets!
Noel:	What seats did you choose?
Kurt:	Right near the back of the plane.
Noel:	That's a terrible place to sit. Why would you choose those seats? It's common knowledge that the bathrooms are at the back of the plane!
Kurt:	Sorry!

Ben:	Man, I just couldn't get to sleep last night. Do you think it had something to do with the coffee I drank at 10:00 p.m.?
Una:	Absolutely! It's common knowledge that coffee has caffeine, and that caffeine keeps you up and disrupts sleep.
Ben:	I just didn't think it would have such a big effect!

The best of both worlds

The best of both worlds can be used to describe a situation where you can enjoy the advantages of two different things at the same time. In other words, **the best of both worlds** can be used to describe any situation where you experience the benefits of two things at once.

For example, in this episode, Andrew and Morag talk about how celebrities benefit from being wealthy, but suffer from a lack of privacy. So if a celebrity were able to keep their wealth but protect the details of their personal life, they would have **the best of both worlds**.

You can use **the best of both worlds** to describe any situation where two very different things can be enjoyed at once. For example, many people think that British Columbia, Canada has **the best of both worlds** geographically because you can be close to both the ocean and the mountains at the same time.

Here are a couple more examples with **the best of both worlds**:

Vera: I really can't decide what I want to do for my birthday.

Adrian: What are your options?

Vera: Well, I was thinking of either playing paintball or singing karaoke. I wish I could do both, but I only have one free evening around my birthday.

Adrian: Those are two very different choices! I don't think you'll be able to get **the best of both worlds** in this scenario. Combination paintball and karaoke places just don't exist!

Megan: How is your sister?

Samuel: Pretty good, although I'm a little jealous of her.

Megan: How come?

Samuel: I don't know how she managed it, but she talked her boss into letting her work remotely. They pay for her to come to town for meetings, but she can work at home. She lives in this amazing cabin in the wilderness, and still has the type of job that most people need to live in the city to do!

Megan: She's so lucky to have **the best of both worlds**!

Quiz

- 1. If a piece of information is out in the open, it is _____.**
 - a) known
 - b) secret
 - c) confusing
 - d) simple

- 2. When you enjoy the advantages of two different situations at the same time, you can say that you have _____.**
 - a) the best of a bad thing
 - b) the most out of it
 - c) the best of both worlds
 - d) the good in everyone

- 3. Common knowledge is information that is known to _____.**
 - a) most people
 - b) one person
 - c) some people
 - d) no one

- 4. Which of the following best describes a straight shooter?**
 - a) a shy and secretive person
 - b) a casual and gun-toting person
 - c) a loud and angry person
 - d) an honest and direct person

- 5. If someone doesn't mind talking about the details of their personal life, you could call them _____.**
 - a) a closed tome
 - b) a short story
 - c) an open book
 - d) an easy read

Quiz Answers

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

Episode credits

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