

Catch Word #193 – In a jiffy

Episode description

In this Catch Word episode, Andrew and Suzanne discuss two idiomatic expressions that you can use to talk about being speedy: in a jiffy/in a jiff and in a flash. Join them to learn how to make your English sound like a native speaker's!

Fun fact

A jiffy is used not only in English idioms, but also as a unit of time! A jiffy is an actual measurement of time used in many fields such as computer science, physics, and even animation!

Expressions included in the study guide

- In a jiffy/in a jiff
- In a flash
- To take 10
- To be useless at [something]
- To piggyback off of [something]





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 I'm Suzanne.

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

Suzanne: Woohoo.

Andrew: Hey, Suzanne.

Suzanne: Hey, Andrew. How are you?

Andrew: I'm doing pretty well. How about you?

Suzanne: I'm good, considering we are in the middle of a big complete kitchen renovation. And I am recording this podcast surrounded by boxes.

Andrew: Yeah, you've got the microphone kinda rigged up in an interesting way. How is your microphone set up right now?

Suzanne: Very carefully. It's sitting on top of a tarp, which is on top of my lap. So if you hear things kind of—I don't know—not so solid, it might be because of that.

Andrew: There might be a little jiggling noise in the background, but that's OK. We can deal with it while your house is under renovation.

Suzanne: I will definitely show you guys the final picture.

Andrew: Yeah, the before and after. And we also have an episode that, well, probably has been released already talking about the renovation. So make sure to listen to that as well.

Suzanne: Yeah

Andrew: But for now, Suzanne, we are going to do a Catch Word episode today. And Catch Word is the series where we teach you guys a lot of super useful and very helpful slang and idioms.

Suzanne: Yeah.



- Andrew: And maybe even a phrasal verb sometimes, who knows. But today, we have a couple of slang expressions that are used to talk about being speedy. Being quick.
- Suzanne: That's right, Andrew. And the first one is **in a jiffy** or **in a jiff**.
- Andrew: Mmhmm. So the first way that we can talk about being speedy, or being quick or being fast, is **in a jiffy**. And I think we should spell jiffy for everyone 'cause even I had to Google to make sure I was spelling it right.
- Suzanne: OK, tell us how it's spelt, and then I'd love to know how you thought it was spelled.
- Andrew: Yeah, well, I was right for the record. I was right.
- Suzanne: OK, good.
- Andrew: It is spelt J-I-F-F-Y, jiffy, or jiff, J-I-F-F. But in the back of my mind, I was like, "Is it a J or a G?" I wasn't sure.
- Suzanne: Mmhmm.
- Andrew: Yeah, because you know there's the whole controversy with the ...
- Suzanne: GIF and GIF.
- Andrew: GIF, GIF, right?
- Suzanne: Yes.
- Andrew: The internet image file format.
- Suzanne: Right.
- Andrew: Some people say it's GIF. Some people say it's GIF, and so I was like, "Well, if GIF can be spelled G-I-F, maybe jiffy is also G-I-F."
- Suzanne: That's true.
- Andrew: But no, no, no. It's J-I-F-F-Y, so **in a jiffy** or **in a jiff**. I guess maybe we'll start with this word, jiffy.
- Suzanne: Yeah.
- Andrew: What does jiffy mean, Suzanne?
- Suzanne: Well, a jiffy is a really quick or short amount of time.



Andrew: Mmhmm.

Suzanne: Like, “I’ll get to that **in a jiffy**.” So you’re doing it right away, within a short amount of time, very soon.

Andrew: Exactly. So if you tell somebody like, “Oh, I’ll do that **in a jiffy** or **in a jiff**,” then it means you’re gonna do it right away. You’re not going to wait before you do it. You’ll do it as soon as possible.

Suzanne: Yeah, ASAP.

Andrew: ASAP, exactly. And so when I was researching this online, this expression, I was really curious about this word, jiffy. Didn’t know how it was spelled, and I also didn’t know where it originated from because it’s kinda a unique word in English. There’s not a whole lot of words that sound like this, so I was like, “Hmm, where does this come from?” And the answer to that question is nobody knows. Nobody knows the origin of this expression. But some people were speculating online that it may have been an old-fashion slang term for lightning.

Suzanne: Oh.

Andrew: And I think that would make sense, right? Because lightning flashes extremely quickly.

Suzanne: Yeah.

Andrew: It’s just like boom. Just a quick flash. So yeah, that could make sense. That a jiffy used to be a lightning strike. It’s a really short, immediate occurrence. But yeah, nobody’s certain about that.

Suzanne: It is very strange to have two F’s in a word, right? F-F—it’s not something you see very often. Maybe there’s just, like—I don’t know—maybe two or three words that have a double F in there. So yeah it is kinda strange.

Andrew: Sue, I’m curious. We have two variations of this expression: **in a jiffy** and **in a jiff**. And personally, I’m partial to saying **in a jiff**. But what about you? Which one do you say?

Suzanne: Me too. I feel like jiffy is a little old-fashioned. So for me, I have always said **in a jiff**. Or yeah, a jiff or **in a jiff**. That’s more common to me.

Andrew: Yup, me as well. It just feels natural to say **in a jiff**. **In a jiffy**, you’re right, has like a 1950s feeling to it.

Suzanne: I feel like I could hear, “Why I’ll get to that **in a jiffy**,” you know?

Andrew: There you go.



- Suzanne: Like an old-fashioned radio voice or something.
- Andrew: Exactly. So yeah, maybe we'll go with **in a jiff** is the most common. And let's see. Do we have anything else to talk about with this expression? I guess we should mention that it's very casual, right? When I use it, I use it with my friends.
- Suzanne: Mmhmm.
- Andrew: But it would be weird, for example, if you went to a clinic and the receptionist at the clinic said, "Oh, just have a seat, and the doctor will be with you **in a jiffy**." You know, that would sound weird. It wouldn't be the right situation to use this expression.
- Suzanne: Yeah, and I mean ... I guess it depends on how well you know the receptionist or maybe her personality. Maybe she's a very bubbly kind of grandma type, and maybe she is friendly with everybody. But in a more formal setting—you know, if you're giving a presentation to a bunch of potential clients—it's maybe not something that you would add in there, unless it's a joke.
- Andrew: That's true. That's true. So guys, just be careful when you're using this one. Make sure you know your situation well before you use it. Not that you would offend anybody, but it might just sound unnatural in some more formal situations.
- Suzanne: So you guys can use it with us if you want. For sure.
- Andrew: Yeah, yeah, we'd love it if you did, actually. All right, Sue, I think it's time to give everyone a couple of examples using this expression **in a jiffy** or **in a jiff**.
- Suzanne: Great.

Colleague 1: Ugh, I need to take a break from looking at the computer screen. We've been working on this project for at least the last 6 hours straight. How about we **take ten** and grab a coffee?

Colleague 2: Great idea! You run ahead to the café, and I'll catch up **in a jiff**. I'm just going to make a phone call quickly.

Colleague 1: OK, no problem.

Andrew: In this example, two colleagues decide to take a break after working on a project for 6 hours straight. They go to grab a coffee, but one of them has to make a phone call first. So she tells her colleague just to go ahead to the



café, and she'll join him **in a jiff**. Let's listen to that part a couple more times.

Colleague 2: I'll catch up **in a jiff**. I'll catch up **in a jiff**.

Andrew: So **in a jiff** means in a very short time. So she'll meet him in just a little bit, as soon as she is done with her phone call.

Suzanne: Hopefully, that phone call is really quick.

Andrew: Or she'll miss out on the break.

Suzanne: I know. Come on!

Andrew: All right, Sue, one more example using this expression.

Suzanne: OK.

Friend 1: Hey, uh, Bob, are you almost here? The movie's gonna start in like 5 minutes.

Friend 2: Yeah, I'm almost there. I just got held up in traffic, but I'll be there **in a jiffy**.

Friend 1: OK, see you soon.

Suzanne: All right. Well, in this example, two friends are about to see a movie; however, one of the friends is running late. He isn't at the theatre yet, and he reassures his friend that he just got stuck in traffic, but he'll be there **in a jiffy**. So let's listen to that part of the conversation again.

Friend 2: I'll be there **in a jiffy**. I'll be there **in a jiffy**.

Suzanne: So when he said he'll be there **in a jiffy**, he means that he will arrive at the theatre very, very soon. So in a just a moment.

Andrew: He better hurry up, though. He only has 5 minutes before that show is going to start.

Suzanne: I know! I mean he probably already missed all of the previews.

Andrew: OK, Suzanne, we have one more expression to teach everybody today.

Suzanne: Yeah!

Andrew: And actually, it's really, really similar to **in a jiffy** or **in a jiff**. It's almost exactly the same in meaning, and it's **in a flash**. OK? **In a flash**.



- Suzanne: All right.
- Andrew: And so if something happens **in a flash**, you could imagine like a flash of light or flash of lightning, right? It's really quick. It's just a split second, just a moment.
- Suzanne: Yeah.
- Andrew: So when something occurs **in a flash**, it's just very quick.
- Suzanne: Kind of like the DC Comic character, right? The Flash.
- Andrew: That's right.
- Suzanne: Is it DC? Yeah, yes, he's in DC.
- Andrew: Yeah, you shouldn't ask me any superhero trivia. **I'm useless at that.**
- Suzanne: OK. Well, I'm pretty sure it's a DC character, and The Flash is very fast, like lightning.
- Andrew: Or you could even imagine a flash on a camera.
- Suzanne: Yeah.
- Andrew: When I was thinking about this expression, I thought of two fixed expressions, two fixed ways that we use this expression. And Sue, if you can think of any other ways, I'd love to hear it.
- Suzanne: OK.
- Andrew: But at least when I use this expression, this is what I say: I say, "I'll be back **in a flash**." So maybe I'm hanging out with my friend, and I just have to pop out for a minute, and I'll come back to where we are. So if I'm gonna leave and then come back quickly, I'll say, "I'll be back **in a flash**." This is really common.
- Suzanne: This one is very common.
- Andrew: And then I also say, "I'll be there **in a flash**." So I will arrive to where my friend is shortly, in a very short amount of time. So "I'll be there **in a flash**," and "I'll be there **in a jiffy**" are exactly the same in this context. So I think those are the two ways I use it.
- Suzanne: I think I have one more way that I've used it before, and it's usually when something happens really quickly, like when you have a memory of something that happens so quickly. Like, it happened **in a flash**.



Andrew: Mmhmm, that's true.

Suzanne: It's usually used to describe an incident that isn't always the most positive incident. It's usually an incident, or like a kinda accident or like you dropped something. Or you were carrying your project to school, and you tripped and it broke. Or you know, some kind of mistake that happens **in a flash**. It just ... Someone collides into you or you tripped, or you know, some kind of moment that you just couldn't control 'cause it happened so quickly.

Andrew: Absolutely. I think I hear this a lot on the TV and in movies. Like, if there's a car accident or something, and maybe the police officer is talking to the driver asking, "Oh, so what happened?" You know? And the driver will say, "I don't remember it. It just happened **in a flash!** It was so quick that I couldn't even process it."

Suzanne: Exactly, yes.

Andrew: Mmhmm, that's very good. So that actually is a very common way that we can also use **in a flash**—to talk about an event or an occurrence that just happened really, really quickly.

Suzanne: Yeah, just **to piggyback off of that**. I had a friend. After her wedding, I asked her, "So how was it? You planned this big day, and how was it? Was it fun?" And she's like, "Honestly, it went by **in a flash**. It happened so quickly, and I didn't really remember all the moments I wanted to." So, sometimes it's not always a negative thing. It could just be that it's, you know, an anticipated moment or something, or day. And it's so much fun that it goes by so quickly.

Andrew: Absolutely. Very good example.

Suzanne: Thanks, Andrew.

Andrew: Speaking of examples, Sue, I think we can give a couple of conversation examples with this expression, **in a flash**.

Suzanne: OK.

Friend 1: I'm feeling a little hungry. How about you?

Friend 2: Yeah, I could use a snack.

Friend 1: You know what? I'll whip down to the convenience store to grab something.

Friend 2: Do you want me to come with you?

Friend 1: Uh, nah! Don't worry about it. I'll be back **in a flash**.



Andrew: In this example, two friends are hanging out, and actually, they're feeling a little hungry. And they decide to grab some snacks at the convenience store. But instead of going to the store together, one of the friends says she'll just whip down to the store, grab some snacks, and be back **in a flash**. I like that she said "whip down." "I'll just whip down to the convenience store." This means go somewhere very quickly too, right? To whip down to the store, to whip down to the restaurant, for example. To go somewhere quickly. So she's going to whip down to the store, grab some snacks, and be back **in a flash**. So let's listen to that part one more time where she uses the expression back **in a flash**.

Friend 1: I'll be back **in a flash**. I'll be back **in flash**.

Andrew: I think you guys get the feeling by now. But when something happens **in a flash**, it means that it happens very quickly. So this friend won't be gone for long. She will be back with the snacks right away.

Suzanne: Yeah.

Andrew: What a good friend. Type of friend I like to have around.

Suzanne: Right? She's like, "I'll do it. No problem."

Andrew: Don't worry about it.

Suzanne: Nice.

Andrew: All right, let's do our final example for today's episode.

Suzanne: OK.

Co-worker: Have you seen Ryan around? I wanted to ask him something.

Secretary: He just stepped out of the office to grab a quick bite to eat. But he said he'd be back **in a flash**.

Co-worker: Ah, OK. I'll come by again in 30 minutes or so.

Suzanne: So in this example, a man is looking for his co-worker, Ryan. However, Ryan went out to buy some lunch. But before leaving, he told his secretary he'd be back in the office **in a flash**. So let's listen to that part again, where the secretary says he'll be back **in a flash**.

Secretary: He said he'd be back **in a flash**. He said he'd be back **in a flash**.



- Suzanne: When Ryan tells his secretary he'll be back **in a flash**, what he really means is he'll return to the 'office very quickly, so he's probably taking a short lunch.
- Andrew: Indeed. Hey, Sue, that brings us to the end of today's episode. I had a good time, you know. Such a good time that time just went by **in a flash** while we were recording here.
- Suzanne: I know! I didn't even notice it. It was like a jiff.
- Andrew: It was just a jiff. That's right. Thanks for listening everyone. If you want to get the most out of this Catch Word episode, I highly recommend downloading the learning materials. That includes a transcript, detailed vocabulary explanations and examples, and a quiz. And you can download it by visiting our website Culips.com—C-U-L-I-P-S.com—and signing up to become a Culips member. So head on over to the website to check out all of the membership options that we have available.
- Suzanne: Yeah, being a member is pretty cool, so check it out. And if you guys have any comments, or questions, or suggestions for future episodes, we'd love to hear it. So please drop us a line. And send us a message via our Facebook page at Facebook.com/CulipsPodcast, or email us directly at contact@Culips.com.
- Andrew: You can find more episodes of the show at our website, Culips.com, or wherever you get your podcasts. So definitely go and check older episodes as well.
- Suzanne: And we'll be back soon with another episode, so stay tuned.
- Andrew: Yeah, we'll talk to you soon everybody. Bye.
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Detailed Explanations

In a jiffy/in a jiff

The first key expression in this episode is **in a jiffy** or **in a jiff**. A jiffy or a jiff is an extremely short amount of time. So if something happens **in a jiffy** or **in a jiff**, it happens very quickly.

We use the expression **in a jiffy** or **in a jiff** when we want to say that doing something will not take long. For example, if you ask a co-worker to send you a file by email, and they respond by saying that they will send it **in a jiff**, they mean that they will send you the file as soon as possible.

So **in a jiffy** or **in a jiff** means in a short amount of time. In addition, as both Andrew and Suzanne mention in this episode, although a jiffy and a jiff have the same meaning, a jiff is used more often than a jiffy.

Here's one more example with **in a jiffy/in a jiff**:

Mom:	Hurry up and get ready! You're gonna be late for school.
Son:	OK! I just need to brush my teeth. I'll be there in a jiff .
Mom:	If you're not in the car in 2 minutes, I'm leaving without you!

In a flash

The second key expression in this episode is **in a flash**. If something happens very quickly or very suddenly, then it happens **in a flash**.

Imagine a stormy night and a strike of lightning across the sky. The lightning flashes, and lights up the sky and disappears within milliseconds. Similarly, if something **happens in a flash**, it happens quickly and seems to be over before it even begins.

Here's one more example with **in a flash**:

Kevin:	How was your vacation?
Stacy:	It was awesome! It went by too fast, though. The past 2 weeks just flew by in a flash .
Kevin:	That's always the case with vacations. Anyways, it's great to have you back in the office. We've missed you.

To take 10

Another expression in this episode is **to take 10**. If you **take 10**, you take a 10-minute break, either from working or studying. Similar expressions include take 5, take 15, take 30, and take lunch. These expressions mean to take a 5-minute, 15-minute, 30-minute, or lunch break, respectively.

In this episode, **to take 10** is used in one of the dialogue examples. Two classmates decide **to take 10** and grab some coffee. Here, **take 10** refers to taking a 10-minute break from studying.

To take 10 is a great expression to use when making a suggestion. Next time that you are working with some colleagues and it's time for a break, let them know you're ready for a break by saying, "Let's **take 10**."

Here are a couple more examples with **to take 10**:

Ralph:	You don't look so good. Are you feeling OK?
Carol:	Yeah, I'm fine. I just didn't sleep well last night.
Ralph:	Let's take 10 and get a coffee. I could use a break.
Carol:	Excellent idea. Coffee will help to wake me up a little bit.

Co-worker:	I'm going to take 10 and go outside to grab some air. If anyone calls, can you tell them I'll call them right back?
Secretary:	Sure, no problem at all.
Co-worker:	Thanks!

To be useless at [something]

The expression **to be useless at [something]** means to be unable to do something well. In other words, you can say you **are useless at something** if you are terrible at something. For example, if you do not know how to play basketball, or are an awful player, you **are useless at basketball**.

In this episode, Andrew mentions that he **is useless at superhero trivia**. This means that he can't answer questions about superheroes correctly because he doesn't know any facts or trivia about superheroes.

Often, the words completely, totally, pretty, and absolutely are used with the expression **to be useless at [something]** to emphasize how awful or terrible someone is at something. So if you are really, really bad at math, you can say, "I am **completely useless at math**."

Here are a couple more examples with **to be useless at [something]**:

Lucy: You did a terrible job at washing the dishes last night. Look at my plate. There's still food stuck on it!

Jim: Sorry about that. **I'm useless at cleaning up**.

Lucy: No, you're just lazy. Next time try a little harder.

Jack: I saw your new profile picture on Facebook. You look so silly.

Eric: I know. I tried to take a nice picture, but **I'm totally useless at taking selfies**.

Jack: I agree! You need to relax more. You look so tense and unnatural in that shot.

Eric: I'll keep that in mind for next time!

To piggyback off of [something]

If you **piggyback off of [something]**, you build on something that someone has done or said. So if someone has developed an idea or has already brought up a point in a conversation, you expand on their idea or the point they have already made.

In this episode, Andrew mentions how a car accident can happen **in a flash**. Suzanne then **piggybacks off of that** by giving another example of something that can happen **in a flash**—a bride's wedding day.

A piggyback means a ride on someone's back. Adults will often pick up children and carry them on their backs for fun. In such instances, the child is supported by the back of the adult. Similarly, if you **piggyback off of [something]**, you use an idea, thought, opinion, or example as a stepping stone to add your own ideas, thoughts, opinions, or examples to a conversation.

Using the expression **to piggyback off of [something]** is a great way to enter into a conversation. It is a polite expression because it shows that you are a good listener. Before jumping into a conversation, try using this expression to acknowledge what the other person has said and then build on that with what you want to say.

Here are a couple more examples with **to piggyback off of [something]**:

Boss:	I organized this meeting to discuss our sales strategy for the next quarter. Does anyone have any ideas?
Employee:	I'd like to piggyback off of what Lisa said during the last meeting . She suggested an expanded advertising campaign. I think that's a great idea, especially if we focus on internet advertising.
Boss:	I also like this idea. Let's get to work on planning an expanded internet campaign. Can you and Lisa work together on this? I'd like an outline of what this will look like and a budget on my desk by Friday afternoon.
Employee:	Of course, we'll get right to it.

Colin:	What did you think of today's history class?
Sam:	It was so interesting!
Colin:	To piggyback off what the professor said in class , I think not only economic factors, but also cultural factors led to the American Revolution.
Sam:	Absolutely. I totally agree with you.



Quiz

1. In the expression to take 10, what does 10 refer to?

- a) cookies
- b) people
- c) minutes
- d) breaks

2. Ralph listened to something that Betty said, and then he expanded on her point by giving his opinion. In other words, he _____.

- a) jumped off of what Betty said
- b) hopped off of what Betty said
- c) leap-frogged off of what Betty said
- d) piggybacked off of what Betty said

3. Which of the following is the best example of something that can happen in a flash?

- a) a car accident
- b) a boring lecture
- c) learning English
- d) doing the laundry

4. Cindy is a terrible dancer. In other words, Cindy is _____.

- a) useless in dancing
- b) useless at dancing
- c) useless with dancing
- d) useless for dancing

5. If you do something in a jiff, you do it _____.

- a) slowly
- b) quickly
- c) smoothly
- d) carefully



Quiz Answers

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

Episode credits

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