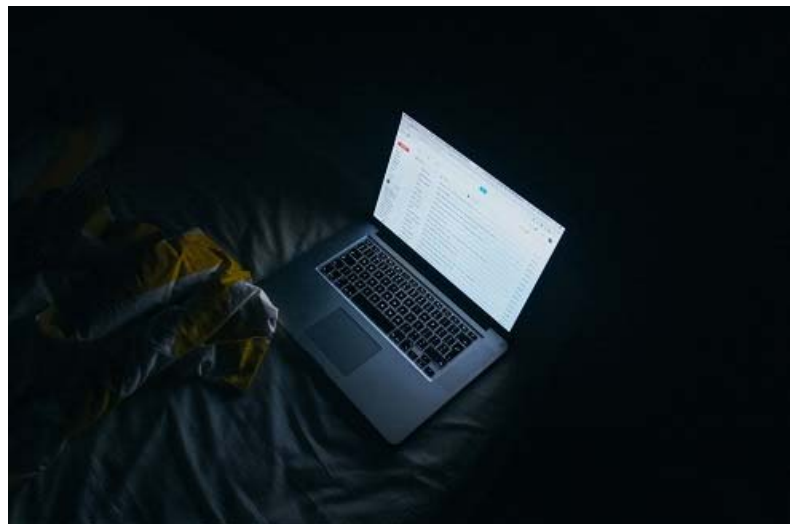# Catch Word #210 – Troll

Episode description

Trolling has become a big problem online. In this Catch Word episode, Andrew and Jeremy explore the words you can use when talking about online trolling.

Fun fact

In the United Kingdom, some people have been sent to prison for trolling. They were imprisoned for online harassment.

Expressions included in the study guide

➢ To troll

➢ To flame

➢ Avatar

➢ First Nations

➢ Invite

➢ Toxic

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 there, Jeremy.

Jeremy: Hey, Andrew, how are you?

Andrew: I'm doing all right. How about yourself?

Jeremy: I'm OK, but something a little annoying happened to me recently.

Andrew: Oh no, what was that?

Jeremy: I got **trolled**.

Andrew: You got **trolled**?

Jeremy: Yeah, online.

Andrew: **Trolled** online. Oh, what happened?

Jeremy: I made a YouTube video and someone wrote some very nasty comments.

Andrew: YouTube comments can be vicious, very, very vicious.

Jeremy: Yes, that is true, and it kind of hurt my feelings, to be honest.

Andrew: Yeah, I could see that. I think people don't realize sometimes when they leave insulting comments or offensive comments that there's a real person on the other end that has to read these and deal with the consequences of the comment.

Jeremy:	Yeah, people think that the internet is anonymous, but that's not the case, right?
Andrew:	Not at all, yeah. Well, Jeremy, I'm sorry to hear that you had this negative experience online, but in a way I'm happy because you brought up a really great expression just a second ago, **troll**. And, actually, today that is one of the expressions we're going to cover in this Catch Word episode.
	And for all of our listeners that don't know, Catch Word is our series where we explain and teach everyone how to use interesting and useful English vocabulary. So today, we're gonna look at a couple of words that we can use to describe comment sections online, so a comment section on YouTube or, you know, a news website or Reddit, social media, anything like this, Facebook, exactly.
	But just before we get started, I wanna let everyone know that there is a study guide for this episode and it's available for download to all Culips members. It includes things like a transcript and examples of some of the interesting and useful vocabulary that you'll hear today. So if you wanna download the study guide or even just find out more details about what's included in the study guide, just visit our website, which is www.Culips.com.
	OK, let's get into it. So, as we mentioned, our first expression for today is t**o troll**, **to troll**.
Jeremy:	So this is a verb.
Andrew:	Exactly, a verb. **To troll**. This is the action. The activity is **to troll**.
Jeremy:	And, in the introduction of this episode, I said I got **trolled**, meaning it happened to me.
Andrew:	Right.
Jeremy:	Right?
Andrew:	Right, yes, somebody else **trolled** and you were the victim of that **trolling**. And so the spelling of this word is T-R-O-L-L. T-R-O-L-L. I have a feeling that some of our listeners are not going to like this word, pronunciation-wise, because of the R and the L sound inside of it. It can be difficult, **troll**. OK, so **to troll** means to trick someone or prank someone or even attack or insult someone online. And I think the origin of this word **to troll** comes from mythology. In Western culture, we have the idea of a mythological creature called a troll.

Jeremy: Yeah, so in old stories, there are many old stories in Western culture, European culture that talk about a little monster that lives under a bridge. Sort of like a goblin, or a gnome is another word, similar.

Andrew: Usually they're depicted wearing no shirt, just a pair of shorts, and they're kind of overweight and ugly and they have strange hair.

Jeremy: Actually, it's like Shrek.

Andrew: Yeah, kind of like Shrek.

Jeremy: Shrek is an ogre or we could say he's like a troll. And in mythology, the troll lives under a bridge and whenever someone tries to cross the bridge he jumps up and he asks them a question, like a riddle, a difficult question that is almost impossible to answer. And he says, "If you get the question right, you can cross the bridge. If you get the question wrong, you cannot cross the bridge." So that's kind of what a troll is.

Andrew: So we have this idea of the troll in Western culture but, recently, we've been using this word to talk about online activities. It's a little bit of a leap, there's not a direct connection, but we can kind of imagine how it jumped from this idea of a monster living under a bridge who treats people badly to someone online who also treats people badly.

Jeremy: Yeah, I think it's because they are hidden. The troll is hiding under the bridge and online people are hiding behind their username, right?

Andrew: That's right, their **avatar**.

Jeremy: Exactly, so maybe that's how it started to be used.

Andrew: And recently, I would say in the last couple of years, I've even started to hear the word troll be used to talk about offline situations, especially with pranking. So if somebody pranks, which means to play a bad joke on someone, to trick someone, someone pranks someone offline, we could even say that that person got **trolled**.

Jeremy: It's sort of similar to a bully in school, right?

Andrew: Yeah.

Jeremy: Or maybe verbal bullying.

Andrew: Right.

Jeremy: Treating people badly, just saying negative things without any good reason. A person can be a troll, so it can be used as a noun or as a verb.

Andrew: That's right.

Jeremy: Like, I got **trolled**. He is **trolling** someone, like that as a verb.

Andrew: Yes, exactly. And I've seen online some people use the expression, don't feed the trolls. Please don't feed the trolls. And we even have the expression troll bait, as well. You can bait trolls. B-A-I-T. And we use this word bait to talk about, you know, when you're hunting or fishing and you use something to attract an animal, like maybe you put a worm on the end of your fishing hook to attract fish to bite your hook. This is called bait. So troll bait is when you post something that is maybe controversial to try and attract this type of negative energy in an online forum or an online comment section.

Jeremy: Before we started recording, you mentioned a very good example of **trolling** with a news agency in Canada, is that right?

Andrew: Oh yeah, so this is a story that actually upset me quite a bit. I thought it was really sad, but the CBC in Canada, the Canadian public broadcaster, they recently had to ban all of the comments from news stories that are related to **First Nations** or indigenous issues in Canada because the comments section was so hateful. There were so many trolls that no reasonable discussion could take place. So because of this, the CBC just banned all the comments. There's, like, no comments on those types of news stories anymore.

Jeremy: That's sad.

Andrew: And I think here, you know even when people would reply, "Don't feed the trolls," don't encourage the trolls, it still happens. There was no stopping it.

Jeremy: Yeah, I think they are everywhere.

Andrew: And I think most trolls are, like, 13-year-olds.

Jeremy: Or probably much older, one of the two.

Andrew: Yeah. 13 or much older. I don't understand it, frankly. You know, there's so many beautiful and interesting things you can do in life. To take time out of your day to write something negative online, I absolutely can't comprehend it. But maybe that's just me, I don't know.

Jeremy: Yeah, I always thought they might be people who are treated badly in their daily life and they need a place to be mean to others. To let that negative energy out. That's what my mom told me, at least, when I was young, when people were mean to me.

Andrew: Yeah, it's really sad, but it's a reality of the internet. So we have to live with it.

Jeremy: But for all of our listeners, it's just important to remember what this word means and how to use it. So maybe we can listen to some examples.

Andrew: That's a great idea. Let's do that right now.

Friend 1:   I've got a date on Friday.

Friend 2:   Oh, awesome, who's it with?

Friend 1:   A girl who that I met online.

Friend 2:   Are you sure it's a real person and not just some troll?

Friend 1:   Yeah, I'm pretty sure. Don't worry about it.

Friend 2:   OK, just checking. Have fun.

Andrew: In this example, a guy tells his friend that he has a date on Friday night. Because he met the date online, his friend is concerned that it might not be a real woman, but instead be a troll, so that is a guy who is pretending to be a woman online, or maybe a 12-year-old kid that is pretending to be an adult woman, right? This is an example of a troll, too. However, in the example, the friend is confident that it is a real person, a real woman, and not a troll. So he tells his friend, yeah, don't worry, it's OK. And, yeah, I've heard of this situation happening before, especially with scams. You know, there's a lot of trolls that do email scams.

Jeremy: Yes, that's an example of **trolling**. Someone you can't see who's pretending to be someone they're not, or playing some prank, attacking people, doing something negative, mischievous online.

Andrew: Exactly. OK, so, Jeremy, let's listen to one more example with this expression, **troll**.

Coworker 1:	Did you watch the news last night?
Coworker 2:	No, I didn't.
Coworker 1:	Oh, man, you missed it, then. They got totally **trolled**.
Coworker 2:	Really? What happened?
Coworker 1:	They interviewed someone who was pretending to be a government official, but in reality he was just a troll. Anyways, this guy said some really crazy things and the reporter's reaction was priceless, dude.
Coworker 2:	That sounds so funny. I'm gonna have to try and find that clip on YouTube.

Jeremy:	In this example, two coworkers talk about last night's news broadcast. In one of the news reports, a reporter mistakenly interviewed a troll who was pretending to be a government official. When the reporter realized who she was interviewing was not a real official, but just a troll, she panicked. So here we see an example of a real-life troll, as opposed to an internet troll. A real-life troll is someone who pranks other people in real life, usually pretending to be someone they're not, right?
Andrew:	Exactly. I've actually seen some videos like this on YouTube, where a reporter interviews somebody. You know, often on the street a reporter will just interview random people to get some opinions, and I've seen these situations become disasters for the reporter when they realize I shouldn't have talked to this person, they're a troll, and it's live news. And they don't know what to do, they panic.
Jeremy:	You gotta check their ID or something.
Andrew:	Yeah.
Jeremy:	Check their identification.
Andrew:	But I do have to be honest, it sometimes makes for some funny videos.
Jeremy:	Yes, yes, I agree.
Andrew:	All right, we're going to look at one final expression today, and it's related to **trolling**. And it is another verb, actually. It's **to flame**. **To flame**.
Jeremy:	**To flame**.

Andrew: Yes. And **to flame** is kind of a more extreme version of **trolling**. So when you're **trolling**, you're really almost trying to trap somebody or trick somebody, but when you **flame** online, when you **flame** somebody, you're straight up insulting somebody. You're just going to the most offensive language and comment you can leave right away.

Jeremy: Well, so the word flame, originally, can be a verb or a noun. And the noun form means sort of like one part of a fire. So if you see a big fire, one of the little pieces of it, kinda like one leaf on a tree, would be a flame.

Andrew: That's right.

Jeremy: So a candle is a single flame, but a bonfire is many flames, right? And **to flame** is that, kind of, in a verb form is for something to flicker or grow or get big like a fire does. So this one is probably used for more negative postings because fire is painful and usually it is related to anger.

Andrew: Indeed. I don't play games online, but I know that you can use this expression when you're playing games and you're chatting with other people, right? When somebody is really offending you or telling you, "You suck, you're gonna lose," you know? Insulting you.

Jeremy: Usually with much worse words than that.

Andrew: With a little more interesting verbiage, yes.

Jeremy: Colourful.

Andrew: Colourful, exactly, then this is also **flaming**, right? You can **flame** someone while you're playing an online game as well, a video game.

Jeremy: Now, is this a little bit of an older expression, or is this still commonly used?

Andrew: I think it is still commonly used, but you're right that I think the young kids these days don't use **to flame** as much. I'm in my mid-30s and I think people my age use this still frequently to talk about this type of situation. But, I don't even know what, you know, 13-year-olds are using these days. It's probably not **to flame**, but I think it's still OK to use, everybody will understand the meaning.

Jeremy: Yeah, for our listeners, our intention is to teach you these expressions so you know them. You don't necessarily have to use them, but, when you see it somewhere or when you hear someone use this term, we hope that you understand what they mean.

Andrew: Exactly, exactly. All right, Jeremy, I think we are ready for a couple of examples using **to flame**.

Friend 1:	Did you get the **invite** to my party?
Friend 2:	What party?
Friend 1:	Oh, I'm having a party on Friday night. I sent out an **invite** through Facebook.
Friend 2:	Oh, dude, I quit using Facebook a couple months ago.
Friend 1:	Really?
Friend 2:	Yeah, I got tired of all the fighting and **flaming** I kept reading. So I just stopped using it.

Andrew: In this example, a guy tells his friend that he quit using Facebook because he was tired of seeing all the fighting and **flaming** online every day. So remember that **flaming** is what we call negative or insulting comments that are made online. So because there were so many **toxic** comments on Facebook, this guy just decided to quit using it. To be honest, I don't blame him, I've had this thought in my head before, too. This is just a negative space sometimes, Facebook.

Jeremy: Yeah and, like a fire, one thing that is burning can light something else on fire. So the fire can move from one person to another. So I could be having a good day and be in a good mood and then I read someone's negative comment and then I start making negative comments, someone else makes negative comments, and then, like a big forest fire, it spreads and everyone gets hurt.

Andrew: Exactly, yes. All right, let's listen to one more example using **to flame**.

Friend 1:	One of my favourite newspapers just disabled the comment section on their website.
Friend 2:	Oh, really? Why'd they that?
Friend 1:	Instead of having a serious discussion, most threads just turned into a big **flame** war.
Friend 2:	I guess by disabling the comments, the newspaper is trying to keep things civil.
Friend 1:	Yeah I think that's the goal.

Jeremy:	In this example, two friends talk about a newspaper that shut down the comment section of its website. Now no one can post comments on news stories. They did this because all of the discussion just turned into a gigantic **flame** war. A **flame** war is an online discussion where the only things that are posted are negative or insulting comments.
Andrew:	OK, this is very similar to the example that we talked about earlier with the CBC in Canada, right? I wonder if that was the inspiration for this example.
Jeremy:	We'll have to discuss that with the writer of this episode.
Andrew:	Well, Jeremy, I think that about brings us to the end for today. But, before we go, I do wanna thank everyone for listening, as always. And if you have any comments, questions, or suggestions for us and future episodes, feel free to drop us a line. You can send us a message through Facebook, if you're brave enough to use Facebook, or you can email us directly. Our address is contact@Culips.com.
Jeremy:	You can find more episodes of the show at Culips.com or wherever you get your podcasts.
Andrew:	We'll be back soon with another episode, and we'll talk to you then. Goodbye, everyone.
Jeremy:	Bye, everyone.

Detailed Explanations

To troll Verb

To troll means to trick or even to attack someone online. The verb is usually used when talking about online actions, but you can also use it when talking about real-life behaviour. Troll can also be a noun, meaning someone who acts in this way.

Here's one more example with **to troll**:

Carl:	Did you read this comment at the bottom of our page?
Rebecca:	No. Give me a second.
Carl:	Do you think he's serious about our website being terrible?
Rebecca:	Actually, that just looks like someone **trolling** us. Don't pay him any attention.

To flame
Verb

To flame is to insult someone online in order to make them angry. **To flame** is to offend the other person instead of using good arguments in a debate.

Here's one more example with **to flame**:

Jill:	I haven't seen you posting on the message boards lately.
Alison:	I know. I stopped visiting them.
Jill:	Why's that?
Alison:	Too frustrating. Everyone is trying **to flame** harder than everyone else. It's become really mean.
Jill:	I understand.

Avatar
Noun

An **avatar** is a graphic representation of a person online. It can be a picture or an animated character. The representation does not need to be an accurate picture of you. You can also say your screen name or your user handle is your **avatar**. The popular movie Avatar took its name from this idea.

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

Pat:	Someone just challenged me to a FIFA Online match. Do you know Ricky_1348?
Will:	Never heard of him. What does his **avatar** look like?
Pat:	This.
Will:	Oh, I've seen this before! Watch out for this guy! He's really good.

Fran:	Did you finish setting up your profile on the website?
Tyler:	Not yet. I'm still trying to pick an **avatar**.
Fran:	You've been doing that for 2 hours!
Tyler:	Picking an **avatar** is the most important thing you can do in this game. Give me a minute.

First Nations
Proper noun

First Nations is a term used to describe the aboriginal peoples of Canada. They are so named because they came to the Americas before the Europeans. They are also distinct from the Inuit and the Métis, who are a mixture of aboriginals and Europeans. **First Nations** is plural because pre-European America was composed of hundreds of different nations. The term Indian is no longer used and is considered offensive by many. In the United States, the equivalent term is Native American.

Here are a couple more examples with **First Nations**:

Lewis:	And where are you from, Barry?
Barry:	I'm from Kahnawake.
Lewis:	Are you Indian?
Barry:	Actually, we don't use that word anymore.
Lewis:	Oh, I'm so sorry. What is the preferred term?
Barry:	The official term is **First Nations**. But, really, just call me Barry.

Rachel:	What do you do, Mary?
Mary:	I'm a lawyer.
Rachel:	In what field?
Mary:	I represent **First Nations** peoples and defend their rights.
Rachel:	Oh, that's great. They often don't get a fair chance in our judicial system.

Invite
Noun

Invite as a noun is the abbreviation of invitation. **Invite** as a noun is pronounced slightly differently than invite as a verb. When saying **invite** as a noun, you should stress the first syllable. When saying invite as a verb, stress the second.

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

Tara:	Honey, did you book the hall for the party yet?
Richard:	I did that yesterday.
Tara:	Great! Then we should print out the **invites** and send them out.
Richard:	I did that this morning.
Tara:	Wow! Good job!

Nicky:	Did you hear Veronica is getting married?
Olivia:	No, I didn't. How did you find out?
Nicky:	She sent me an **invite**. You didn't get one?
Olivia:	Did she send it by mail?
Nicky:	No. It was in my email inbox when I woke up.
Olivia:	Oh. I didn't check my email today.

Toxic
Adjective

When something is **toxic**, it is bad for your health. Pollution, poison, and radiation are all **toxic**. In this episode, Andrew says there are many **toxic** comments on the internet. He means that those comments are also bad for you and your mental well-being.

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

Heather:	I heard Gregory broke up with his girlfriend.
Fanny:	Yeah, he did.
Heather:	Did he tell you why?
Fanny:	Yes. He realized he was in a **toxic** relationship. He thought she was influencing him in a bad way.
Heather:	I see. I sensed that, too.

Clark:	I found these mushrooms in the forest. Aren't they cute?
Tilly:	Kind of.
Clark:	I wonder what they taste like.
Tilly:	Don't eat those!
Clark:	Why not?
Tilly:	They could be **toxic**. You don't know what kind of mushrooms they are.

Quiz

1. True or false? Invite as a noun is interchangeable with invitation.

a) true
b) false

2. What is an example of something that is NOT toxic?

a) smog
b) mathematics
c) alcohol
d) car exhaust

3. Which came first, the film Avatar or the internet usage of avatars?

a) the film
b) the internet usage

4. Which of the following is NOT closely associated with mythological trolls?

a) ogres
b) goblins
c) avatars
d) gnomes

5. Is trolling ever a positive thing?

a) yes
b) no

Writing and Discussion Questions

1. How do you react to online trolling? Do you think it is better to engage with trolls or to simply ignore them?

2. Do you think online trolling is a big problem? Explain.

3. A lot of online trolling distributes fake news. In your opinion, what is the best way to fight this?

4. Do you think that websites should monitor and edit the messages in their comment sections? Why or why not?

5. Do you think online trolling and cyberbullying should be illegal? Are they worse than in-person bullying?

6. How do you express the concept of trolling in your native language?

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Quiz Answers

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

Episode credits	
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