

Catch Word #202 – With a grain of salt

Episode description

Don't believe everything you hear! But you can trust our hosts Andrew and Jeremy when they talk about key expressions regarding skepticism. Believe me!

Fun fact

Skepticism is very important in Western philosophy. In fact, since 1992, there's been a popular US magazine called *Skeptic*.

Expressions included in the study guide

- Grain of salt
- Seeing is believing
- Mindset
- Deep question
- Face value
- Volatile
- First-hand experience



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: You're listening to the Culips English podcast. To download the study guide for this episode, which includes the transcript, detailed vocabulary explanations, real-world examples, and a quiz, visit our website, Culips.com, C-U-L-I-P-S.com.

Hello, everybody. My name is Andrew.

Jeremy: And I'm Jeremy.

Andrew: And you're listening to Culips. Hey, Jeremy, how are you?

Jeremy: I'm OK. I'm a little bit worn out today.

Andrew: Worn out, did you have a long day?

Jeremy: Yeah, I woke up really early and, yeah, just a slow day today.

Andrew: Slow day today. Jeremy, you're a new father, right?

Jeremy: Yes, that is true.

Andrew: And is it a difficult adjustment with your sleep schedule? Is your sleep schedule different now than it used to be when you weren't a daddy?

Jeremy: Well, definitely. At first it was very different and, as time goes on, it's getting more and more regular.

Andrew: That's good to hear.

Jeremy: Yeah, so it's not such a huge difference anymore. I am actually sleeping now but, yeah, it takes some time to adjust.

Andrew: I bet. I believe you.

Jeremy, today we are going to do a Catch Word episode, and for all of the listeners that don't know what Catch Word is, it is our vocabulary series. So in Catch Word episodes, we define and explain and give examples of how to use interesting and useful, key word, useful English expressions. And today we are going to talk about two expressions that you can use when you doubt something, or you don't believe the accuracy of something.

Andrew: But just before we get in to the main content for today's episode, I wanna remind everybody that we have a study guide that you can use to study along with us today. So if you visit our website, Culips.com, you'll be able to download that study guide. And we highly recommend doing this because, well, it's really great, I think. It includes the transcript for this episode, along with detailed vocabulary expressions, real-world examples, and also a quiz and questions and prompts that you can use for discussion or journaling. So, visit our website, Culips.com, again, to download that right now.

OK, Jeremy, so two expressions that we can use in situations of doubt, mistrust, or maybe skepticism.

Jeremy: Skepticism, I like that word.

Andrew: It's a big word, skepticism, and it is fun to say.

Jeremy: Yeah, maybe that's why. Skepticism.

Andrew: Actually, we should define skepticism, because maybe it's a new one for some of our listeners. It's a high-level vocabulary word. What does it mean, skepticism?

Jeremy: Well, -ism means it's a sort of way of thought, right? Like people say Buddhism is the way of thought of Buddhist people, right?

Andrew: Yup.

Jeremy: So -ism. Skept-, there is also skeptical, which is a different form of the same word. And to be skeptical means to look at something with doubt, to doubt something. So skepticism is the **mindset** of doubt, it's having doubt in your mind at all things. If someone gives you a fat-free cookie, someone who is skeptical, or you could say someone who is a skeptic, looks at the cookie and thinks, that's not really fat-free. I don't believe you, right? So that is skepticism.

Andrew: Yeah, and actually, you know, I think I am a bit of a skeptic. I think I am a pretty skeptical person. I like to investigate and get lots of information before I make my mind up about something and, yeah, sometimes this is great, sometimes it's bad.

Jeremy: So what is the difference to you between being curious and being skeptical?

Andrew: Oh, that's a **deep question**. If you're skeptical, you really just don't trust something, right? For example, these days on the internet, especially on the internet and internet communities, there are a ton of conspiracy theories going around. And people make these huge claims but with little evidence, so I'm very skeptical about these. I don't believe them.

- Andrew: But if you're curious, you just wanna find out more information about something. I'm curious about these conspiracy theories, I wanna know what the story is and what people think about them, but that doesn't mean I'm gonna believe it, right? Curiosity is just having an open mind, skepticism is not taking information at **face value** and needing deeper evidence before you can believe in something, in the truth of something.
- Jeremy: So just because someone says something is true, you don't believe it right away. You need some more information and you need to check your sources.
- Andrew: Exactly. And I think these days, you know, in the age of Trump and in the age of fake news, all the talk about fake news, these expressions are especially useful. The two expression that we're going to take a look at today because you know, they show, like, ah, I need some more information, I can't believe what I saw on Facebook without doing further research, right?
- Jeremy: Well, and for our listeners, I think it's good to know these expressions because, since there is so much fake information out there, so much fake news, they will see people commenting online using these expressions, likely. Or when they hear people talking about some fake news story, they might use one of these expressions that we're going to mention today.
- Andrew: Absolutely. So our first expression is a good one, and it is to take it with a **grain of salt** or to take it with a pinch of salt, OK? To take it with a **grain of salt** or to take it with a pinch of salt. Wow.
- Jeremy: What a strange expression.
- Andrew: Very strange expression. We should quickly mention here that to take it with a **grain of salt**, Jeremy, before we started recording, said that he uses this variation of the expression in the United States. And I mentioned that I used both, take it with a **grain of salt** or take it with a pinch of salt. From my Canadian English perspective, both are OK. And I believe in the UK, they prefer take it with a pinch of salt.
- Jeremy: I think so too.
- Andrew: Depending on where you are in the English-speaking world, you may have to adjust which expression you use. But they have the same meaning. OK, so very strange expression, to take it with grain, or take it with a pinch of salt. Now what does this mean, Jeremy?

- Jeremy: Well, I'm sure there's some story to this, but if someone were to give me a soup, right? Some soup, they made soup for me, and I don't trust that they made it to taste the way I like it. I like it a little bit saltier, so they gave me this soup, and usually people say try it first before you put salt in, right? The person who made the soup for you, they want you to try it first. But if I don't trust them, I just think, no, I don't think they put enough salt in here, maybe I would take a little pinch or not a grain, more than a grain, a pinch of salt and put it in the soup anyway. So that's what I think where it comes from.
- Andrew: Yeah, I actually don't know the origin of this expression. I couldn't find a satisfactory answer, but essentially the meaning of this expression is that you shouldn't assume that what you hear is true, OK? You shouldn't assume that what you hear from somebody or see on the news or see on TV is true. Can't accept something at **face value**, you need to take it with a **grain of salt**.
- Jeremy: So maybe it's, like, someone gives you the soup and says it's delicious, it's perfectly salted, and you take that with a **grain of salt** and say, OK, I'll put some salt on my soup anyway, I don't trust you, cook.
- Andrew: Yeah, if you're a big fan of salty foods, then people are like, oh, we put salt in there, and you're, like, no, no, no, I like it really salty.
- Jeremy: This actually happens a lot with my in-laws. My mother-in-law will make some soup dish or some noodle dish, and she will say try it first and my father-in-law will put soy sauce in it immediately. It's the same situation, I think, he doubts her, he doesn't trust her right away.
- Andrew: Probably the origin of this expression dates back to some marital conflict 1000 years ago, where some husband was saying that his wife's cooking is too bland.
- Jeremy: I bet, I bet that is true.
- Andrew: OK, so just to recap: when you take it with a **grain of salt** or take it with a pinch of salt, there's doubt, right? You're doubting the accuracy of the information that you are learning about and you don't trust it.
- Jeremy: And here when we say take it, I think this take is the way we say, like, take medicine, it kind of means to eat or to ingest, to put it inside you to make it a part of you. And sometimes we can put different words in here for it, so take this with a **grain of salt**, or take what he said with a **grain of salt**, take my opinion with a **grain of salt**, but the word that goes in here in place of it must have some element of opinion to it. It can't be just a normal object, take this book with a **grain of salt**, for example, that wouldn't work.

Andrew: That's a very good explanation. I think it's awkward if we insert a concrete noun, right? Into that something slot, the it slot, the object slot. That's a good example, take this book with a **grain of salt**, sounds unnatural to me. But take his opinion or take that viewpoint with a **grain of salt**, that's better. If you're using an abstract noun that relates to a way of thought, then, yeah, it's totally fine.

Jeremy: I agree.

Andrew: All right, let's listen to some examples with this expression to take it with a **grain of salt** or take it with a pinch of salt.

Coworker 1: I'd take this with a **grain of salt**, but I just heard a rumour that our department will be hiring a new designer later this month.

Coworker 2: Oh, I hope that's true. We're so far behind on our current project right now, an extra set of hands would be amazing.

Coworker 1: That is for sure. I guess we'll just wait and see.

Andrew: In this example, two coworkers discuss a rumour about a new designer that maybe joining their team. One of the coworkers warns that the rumour should be taken with a **grain of salt**. So, in other words, it's just a rumour and it shouldn't be fully believed. Coworkers should be cautious about assuming that the news is true, because it very well just might be a rumour.

Jeremy: So you know, Andrew, you should take this with a **grain of salt**, but I heard pigs can fly.

Andrew: Oh, really?

Jeremy: Don't believe me, man. Take it with a **grain of salt**.

Andrew: OK, OK, I'll wait and see if I see some pigs fly.

Jeremy: Hey, you never know.

Andrew: Then I'll believe you.

Jeremy: It's a crazy time we are in. All right, you wanna get into the next example?

Andrew: Yeah, let's listen to it now.

Friend 1: Dude, I heard the price of Bitcoin is going to be doubling soon. I think I'm gonna invest.

Friend 2: Hey, where did you hear that from? If I were you, I'd take that tip with a **grain of salt**. Cryptos are extremely **volatile** these days.

Friend 1: Yeah, I realize that, but I still wanna buy a bit and see what happens.

Friend 2: All right, good luck.

Jeremy: In this example, two friends talk about investing in Bitcoin. One friend warns that any investment tips about Bitcoin should be taken with a **grain of salt**. That is, everyone should be careful about investing in Bitcoin because it's really **volatile**, meaning the price goes up and down a lot. Andrew, do you say **volatile** or **volatile**?

Andrew: I say **volatile**, like the price of Bitcoin is really **volatile** these days. What about you?

Jeremy: I actually say it both ways. I say **volatile**, tile like that. But sometimes I say **volatile** when I say it fast, **volatile**. This chemical is really **volatile**. Maybe that's the incorrect pronunciation, but I think Americans do say that.

Andrew: Yeah, I personally always say **volatile**, I believe, with three syllables but, yeah, I think there's always room for variation in English. And because the speaking community is so huge, different people say different words different ways.

Jeremy: Yeah. So I guess for our listeners, it's probably important to know that this word could be pronounced in multiple ways.

Andrew: Yeah, exactly. So, **volatile** or **volatile**, both are acceptable.

Jeremy: All right, what's our next expression?

Andrew: OK, our next expression is **seeing is believing**. And there's also a related expression that's really similar, so we'll include it here as well. And that is I'll believe it when I see it. I'll believe it when I see it. And this is a very, very frequently used expression by people like me who are skeptical.

Jeremy: So what is something in your life that you didn't believe until you saw it?

Andrew: It's hard to think of an example, because most of the things I'm skeptical about, I think I'm skeptical about for good reason because I haven't seen it yet.

Jeremy: All right.

- Andrew: You know what I mean? Like, I haven't seen the claims that people make about certain things actually come true. For example, several years back, I believe, in the year 2012, the Mayan calendar came to an end, right? The Mayans way back in the day made this calendar and they had created the calendar, you know, to run for 1000 years. But I guess the calendar maker just got lazy after 1000 years, he's like, oh, that'll do for now. I don't need to finish the calendar, that's pretty good. And, yeah, it just stopped at the year 2012. So on the internet, I think mostly on the internet, and it started to be picked up as a meme, too, people made fun of this. They said the world is going to end in 2012 because the Mayan calendar ends in 2012. So this signifies the end of world. So some people said, ah, the worlds gonna end in 2012. And I said, yeah, I'll believe it when I see it, like, if the world actually ends then I'll believe you, but.
- Jeremy: Well, if the world ended, would you be there to believe it?
- Andrew: Well, maybe I'd see the giant comet falling from the sky.
- Jeremy: Boom.
- Andrew: My final thought, right? They were right, dead.
- Jeremy: I shouldn't have been so skeptical.
- Andrew: Exactly. So that's an example. But the comets haven't fallen from the sky yet, so I think my skepticism was appropriate.
- Jeremy: For now.
- Andrew: For now. Jeremy, can you think of an example where you said I'll believe it when I see it and then that thing came true?
- Jeremy: That's a hard question. Well, before our son was born, everyone told me that you'll never understand what it feels like to be a parent until you have one, until you have a child, until you become a parent. And at the time I thought, nah, I understand it—ignorantly. But when it happened and when our son was born and I saw how difficult my life was at the time, I changed my mind. And for me in that situation, **seeing was believing**.
- Andrew: **Seeing was believing**. Having that **first-hand experience** convinced you.
- Jeremy: Oh, this is why.
- Andrew: That's a great example. And you know, Jeremy, I think it's time for us to listen to some additional examples. So let's listen to the first example with the expression **seeing is believing**. We'll start with that one, **seeing is believing**, and let's listen to that example now.

Friend 1: This year the Knicks are definitely going to win the championships, man.

Friend 2: Ah, come on! You say that every year and they never do.

Friend 1: This year's different, dude! The lineup they have in place is unstoppable.

Friend 2: Ah, **seeing is believing**, man. But, yeah, I hope you're right.

Andrew: In this example, two friends talk about the New York Knicks basketball team. Now, one friend thinks they are definitely gonna win the championship. The other friend is skeptical about that and he says that **seeing is believing**. So this means he wants to wait and see the team start to go on a winning streak before he'll believe any hype about the Knicks taking the championship this year. He wants to see some evidence that will convince him that this claim could be true.

OK, let's listen to our final example for today's episode, and that is with the expression I'll believe it when I see it. Here we go.

Friend 1: I heard the proposal to build a new library downtown finally got approved by city hall.

Friend 2: As much as I'd love for that to be true, there is no way the city can afford to build a new library right now.

Friend 1: I'm telling you, the city is gonna follow through this time.

Friend 2: Yeah, well, I'll believe it when I see it.

Jeremy: In this example, a pair of friends talk about a library that may or may not be being built downtown. One friend thinks it will be built, but the other friend doesn't believe that city hall will actually follow through with the plan. And here, follow through means to finish. So he doesn't believe city hall will actually finish the plan of the building, he is slightly open-minded, though, and says he'll believe it when he sees it. So, essentially, he just needs more evidence to convince him that the new library will actually be built.

Andrew: Let's cross our fingers for the citizens of that town.

Jeremy: Yeah, libraries are great. I went to the library today.

Andrew: Oh yeah? Very nice.

Andrew: Jeremy, that about wraps it up for us today, I think. Thanks for listening, everyone, and if you have any comments or questions or suggestions for future episodes even, drop us a line. We love to hear from you. And the best way to do that is through email. Our address is contact@Culips.com. You can also contact us through our Facebook page, which is Facebook.com/CulipsPodcast.

Jeremy: If you'd like to hear more episodes from Culips, you can head over to Culips.com or find them wherever you get your podcasts.

Andrew: And, again, the study guide for this episode is online now and you can download it through our homepage, Culips.com. All right, guys, that is it for us, we will talk to you next time. Bye.

Jeremy: Bye for now.

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Detailed Explanations

Grain of salt Idiom

To take something with a **grain of salt** is to not fully believe in the truth of something.

Here's one more example with **grain of salt**:

Heather:	Honey, when you meet my family tonight, be careful around my brother.
Robert:	Your brother? Why?
Heather:	He's a bit of a joker. You have to take everything he says with a grain of salt .
Robert:	Oh, I've dealt with people like that before. Don't worry about me.

Seeing is believing Idiom

Seeing is believing is when you say you will only believe in something if you actually see it with your own eyes.

Here's one more example with **seeing is believing**:

Carl:	Hey, are you doing anything special on the weekend?
Mario:	I'm running another marathon.
Carl:	You run marathons? What kind of times do you run?
Mario:	Usually just under 3 hours.
Carl:	What? No, I don't believe you.
Mario:	Really! I do.
Carl:	Well, seeing is believing .
Mario:	Then here, check out these pictures on my phone. You see? Two hours and 53 minutes. What do you think about that?

Mindset

Noun

A **mindset** is the way you think about things. It could be a system of thinking, as in you can have a conservative **mindset**, or it could be a mood, as in you have a positive **mindset** today.

Here are a couple more examples with **mindset**:

Sally:	I think we should invest more money into our research and development department.
Fred:	Me too. The only problem is that the board of directors has a very proactive mindset . They want to put money into marketing.
Sally:	But that's not good for our company right now.
Fred:	Create a proposal defending your ideas. I'm sure they will listen to you.

Erik:	I really admire you.
Vicky:	Really? That's nice.
Erik:	I do. I like your goal-oriented mindset . You want to be good at something, and so you do everything you can to achieve that goal.
Vicky:	There's no trick to it. You can do that, too.

Deep question

Idiom

A **deep question** is a complex question that forces you to ponder and think deeply. Are you allergic to cheese? That is not a **deep question**. You either are or you aren't. What is the key to succeeding in life? That's a **deep question**! You can talk about that for days.

Here are a couple more examples with **deep question**:

Beth:	Hey, Astrid. You looked a little preoccupied.
Astrid:	Yeah, I just came back from philosophy class.
Beth:	Oh, I see.
Astrid:	Every time I go to this class, I'm left with all these deep questions and I can't think of anything else.
Beth:	I studied a bit of philosophy. Maybe we can talk.

Nancy:	Honey?
Cillian:	Yes?
Nancy:	I know it's late and you have to work early tomorrow, but I've been thinking. Wouldn't we be happier if we sold the house and moved to Spain?
Cillian:	I'm sorry, my dear, but I'm really too tired for deep questions . Can we talk about it tomorrow?

Face value

Noun

To take something at **face value** is to accept something without questioning it. **Face value** is only surface knowledge, and you don't go too deeply into the subject. A second meaning of **face value** is how much something is worth on its price tag; its true value might be quite different.

Here are a couple more examples with **face value**:

Myra:	I know the salesperson told you the dress looked nice, but don't take that at face value .
Winona:	What do you mean?
Myra:	People work on commission in this store. He might be saying that it looks nice because he only wants you to buy it.
Winona:	That's a mean thing to say! What do you think of the dress?
Myra:	Honestly, it's not really your style.

Caleb:	I really like these running shoes, but they're \$200.
George:	That's pretty expensive, but don't think of it like that.
Caleb:	How should I think about it?
George:	\$200 is only the face value . Once you buy these shoes, you'll want to go out jogging all the time. It will change your life. That's worth way more than \$200.
Caleb:	Good point. I'll buy them.

Volatile

Adjective

When something is **volatile**, it is subject to rapid changes. The value of money can be **volatile**, but something like a person's personality can be **volatile**, too.

Here are a couple more examples with **volatile**:

Peter: You look stressed. Are you all right?

Aida: I'm so stressed. It's my job.

Peter: Oh. Where do you work again?

Aida: I work for a financial firm.

Peter: Oh no, the markets are so **volatile** these days.

Aida: That's why I'm so stressed!

Georgina: I heard you broke up with Richard.

Fergie: Yeah. I couldn't take it anymore.

Georgina: How come?

Fergie: He was just a little too **volatile**. One day, he would talk about having children. The next, he would say he wants space and time to think. I can't deal with that right now.

First-hand experience

Idiom

To have **first-hand experience** is to have done something yourself. You can also say that you have experienced something first-hand.

Here are a couple more examples with **first-hand experience**:

Kyle:	What will you be doing next semester?
Holly:	I'm applying for teachers' college.
Kyle:	Cool! Do you have any first-hand experience with teaching?
Holly:	A little. I volunteered as a tutor for a couple of summers.
Kyle:	Teaching in a classroom is pretty different.
Holly:	I know. That's why I want to go to teachers' college and do a practicum.

Dave:	Why are you dressed like a carpenter?
Chris:	Haha! Because I'm actually building a wooden shed behind my house.
Dave:	That's nice. Do you mind if I join?
Chris:	Do you have any first-hand experience ?
Dave:	Um, not really. But my dad used to build a lot of things around the house. I'm sure I learned a lot just by watching.

Quiz

1. **Why does Jeremy say he's really tired at the opening of the episode?**
2. **Which is the best definition of skepticism?**
 - a) to believe in some things
 - b) to believe in everything
 - c) to question some things
 - d) to question everything
3. **True or false: The expression seeing is believing is the same as the expression I'll believe it when I see it.**
 - a) true
 - b) false
4. **Which expression is better: take it with a pinch of salt or take it with a grain of salt?**
 - a) take it with a pinch of salt
 - b) take it with a grain of salt
 - c) both are acceptable
5. **True or false: Volatile is the opposite of stable.**
 - a) true
 - b) false
6. **Which of the following is the best example of first-hand experience?**
 - a) Watching a movie about a painter
 - b) Volunteering at a medical camp
 - c) Registering for a university course
 - d) Reading a book about mountain climbing

Writing or Discussions Questions

1. Who do you know in your life who always says things you need to take with a grain of salt?
2. What makes you skeptical?
3. What is a situation where you went from disbelieving to believing because you saw it with your own eyes?
4. How much of the news do you believe is true?
5. What are some of the deep questions that you find yourself thinking about a lot?
6. What is a situation where first-hand experience completely changed your opinion on something?

Quiz Answers

1.He's a new father 2.d 3.a 4.c 5.a 6.b

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