

Catch Word #203 – In a pickle

Episode description

What does it mean to be in a pickle or in a jam? It sounds strange, but these are helpful expressions to use when you're in trouble. In this Catch Word episode, Andrew and Jeremy show you how and when to best use these idioms.

Fun fact

Pickling food has been done for almost 4500 years. It is great way of preserving food for long periods of time, especially over a cold winter or for sailors on long trips who don't have access to fresh food.

Expressions included in the study guide

- In a pickle
- In a jam
- Chunk
- To touch upon [something]
- To ace [something]
- Yuck



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.

Jeremy: Hey there, Andrew. How are you?

Andrew: I'm not too bad. How are you?

Jeremy: I'm doing really well today, actually.

Andrew: Good to hear.

Jeremy: Always good days.

Andrew: Keep it positive, right?

Jeremy: Yup, I try to.

Andrew: Jeremy, today we are going to do a Catch Word episode. And for all the listeners that don't know what that is, Catch Word is the series where we teach you how to use interesting and fun and natural English idioms and slang, phrasal verbs, vocabulary, all of these things. And today, we're going to teach you how to use two English expressions that you can use when you have a problem or when you're in trouble. So, actually, we're going to transition from that positive state of mind into a negative frame of mind. But just temporarily, OK?

Jeremy: Yeah, it's OK, I'm ready.

Andrew: OK, so just before we get started, we should tell everyone that to get the most out of this episode, you can actually study along with our study guide. And it contains a transcript, and a bunch of other awesome practice activities that we designed to help you guys get better at English. And it's available for download on our website, Culips.com. So when you get a free moment, please go check it out.

- Andrew: OK Jeremy, what is our first expression that we'll look at today that relates to having a problem or being in trouble?
- Jeremy: Our first expression today is **in a pickle**, as in I am **in a pickle**. Or she is **in a pickle**. Wow, what a strange expression.
- Andrew: It's funny when you think of it. Of course, a pickle is a type of well-pickled vegetable, right? Like a cucumber that's been soaked in vinegar for a long time and it tastes a little bit sour and very delicious, actually.
- Jeremy: Yeah, me too. I love pickles.
- Andrew: So if you're **in a pickle**, it actually means that you're in trouble.
- Jeremy: In trouble.
- Andrew: In trouble, and you find yourself in a difficult situation. So if you're **in a pickle**, you have a problem. You're in trouble, something's difficult and you actually don't know what to do. You need help, I think, if you're **in a pickle**.
- Jeremy: It makes me wonder if this actually means you are stuck in a jar, like a pickle?
- Andrew: Actually, you're on to something here. I did a little research into the origins of this expression, and what I learned was that in the UK, the word pickle actually refers to what we call, in North America, relish. And relish is a condiment that you would put maybe on a hot dog or a hamburger. Pickles that have been sliced up really small into little **chunks**.
- Jeremy: OK.
- Andrew: And so, some people think that the origin of this expression **in a pickle** means to be stuck in the pickle jar with all the little **chunks** of relish, and you're getting tossed around in the jar. And you're in a difficult situation. That's just a hypothesis.
- Jeremy: Well, it makes it easier to remember, for sure.
- Andrew: Jeremy, I wanted to ask you.
- Jeremy: Yes.
- Andrew: When you hear this expression, **in a pickle**, how does it sound to you? If you hear somebody say, like, oh man, I'm **in a pickle**, what's your impression? Is it a serious problem? A light problem?

- Jeremy: It can be, usually, not like a life or death situation. Someone who is **in a pickle** is stuck between two equally strong forces. For example, they have to clean their house because they have guests coming over, but they also have to go to the store to buy food for the guests. And they're not sure which one to do. So in that moment, they're **in a pickle**. I have to go here, I have to go there, no time. So, they are stuck **in a pickle**.
- Andrew: Stuck **in a pickle**, yeah. In a dilemma, right? There's two things you need to do, but you don't know how to do either of them. Or you can't do either of them. Yeah, this is a great example of being **in a pickle**.
- Jeremy: Does this expression sound a little old-fashioned to you?
- Andrew: Slightly old-fashioned. And that's a great point that I wanted **to touch upon**, is that I would not use this expression every day. But when I do use it, or when I hear my friends use it, it's usually a way to break the ice or to make light of a serious problem. Like, you're kind of laughing to keep yourself from crying, right? You're in a bad situation, you have a problem, but you recognize that the problem is serious and you laugh. Like, ah, man, I'm really **in a pickle**, my rent's due tomorrow, I have no money. What will I do? You know, this kind of situation.
- Jeremy: Yeah. When you don't know what to do, or when you can't do anything to resolve the situation immediately. You're stuck in jar. So you're stuck **in a pickle**.
- Andrew: I like that way of thinking about it. Yeah. I think we are ready to listen to a couple of examples using this expression, **in a pickle**. So let's do that now.
- Jeremy: Here we go.

- Friend 1: Hello?
- Friend 2: Hey, man, do you think you could give me a hand? I'm kind of **in a pickle**.
- Friend 1: Oh no, what's up?
- Friend 2: I just ran out of gas, actually. I'm on the side of the highway just outside of town. Could you possibly bring a jerry can of gas out to me?
- Friend 1: Yeah, I can do that. Give me 20 minutes, OK?
- Friend 2: Thanks so much. I owe you one.

Jeremy: In this example, a guy finds himself **in a pickle** when he runs out of gas on the side of the road and has to phone his friend to ask for help. Let's listen to the part of the example where he uses this expression a couple more times.

Friend 2: Do you think you could give me a hand? I'm kind of **in a pickle**.
Do you think you could give me a hand? I'm kind of **in a pickle**.

Jeremy: So he found himself **in a pickle** when he ran out of gas. And, again, **in a pickle** means in trouble or in a bad situation. By the way, Andrew, when this guy asks his friend for help, he asks him to bring him a jerry can of gas. What is a jerry can?

Andrew: A jerry can. Good question. A jerry can is one of those containers that many people keep in their garage and it's rectangular-shaped and red, usually.

Jeremy: Like a gas can?

Andrew: Yeah, it's used for storing gasoline, usually has a nozzle on the end, like a spout that you can put right into the gasoline tank. So it's just a portable gasoline jar.

Jeremy: I've never heard that before.

Andrew: I wonder if it's a Canadian term? It might be a Canadian term. Jerry can.

Jeremy: Jerry can. Yeah, Jerry is a name of a person, right? It's a person's name. Interesting.

Andrew: There's a band in Canada called The Jerry Cans, and they're actually from the very, very north of Canada in the territory of Nunavut. So if you ever wanna listen to some up-north music, check out a band called The Jerry Cans.

Jeremy: The Jerry Cans. Maybe I'll have to check that out.

Andrew: All right, Jeremy. Let's move on to one more example with **in a pickle**.

Jeremy: All right.

Coworker 1: Hey, it's late, aren't you gonna go home?

Coworker 2: No, I'll be working late tonight. I'm really **in a pickle**. Management wants my sales report by tomorrow morning, but I haven't even started yet.

Coworker 1: Is there anything I could do to help?

Coworker 2: No, I don't think so. Maybe just bring me a big coffee tomorrow morning, because I think I'm gonna need it.

Andrew: In this example, an office worker says he's **in a pickle** when he realizes that he's very far from finishing the work he needs to submit by tomorrow morning. Let's listen to that part of the example where we hear him describe his problem a couple more times.

Coworker 2: I'm really **in a pickle**. Management wants my sales report by tomorrow morning, but I haven't even started yet

I'm really **in a pickle**. Management wants my sales report by tomorrow morning, but I haven't even started yet

Andrew: OK, so he's in trouble, he's **in a pickle**, and he'll have to work all night if he wants to finish his report by the deadline. That sucks.

Jeremy: Yeah. That's a pickle, for sure.

Andrew: That's a pickle.

All right, Jeremy, our second expression today is actually very similar to the first one, both in form and in meaning. So what is it? What's our second expression?

Jeremy: Our second expression is **in a jam**.

Andrew: **In a jam**. J-A-M. **In a jam**.

Jeremy: Jam. That has a lot of meanings. Jam.

Andrew: Jam, yeah, it's a delicious spread for bread and muffins.

Jeremy: Sometimes it can mean a good song.

Andrew: Yeah, a jam.

Jeremy: Yeah, that's a good jam. That's my jam.

- Andrew: It can mean a problem, right? I'm **in a jam**, which is the context that we're looking at it today. Yeah, very versatile word, jam.
- Jeremy: But if you think about it, it's actually the same expression, because jam is something that is made in a jar with lots of fruit and sugars and other things, stuffed into a jar.
- Andrew: Yeah, that's right. That's cool that you looked at it from that approach, because I took a different approach when I was trying to understand this expression, but I think both are valid. I thought of it more as, like, a traffic jam or a paper jam in a photocopier. You know, in this situation you're stuck, there's no movement and this is problematic, right? If you wanna move but you're blocked, then this is a problem. And if you're **in a jam**, I think you're in trouble, you have a problem, but you don't really see an escape. You're stuck, you don't how you can solve the problem or free yourself from this troublesome situation.
- Jeremy: Sometimes when the door won't open, they say the door is jammed.
- Andrew: It's true.
- Jeremy: So, yeah, that makes perfect sense.
- Andrew: Yeah, or you can jam somebody's phone, right? Maybe the CIA will jam somebody's phone line so that they can't make any calls.
- Jeremy: They block it, or something like that.
- Andrew: I don't know about you, but I sense that **in a jam** is slightly more serious sounding than **in a pickle**. **In a pickle's** kind of cute, kind of light, but **in a jam**, I think I would use it with a more serious problem, a more serious situation.
- Jeremy: Yeah, I agree. I can imagine someone smiling when they say **in a pickle**. But they probably wouldn't be smiling if they say **in a jam**.
- Andrew: Yes, I agree that if you're **in a jam**, it's not really funny.
- Jeremy: Yeah.
- Andrew: All right, so let's take a listen to a couple of examples with **in a jam**, which once again means to be in trouble or have a big problem on your hands.

Student 1: How did you do on your paper for history class?

Student 2: Oh man, I actually failed.

Student 1: What, really? But you worked really hard on it, didn't you?

Student 2: I guess the professor just hates me.

Student 1: Man, I guess that really puts you **in a jam**, hey? If you wanna pass the class, you'll have **to ace the final**.

Student 2: Ugh, **yuck**. I don't even wanna think about it.

Andrew: In this example, a student is in big trouble, or he's **in a jam** when he realizes that he will probably fail his history class. And his friend, such a nice guy, his friend kindly reminds him of this fact, right? So let's listen to that part of the conversation again.

Student 1: Man, I guess that really puts you **in a jam**, hey?

Man, I guess that really puts you **in a jam**, hey?

Andrew: OK, the only way this student can pass the class and get out of being **in a jam** is **to ace the final, ace the final**. Jeremy, what does it mean **ace the final**?

Jeremy: I guess ace is like a perfect score, right? **To ace it, to ace something**.

Andrew: **To ace it**. Yeah, so, wow, that's a lot of pressure, having **to ace the final** to pass a class.

Jeremy: Yeah, my goodness. I don't like thinking about that, even now.

Andrew: Me neither. All right, let's listen to one more example for today.

Friend 1: My brother asked me for a loan again. Can you believe it?

Friend 2: I've lost track of how many times he's been **in a jam** and asked you to help him out.

Friend 1: I know, that guys a magnet for trouble.

Friend 2: So are you going to help him out?

Friend 1: I mean, do I have a choice? He's my brother! I just can't let him starve out in the cold.

- Jeremy: In this example, we heard a conversation about a guy who just can't seem to stay out of trouble. He's always **in a jam**, he always has financial difficulties, and has to ask his brother to borrow money. **In a jam** is a good expression to use when talking about debt and financial problems because unfortunately financial problems can be difficult to overcome and often feel hopeless. And when you are **in a jam**, you are in serious trouble and feel like there is no escape from your problem.
- Andrew: That is right, unfortunately, and, yeah, not being able to pay your bills, this is a jam. You're **in a jam** in this situation.
- Jeremy: Yeah, you're stuck in a difficult situation and you need help to get out of the jar of the jam.
- Andrew: Of the jam jar or of the pickle jar.
- Jeremy: The pickle jar. I imagine, like, a small person stuck in a jar. I think of this now.
- Andrew: It's a funny image, but I think it will help everybody remember these two expressions.
- Jeremy: Hopefully, yeah.
- Andrew: All right, so let's just recap what we talked about today. And so we learned two expressions today that you can use when you have a problem or when you're in trouble, or even when you're in deep, deep, deep trouble. And the first expression was to be **in a pickle**, and the second was to be **in a jam**.
- Guys, I have a great idea for you, a suggestion. Why don't you practice making some sentences using these two expressions, OK? So if you would like us here at Culips to take a look and correct them for you, just post them to our Facebook page and we will do that. So you can find our Facebook page at [Facebook.com/CulipsPodcast](https://www.facebook.com/CulipsPodcast), and we look forward to reading all of the creative and funny examples sentences that you think up and leave for us.
- That is it for today. Thank you for listening, everyone, and if you have any comments, questions, or suggestions for future episodes, please drop us a line: contact, C-O-N-T-A-C-T@culips.com, or you could send me a message directly. My email address is andrew@culips.com.
- Jeremy: You can find more episodes of the show at Culips.com or wherever you get your podcasts.
- Andrew: We will be back soon with another episode, so stay tuned.

Jeremy: Talk to you soon, bye.

Andrew: Goodbye.

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Detailed Explanations

In a pickle

Idiom

To be **in a pickle** is to be in a difficult situation.

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

Olivia:	Megan? Can you please do me a huge favour?
Megan:	Sure. What is it?
Olivia:	Can you please pick up my boys from school? I'm in traffic on the other side of town and I'm running late for a meeting. There's no way I can do everything at once.
Megan:	Sounds like you're really in a pickle . OK, no problem. Don't worry.
Olivia:	Thank you so much. I owe you.

In a jam

Idiom

Similar to being in a pickle, to be **in a jam** is to be in some kind of difficulty. As Andrew mentions in this episode, **in a jam** sounds slightly more serious than in a pickle, as the latter sounds a little more cute.

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

Sarah:	Jill, I need your opinion on something.
Jill:	Sure thing.
Sarah:	It's about my job. I'm in a bit of a jam . The money is good and the job is OK, but I can't stand my boss.
Jill:	That doesn't sound good.
Sarah:	This other company contacted me the other day with an offer. The salary is lower, but the working conditions are way better. What do you think?

Chunk

Noun

A **chunk** is a piece of something, usually large. You can have a **chunk** of chocolate, a **chunk** of granite, or a **chunk** of cheese. To compare, saying you have a piece of cheese implies that your cheese is smaller than a **chunk** of cheese.

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

Wendy:	We need to buy more milk.
Peter:	We have a carton of milk in the fridge.
Wendy:	I threw it out. It went bad.
Peter:	But we bought it 2 days ago.
Wendy:	I know, but it smelled sour and it had chunks in it. Is that something you would drink?
Peter:	We need to buy more milk.

Charles:	I'm heading over to my grandfather's house to do some repairs. Do you want to join me?
Stephen:	Your grandfather's? What's happened?
Charles:	During the storm last week, chunks of cement broke off his exterior wall.
Stephen:	That's too bad. Sure, I can help. I'm good with cement.

To touch upon [something]

Idiom

To touch upon [something] is to mention or speak of a particular topic. If you are talking about something briefly, you can say you want **to touch upon it**. For a longer, more complex talk, you would say you want to discuss something.

Here are a couple more examples with **to touch upon [something]**:

Tim:	How did you do on the test?
Luka:	Not bad. You?
Tim:	Poorly, I think. Did you see that question on the War of 1812? I don't remember hearing about that in class.
Luka:	The professor just touched upon it briefly. But he did say you should read about it for homework.
Tim:	Oh no. I guess I wasn't paying attention.

Boss:	That resolves item 7 on our list for today's meeting. Before we leave, is there anything anyone would like to add?
Staffer:	Yes, actually. There's a little matter I would like to touch upon .
Boss:	OK, let's hear it.
Staffer:	We're always having problems with the vending machine on the second floor. Can we please look into changing service companies?
Boss:	Sure. I'll look into that.

To ace [something]

Verb

To ace [something] is to do exceptionally well at something. You can **ace** an exam by getting a perfect score. You can **ace** a job interview.

Here are a couple more examples with **to ace [something]**:

William:	When is our midterm exam?
Quentin:	On Thursday.
William:	Did you study?
Quentin:	No. I probably won't, either. It's geography—I always ace those exams without studying.
William:	I wish I had that skill.

Fred:	How did your job interview go this morning?
Erika:	I think I aced it.
Fred:	Really? That's great to hear. What makes you think that?
Erika:	They immediately offered me the job.
Fred:	You're right. It sounds like you did very well at the interview.

Yuck

Exclamation, informal

Yuck is something you say to express disgust toward something. If there is a food you don't like or a cringe-worthy situation, you can say **yuck**. You can also turn the word into an adjective and say that something is yucky.

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

Pat:	Do you like anchovies?
Dave:	Anchovies? Those little salted fish? No way.
Pat:	Me neither. But my girlfriend loves them. And every time she orders us a pizza, she asks for extra anchovies!
Dave:	Yuck! That's disgusting. Does she know you don't like them?
Pat:	Of course. I always pick them out of my slices with my fingers and give them to her. But then my fingers smell like anchovies!

Beth:	I need your opinion on this outfit. What do you think?
Carl:	So-so.
Beth:	OK. What if I change my blue shirt for this yellow one?
Carl:	Yuck!
Beth:	Really? It's that bad?
Carl:	Yup. Stick to the blue one. It's all right.

Quiz

1. What is a jerry can?

- a) a band from Northern Canada
- b) a man's name
- c) a container for gasoline
- d) a can for pickles

2. What is NOT an example of a condiment?

- a) carrots
- b) relish
- c) mustard
- d) chili sauce

3. True or false: The expression in a jam literally means you are stuck and cannot move.

- a) true
- b) false

4. Which of the following is a good example of touching upon something?

- a) mentioning a minor detail
- b) writing a 10-page report
- c) discussing soccer tactics all afternoon
- d) taking a course in mathematics

5. True or false: In a pickle is a good expression to use when you are in great difficulty, as in a life or death situation.

- a) true
- b) false

Writing or Discussions Questions

1. When have you found yourself in a pickle?
2. Who can you always depend on to get you out of a pickle?
3. In your native language, is there is an expression that is similar to in a pickle or in a jam? Does it involve vegetables or fruits?
4. Have you ever run out of gas while driving? What happened?
5. What is a school subject that you know you can ace every time?

Quiz Answers

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

Episode credits

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