

## Catch Word #195 – At all (part 1)

### Episode description

At all looks like a simple expression but, in this Catch Word episode, Morag and Andrew find out just how versatile it really is.

### Fun fact

At one example in this episode, two friends talk about visas used to travel abroad. Did you know that Singapore issues the most powerful passport in the world? Singaporeans can visit 159 countries either visa-free or by purchasing a simple visa upon arrival.

### Expressions included in the study guide

- At all
- Pretty darn sure
- Peckish
- Shoot
- To be stoked
- Minuscule
- Conversation opener
- To be screwed
- To be spaced
- To cross one's mind



## 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 you're listening to Culips. Hey, Morag.

Morag: Hey, Andrew, how's it going?

Andrew: I'm doing really well. How are you?

Morag: I'm doing all right, all right, yeah.

Andrew: Morag, I wanna jump right into this episode because we got a lot of awesome content to share with all our listeners today. And today we're going to do a Catch Word episode. For those of you that don't know, Catch Word is our series where we teach you really interesting and useful English vocabulary, especially slang, idioms, phrasal verbs—this kind of vocabulary.

And today, actually, our episode is answering a question that we got in our email inbox from one of our listeners named Pedrosa. Pedrosa, thank you for your question and I apologize if I'm pronouncing your name incorrectly. I don't speak Spanish, so that's probably wrong, but your question is a good one and I'm thankful that you sent it to us. So, Pedrosa asked how to use the expression **at all** in a natural way. And I thought, OK, this question will be easy to answer. **At all** is a short, simple expression, right?

Morag: Ah, no.

Andrew: No! When I thought about it a little bit more, I realized that **at all** is actually quite a complicated expression, but it's very, very common. I think I use it every day probably and so it's a really good expression to know. And this is what we'll talk about in today's Catch Word episode.

Morag: Before we get started, we wanted to remind you that you can download the study guide on our website, Culips.com. And the study guide includes a transcript, detailed vocabulary explanations, real-world examples, and a quiz. It is by far the best way to study with us. So remember, guys, you can get that study guide on Culips.com

Andrew: Awesome. And because there's so much info in this episode, we really recommend that you do grab the study guide to accompany this episode. OK, Morag, let's get right into it and, actually, this is gonna be a two-part episode because there are so many different ways that we can use **at all**. I thought it would be best if we broke it down into the different ways we could use it. So, today we will talk about how to use **at all** in negative statements and in questions, and in the next Catch Word episode we're gonna look at how you can use **at all** in conditional if sentences and also in positive sentences. So there's many different ways we can use at all and that's what will be the topic for our next two episodes.

Today we're gonna look at the most common way to use **at all**, and this is in negative statements and in questions. So, Morag, I guess a good place to start would be with the general definition of **at all**. If we're making a negative statement, what does **at all** mean?

Morag: In a negative statement, **at all** means no. Or just never, not even a little bit, just none.

Andrew: Yeah, it's just an intensifier, actually. **At all** is a really great word to add to your English vocabulary to make it sound more polished, more advanced. Instead of saying a really basic word like very or really, if you use **at all** it gives you that little bit of nuance, it really takes your English to the next level. So this is why I think it's important to know how to use it correctly, and **at all** just adds emphasis. It makes sentences, questions stronger. It makes them sound stronger and, like you said, in a negative sentence **at all** can mean not even a little bit.

Morag: You know, Andrew, I'm **pretty darn sure** that the majority of the time that a native English speaker uses **at all**, it will be in a negative statement. Not **at all** being one of the more common phrasings of it.

Andrew: I think in my day-to-day life, the most frequent way I use **at all** is in the phrase no problem **at all**. Like somebody will thank me for something and I'll say no problem **at all**. Like today, for example, today one of my students asked to make an appointment with me to talk about an assignment and he said oh thanks for agreeing to meet with me and I replied, "Hey it's no problem **at all**, it's my job." Like don't even think to thank me about it, it's absolutely no problem, not even a little bit of a problem.

Morag: You know what's funny, I think my most used phrasing for **at all** would be not **at all**. When someone says, hey is this an issue? Is this a problem? Not **at all**, go ahead, so we both use negative statements that have positive connotations for this.

Andrew: It's funny actually, I didn't realize that but, yeah, when we say negative statement, it just means that there's negation in the sentence. It doesn't actually mean that the meaning is negative but, grammatically, there's a negative aspect to the sentence.

Morag: Yes, this is another—or a couple of other—fun examples of English speakers saying yes when they mean no and no when they mean yes.

Andrew: Right, which we've talked about in the past.

Morag: Go search through some of the old episodes for that one. I'm sure it'll come up again.

Andrew: OK, Morag, well, I think we can hop into some examples using **at all** with negative statements. And you guys can listen to the examples and get a better idea for how we can use **at all** to mean not even a little bit. OK, let's listen to the first example.

Coworker 1: Ah, I'm getting a little **peckish**, do you wanna grab some lunch soon?

Coworker 2: I'm actually not hungry **at all**. I had a big breakfast this morning, but I would be down to grab a coffee later this afternoon?

Coworker 1: OK, sure, sounds good.

Andrew: In this example, two coworkers are talking about lunch. One of the workers says she's not **at all** hungry. So, in this sentence when she uses **at all**, it's in a negative sentence right? Not hungry, so **at all** just adds emphasis. She's saying that she's not even a little bit, not even slightly hungry. OK? She's really not hungry. And just to recap, let's listen to her describe her hunger here again a couple of more times.

Coworker 2: I'm actually not hungry **at all**. I'm actually not hungry **at all**.

Andrew: OK, Morag, I think we can listen to a second example now.

Morag: All right.

Girlfriend: Don't forget we have tickets to see Guns N' Roses this weekend.

Boyfriend: Oh yeah, that's right, ah, **shoot**. Ah, I guess I'll have to cancel my plans with the guys.

Girlfriend: Wait, hold up, are you actually complaining about going to see Guns N' Roses?

Boyfriend: Ah nah, not **at all**. It's gonna be great, right?

Morag: In this example, a woman accuses her boyfriend of complaining about having to go to a Guns N' Roses concert, which should be a fun thing, right? The boyfriend defends himself by saying that he's not complaining **at all**. He's not complaining in the slightest, or in any way. Actually, he's excited for the concert. Let's listen to him mention how he's not complaining a couple more times.

Boyfriend: Ah nah, not **at all**. It's gonna be great, right? Ah nah, not **at all**. It's gonna be great, right?

Morag: So here **at all** is used to add emphasis to the fact that he is not complaining, not in any way.

Andrew: Not **at all**. He **is stoked** to go see Guns N' Roses.

Morag: So **stoked**.

Andrew: Actually, I would **be stoked** too. OK, so we looked at how to use **at all** in negative statements and we learned that **at all** in a negative statement means not even a little bit or not in any way. And when we use **at all** to ask a question, we can think of it as meaning even a little bit. OK? Even a little bit. Do you have a **minuscule** amount, yes?

Morag: Anything.

Andrew: Yeah.

Morag: Yeah.

Andrew: Morag, so let's compare two questions. Are you **at all** interested in going to the museum? And are you interested in going to the museum? They're slightly different, there's a little nuance.

Morag: Definitely.

Andrew: In your native English-speaker opinion, what's the difference between the two questions?

- Morag: I would say that are you interested in going to the museum is a more casual question, it's a lighter question. It's just, and you could have interest for any reason or in whatever degree.
- Andrew: Just a general interest,
- Morag: Just a very general interest. You know it's like do you, are you interested in going? And the answer to that could be really anything. I also feel like there's no particular time frame that I would expect someone to ask that question. It could be getting to know someone, seeing if they enjoy that sort of activity. Or, you know, actually actively making plans. However, the question, "Are you **at all** interested in going to the museum?" that is much more about assessing a smaller amount of interest. You know, like, you sort of already potentially know that someone is not incredibly interested and now you're, like, do you have any, like, it's more of a, "Please come with me."
- Andrew: You're trying to assess if the person you're asking the question to has even a little bit of interest going to the museum. If you ask this question, I feel it's, like, because you want to go to the museum, or you think it would be a good idea to take this person to the museum. And doing this is just a way to gauge the other person's interest in doing this activity that you think is a good idea.
- Morag: True, Andrew. I think the other aspect is this is not a **conversation opener**.
- Andrew: Totally, totally.
- Morag: You would have already talked about the general concept of either going places or a museum before asking this question. It's not a, it's not something to start out a topic with.
- Andrew: Absolutely, like, maybe you had talked about going to the museum before and then you remember like, oh, hey Morag and I talked about the museum last week, I'll see, you know, if she has any interest in going this week, yeah. Yeah, that's a good point.
- Morag: Yeah.

Andrew: OK, guys, so, to recap: Are you interested in going to the museum? It's kind of a general question, you're just asking if somebody has a general interest in doing this activity—visiting the museum. On the other hand, are you **at all** interested in going to the museum? You're wondering if that person has just a tiny bit, if they're even a little bit interested. OK, so it's a slight nuance to the meaning and the tone of the two questions.

Morag, I think that we should get to some examples and, yeah, let's do that right now.

Morag: All right.

Friend 1: Are you **at all** thinking about going to Jeff's party this weekend?

Friend 2: I thought about it but, you know what, I don't think I'm gonna go. What about you?

Friend 1: Yeah, I think I'm gonna go, I haven't seen Jeff in forever and it'll be fun.

Andrew: In this example, two friends are talking about a party that is hosted by Jeff. Now, one of the friends asks the other friend if he is **at all** thinking about going to the party. Let's hear her ask that question a couple more times.

Friend 1: Are you **at all** thinking about going to Jeff's party this weekend? Are you **at all** thinking about going to Jeff's party this weekend?

Andrew: OK, so when we use **at all** in a question, it means even a little bit. So pretty much she wants to know if her friend has any interest in going to the party—even a little bit of interest. She's curious if he's even in the slightest degree interested in going to the party.

OK, all right Morag, let's listen to the final example with **at all** used to ask a question.

Morag: Let's go.

Friend 1:	Oh man, I'm <b>screwed</b> .
Friend 2:	<b>Screwed</b> , why?
Friend 1:	I'm supposed to leave for my trip to China tomorrow and I just realized that I don't have a visa.
Friend 2:	Are you serious? You didn't consider the fact that you'd need a visa <b>at all</b> before you left on the trip?
Friend 1:	No, I totally <b>spaced</b> . It didn't <b>cross my mind at all</b> .

Morag: So in this example, a woman complains about her trip to China, that it's ruined because she forgot to get a travel visa. When her friend hears this, he kinda makes fun of her by asking if she even considered the fact that she would need a visa—pretty necessary item.

Andrew: I'd say.

Morag: So, yeah, let's listen to the friend ask that question a couple more times.

Friend 2:	You didn't consider the fact that you'd need a visa <b>at all</b> before you left on the trip? You didn't consider the fact that you'd need a visa <b>at all</b> before you left on the trip?
-----------	---

Morag: So here, the friend asks if she even slightly considered the fact that she would need a visa to travel to China. So when we use **at all** in a question like this, it means even a little bit or even slightly. So the friend just wants to know if she had thought about it **at all**, which she had not.

Andrew: She didn't think about the visa, and that's a problem. She's not gonna get into China without a visa. OK, Morag, that brings us to the end of today's show.

Just to recap, we looked at how to use **at all** when making a negative statement or asking a question. And when we use **at all** in a negative statement, **at all** means not even a little bit. And when we use **at all** to ask a question, **at all** means even a little bit, OK? And like I mentioned at the top of the show, in the next Catch Word episode we will be looking at this expression **at all** again, however, this time in conditional sentences and in positive statements. So, you're gonna wanna check in and listen to that episode when it's released. So stay tuned for that.





- Morag: If you have any questions, or comments, or suggestions for episodes just like this one, you can send us a message a few different ways. You can drop us a line via our Facebook page, [Facebook.com/CulipsPodcast](https://Facebook.com/CulipsPodcast), or you can email us directly at [contact@culips.com](mailto:contact@culips.com).
- Andrew: We'll be back soon guys, so stay tuned. Bye.
- Morag: Bye.
- Announcer: Do you like listening to Culips? If so, please show your support by leaving Culips a 5-star rating and a review on iTunes or Stitcher. This helps new listeners find the show. So don't delay, rate and view today.

## Detailed Explanations

### At all

Adverb

**At all** in a negative sentence means no, an absolute no. It intensifies the idea of no, making it clear that there is no possibility of a yes.

Pete:	So how was the movie?
Dane:	I didn't like it.
Pete:	What? But it's a great movie! You mean you didn't like it just a little bit?
Dane:	Nope, not <b>at all</b> . It was slow and boring, and I thought the action was predictable.
Pete:	Oh geez, sorry for the recommendation!

Nate:	Thank you so much for driving me to the airport.
Art:	Don't mention it.
Nate:	But really, thank you! You saved my life.
Art:	It was no problem <b>at all</b> . You're welcome. Have a safe trip!

### Pretty darn sure

Colloquial expression

In this episode, Morag offers an opinion by first saying she was **pretty darn sure**. That means that she is strongly certain of her opinion, although there is a very slight possibility that she could be wrong. The word darn is a euphemism for damn, which used to be a fairly strong expletive. You could say pretty damn sure, but that might sound too strong or even aggressive in many situations.

Heath: Do you remember where the record shop is?

Carla: Yeah, it's on St. James Street in Old Town.

Heath: Really? I don't remember seeing a record shop over there. Are you sure?

Carla: I'm **pretty darn sure**. I was there last month. So unless something happened in the meantime, it should still be there!

Heath: Right. Thanks.

Vicky: (on the phone) I'm looking out the window now but I can't see your car. Are you sure you got the correct address?

Norma: **Pretty darn sure!** I can see you in your apartment window.

Vicky: Wait, what colour is your car?

Norma: Dark blue.

Vicky: Oh, I thought it was light green for some reason. OK, I see you now.

## Peckish

Adjective

If you are **peckish**, that means you are somewhat hungry. As opposed to hungry, starving, and famished, feeling **peckish** is mild. You could eat, but it's not a strong urge. It often goes with **a little peckish**, **somewhat peckish**, or **a bit peckish**.

Kyla: How are you feeling? Wanna grab a bite?

Danny: Nah, I'm not very hungry.

Kyla: Oh, c'mon! It's on me. There's a great Mexican place around the corner.

Danny: Mexican, eh? Now that you mention it, I am a bit **peckish**. Let's do it!



Fred: Are you OK? You seem a bit down.

Greg: Kinda. I've been feeling a little sluggish this afternoon.

Fred: What did you eat for lunch?

Greg: Just soup.

Fred: Are you hungry? There are some energy bars in the break room. Try one.

Greg: I guess I am feeling a little **peckish**. Good idea.

## Shoot

### Interjection

**Shoot** is an interjection you can say when you are mildly annoyed or disappointed. It's a euphemism for the word shit, which is a largely unacceptable swear word to say with people you don't know well. In the sample dialogue, the boyfriend is somewhat annoyed at having to cancel his plans. In saying **shoot**, he's acknowledging that he isn't happy about it, but also that it's not a big problem.

Warren: That was a great meal. I love Indian food.

Frank: I know—the butter chicken here is the best.

Warren: Want to split the bill?

Frank: No way, I invited you! Just let me ... **Shoot!**

Warren: What's the problem?

Frank: I forgot my wallet at home. Um, do you mind picking up this one and I'll get you next time?

Gabby: It's nice to see you again. You look happy.

Anthea: I am! So what do you want to do this afternoon?

Gabby: There's a Gauguin exhibition downtown. I've been wanting to go for a while now.

Anthea: The Gauguin exhibition? That closed last weekend.

Gabby: Oh, **shoot!** I always wait too long.

## To be stoked

Informal verb

When you are really excited about something, you can say you are **stoked**. The expression comes from stoking a fire, which means to add fuel to a fire. **To be stoked** is fairly recent slang, coming from the surfer culture of the 1960s.

Karen: Are you excited about the concert tonight?

Fanny: Totally **stoked**. It's going to be off the charts!

Karen: I know—plus there's an after-party!

Fanny: Oh, maybe I shouldn't go to that. I end up doing too many crazy things!

Vance: Did you catch some waves yesterday?

Billy: I was going to. I waxed my surfboard and got everything ready. I looked outside and the weather was perfect. I **was so stoked**.

Vance: But?

Billy: My friend called me, said it was an emergency. He needed a ride to a job interview. Oh well, I can go out today.

## Minuscule

Adjective

In this episode, Andrew uses the phrase a **minuscule** amount. That means a tiny or very small amount. An increasingly popular way of spelling the word is **miniscule**, though **minuscule** is accepted as the proper way.

Yann:	Did you hear they caught the thief who stole from the store?
Fedor:	Really? How did they do that?
Yann:	They found a <b>minuscule</b> amount of his DNA on the cup he drank from.
Fedor:	Can they really trace someone's DNA from such a small amount?
Yann:	Apparently so.

Lara:	I'm worried about my stock portfolio. There's a storm coming on the East Coast and that always causes damage.
Gail:	Yeah, but the markets always bounce back. In the end, I think that storm will have a <b>minuscule</b> effect on your investments.
Lara:	You think so?
Gail:	Yeah. Your money will be fine. But the people affected the storm might have difficulty.

## Conversation opener

Noun

A **conversation opener** is a way to start a conversation with someone. Asking an open-ended question is a common way to begin a conversation. They are also called conversation starters or ice breakers. At seminars, at meeting places, on a date, and in language classes, **conversation openers** are a good way for people to speak with one another.

Opal: I'm teaching a class with new students tomorrow morning. Do you know any good **conversation openers** I can use?

Shelley: How about, "Do you like pizza?"

Opal: That's a yes or no question. It's better to have open-ended questions like, "If you could visit any country right now, where would you go?"

Shelley: That's a great question. I would go to Iceland! How about you?

Lyle: I'm trying to think which is more common: Do you use the term **conversation openers** or conversation starters?

Nate: Oh, the term for the questions you ask to start a conversation?

Lyle: Yeah.

Nate: I usually say ice breakers.

Lyle: That doesn't help me!

## To be screwed

Idiomatic verb

**To be screwed** means to be in trouble or to have difficulty. In the sample dialogue, one of the friends doesn't have the visa needed to enter China. Both a person and a situation can **be screwed**. This does have a sexual connotation, so beware who you use it with!

Beth: My boss just texted me. She said everyone has to come into the office tomorrow, even though it's Saturday.

Vicky: But we have plans to go camping!

Beth: I know, I know. It **screws** everything up!

Vicky: I guess we'll have to reschedule for next week, unless your boss does this again.



Bobby: I feel bad for my dad.

Finn: Why's that? What happened?

Bobby: A good friend of his **screwed** him out of a lot of money. Now he's having a bit of trouble paying his bills.

Finn: That sounds really bad. Is there any way to get his money back?

Bobby: We'll see, but I don't think so.

## To be spaced

Idiomatic verb

If you **space**, it means that your mind has wandered and that you are not concentrating on what is in front of you. It's the idea that your mind is literally in outer space. **To be spaced** is the short version of the more common **to be spaced out**.

Hanna: Andy! Andy!

Andy: What?

Hanna: Are you listening? I just asked you twice what you thought of this dress.

Andy: Really? Oh, sorry, I guess I **spaced** out there.

Hanna: That's all right. So?

Andy: Your dress is lovely.

George: And this is a picture of my good friend. We call him the space cadet.

Dana: Because he's always **spaced** out?

George: That's right. Nice guy, though. Super friendly. Just don't count on him to remember the appointment you made the day before.

Dana: Gotcha, I'll make sure to keep that in mind.





## To cross one's mind

Idiomatic phrase

If something **crosses your mind**, that thought occurred to you, often all of a sudden. The negative form is also common. If something has not **crossed your mind**, it means that you hadn't thought of it.

Jeff: What's this? You brought me cookies?

Carla: Not just any cookies. Double chocolate chunk cookies!

Jeff: That's so nice of you.

Carla: It **crossed my mind** that you might appreciate the finer things in life.

Jeff: Like chocolate chip cookies?

Carla: Yup.

Tara: Have you ever thought of applying for a manager's position?

Phil: You know what? The thought never **crossed my mind** until just now. That's a pretty good idea.

Tara: I think that's something that would be great for you and your career.

Phil: You're right. I'll look into it.

## Quiz

**1. If you are stoked about something, you are:**

- a) starting a fire
- b) putting on socks
- c) enthusiastic
- d) living in the past

**2. If something is minuscule, it is:**

- a) under 0 degree Celsius
- b) a very small amount
- c) a very small school
- d) unhappy

**3. Which of the following is NOT a synonym for the interjection shoot?**

- a) well done!
- b) damn!
- c) crap!
- d) darn!

**4. If something has not crossed your mind, it has:**

- a) not ridden a bicycle
- b) not occurred to you
- c) been unpleasant for you
- d) not happened in a long time

**5. I'm looking in the cupboard for a little snack because I am:**

- a) spaced
- b) screwed
- c) pretty darn sure
- d) peckish

## Writing or Discussions Questions

1. What are some of the things you would never do at all?
2. When you are peckish, what's your favourite food to eat?
3. What do you think is a good conversation opener?
4. Describe a time when you tried a conversation opener and it went incredibly well.
5. At what time of day do you space out the most?
6. What is something that you really get stoked about?



## Quiz Answers

1.c    2.b    3.a    4.b    5.d

### Episode credits

Hosts: Andrew Bates and Morag St. Clair

Music: *Something Elated* by Broke For Free

Episode preparation/research: Andrew Bates

Audio editor: Andrew Bates

Transcriptionist: Heather Bates

Study guide writer: Matty Warnock

English editor: Stephanie MacLean

Business manager: Tsuyoshi Kaneshima

Project manager: Jessica Cox

Image: Steven Pahel (Unsplash)