

Catch Word #219 – Cut corners

Episode description

In this Catch Word episode, Andrew and Kassy teach you some useful expressions to use to talk about doing the bare minimum amount of work. After listening to this episode, you'll know how to gossip about your lazy coworkers using completely natural English!

Fun fact

According to a study done by Peter Jonason, a professor at Western Sydney University, men are more likely to cut corners at work than women. The study found that people with certain personality traits, such as low levels of honesty and high levels of manipulation, self-interest, and pride, were more likely to cut corners at work. Lastly, the study suggested that those diagnosed as psychopaths were likely to make more money than their peers who do not cut corners.

Expressions included in the study guide

- To cut corners
- Bare minimum
- Surefire
- To smell [something]
- To half-ass [something]
- To blow it



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, everyone. My name is Andrew.

Kassy: And I'm Kassy.

Andrew: And you are listening to Culips.

Hello, Kassy.

Kassy: Hey, Andrew.

Andrew: How are you?

Kassy: I'm fantastic.

Andrew: Fantastic. I like that enthusiasm.

Kassy: Yeah, I'm pumped. We've been recording a lot of episodes today.

Andrew: Yeah, this is a marathon session because, Kassy, you and I live in different cities. So when we get together, we like to try and record a bunch of episodes at one time because it's just the best way to do it. So I think this is number six for us, or number five?

Kassy: Five.

Andrew: Number five, fifth one in a row.

Kassy: Yeah.

Andrew: But you're still motivated and still have lots of energy, so this is great.

Andrew: And, everyone, today we have a Catch Word episode for you. This is the Culips vocabulary series where we teach you some natural English expressions that will really make your vocabulary pop, will really make you sound like an English native speaker. These are good expressions to know for speaking, but also for listening, too, because you are definitely going to encounter these expressions when you are watching English movies or talking with English native speakers. So they're really important to know.

And our theme for today is doing the **bare minimum**. OK. So, Kassy, you can think about, like, when you have a job to do right? And you do the opposite of doing a good job, you do a terrible job. You do just enough so that it will pass.

Kassy: So that I don't get fired.

Andrew: Yeah, if you're thinking about, like, working at an office, right? Maybe you have to do a report and you do just the **bare minimum**. If you did any worse, you'd be fired, but it's just good enough so that you won't get fired. This type of situation. We have some expressions for this, and that's what we're gonna talk about today.

But, guys, just before we get into it, I wanna remind you about the study guide for this episode. It is awesome and it's jam-packed with lots of things that will help you with your English studies, and we suggest following along with it while you are listening here today. So if you would like to download it, just visit Culips.com and you can find out how to do that.

Kassy, could you introduce the first expression today? What is the first expression?

Kassy: The first expression is to **cut corners**.

Andrew: To **cut corners**. So this is a verb, right? To **cut corners**, we use this expression as a verb. And when I hear **cut corners**, I think of somebody taking a shortcut.

Kassy: Yeah.

Andrew: Is that what comes to your mind, too?

Kassy: Yes, that's exactly what comes to my mind.

Andrew: So when you **cut corners**, it means just like kind of what we were discussing, right? It means doing the **bare minimum**. It means not doing a job or a task or anything really well, it just means putting in low effort, right? It's like when you're doing something with low energy and low effort and the result is not good. The result is just so-so, very so-so.

Kassy: Yeah, it looks shabby. It looks only half done. It looks like you either didn't have enough time to finish it or you're just too lazy.

Andrew: Right. And, you know, we both work as teachers, and I think I use this expression a lot with my students when they hand in reports or something. They'll be like, "Andrew, why did I get a D on this assignment?" And I'm like, "Well, you **cut corners**, you did none of the things that I asked you to do, you just put this report together really quickly and it shows. It looks shabby, it looks terrible, and I can't give you an F because you did do it, but you didn't do it the way that I asked you to do it. You didn't follow the instructions, so this is why you got the **bare minimum** passing grade, a D."

Kassy: Yeah.

Andrew: You **cut corners**.

Kassy: I actually really kind of hate **cutting corners**. I do it myself sometimes, as well, but it's almost, like, why bother trying at all when you're not giving your best.

Andrew: Yeah. I was talking to one of my friends this week and, at work, she was interviewing people for an opening at her office. And she was laughing about one of the candidates that came in for the interview, because it was very, very evident that she **cut corners** when she was preparing for the interview. She didn't know anything about the company, she didn't even really know about what job she was applying for.

Kassy: "Hello, I'm so excited to work for Walmart." "Uh, you know this is Kmart, correct?"

Andrew: Yeah, exactly that kind of situation. So this is another way that people can **cut corners** is when preparing for a job interview. And I wouldn't recommend this, it's a **surefire way** to not get hired.

Kassy: Exactly.

Andrew: How about we listen to a couple of examples with this expression, **to cut corners**?

Kassy: Sounds good.

Friend 1: I can't get this stupid blender to work. It keeps getting stuck when I try to make a shake.

Friend 2: That's because you bought the cheapest one in the store. The company obviously **cut some corners** when making it. How else do you think they could sell it for so cheap?

Friend 1: Lesson learned, I guess. I'll have to get a better one next time.

Andrew: So in the example we just heard, two friends are talking about a blender, a stupid blender. Why is it stupid? Well, it broke, so one of the friends was trying to make a shake, you know, like a milkshake or something like this, a smoothie, and the blender broke. And it broke because it was a cheap model, and he suspects that the company **cut corners** when producing, when manufacturing the blender, right? They're maybe trying to keep their production costs low, and the result is just a blender that doesn't work.

Kassy: I think listeners could experience this kind of problem a lot, right? Companies **cutting corners** and making poor products.

Andrew: Yeah. There's a really popular store here in South Korea, Kassy, and I won't say the name of it, but it's kind of the equivalent of a dollar store that we would have back home. And I have a frying pan that I'm using from this store and I'm kind of regretting my purchase.

Kassy: Corners were cut when making that product as well?

Andrew: Yeah, the coating just came off the bottom of the frying pan very quickly. I think there were some corners that were cut when producing the frying pan.

All right, let's listen to another example.

Kassy: OK.

Woman: So, I finally got my boss to look over my proposal for the spring marketing campaign.

Man: What did he say?

Woman: He said it looked good and that he was happy that I didn't **cut any corners** or leave any rocks unturned.

Man: Awesome. I **smell a promotion** in your future.

Woman: That'd be nice.

Kassy: In this example, we hear about a woman who got a promotion because she didn't **cut corners** when creating a marketing campaign for her company.

Andrew: Exactly. Yeah, she didn't **cut any corners** or leave any rocks unturned. This is another kind of idiomatic expression, rocks unturned. It just means that you do something completely when you don't leave any rocks unturned.

Kassy: You do something to the best of your ability without leaving anything unfinished.

Andrew: Yeah, maybe it has a farming origin. I'm not sure the origin of this expression, it's kind of a weird one, 'cause, really, we don't go around turning over rocks very often in our daily lives, do we?

Kassy: No.

Andrew: But it is an idiomatic expression that we still use in English today.

Kassy: There was another interesting phrase in this example as well.

Andrew: What's that?

Kassy: I **smell a promotion** in your future.

Andrew: Oh yeah, I **smell a promotion** in your future, when we predict something, right? When we're making a prediction, we can use this, I **smell success** in your future.

Kassy: If you think someone is lying, you can say, "Hmm, I **smell bullshit**."

Andrew: Yeah, we could also say that, I **smell bullshit**, like, it doesn't seem right, right? Yeah, we use this kind of to say that we sense something, we feel that something is going to happen some time soon or that something is wrong, like in your example there.

All right, we have a similar expression for number two, and it is a little bit spicy, this one. You know, usually in Culips we try and stay away from bad words, but this one isn't really necessarily bad and it's very common, but it's a little stronger than most of the expressions that we explore here in Culips. So just be aware of that, listeners.

It is to **half-ass something**. **To half-ass something**. Half being spelt H-A-L-F to mean like 50% of something, right? Now, this also means to do something really, really poorly, right? If you **half-ass something**, like if you **half-ass a report**, it means that you just did a bad job. You did a poor job on this report. And when we say something in this expression, you always have to use this expression with an object, it needs a noun or a pronoun.

Kassy: I think you could also make it into a verb, like, "Oh, he **half-assed it**."

Andrew: Right, right, but you need that “it.”

Kassy: Yes.

Andrew: Yes, you can’t say just, like, he **half-assed**.

Kassy: Yeah, no, that sounds awkward.

Andrew: That sounds awkward, so it needs something, a pronoun or a noun to use it with. And when you **half-ass something**, you’re just doing a poor job. It’s really shoddy work or terrible quality work, right?

Kassy: It’s usually someone is complaining about your work, if they tell you that you **half-assed something**.

Andrew: Right. And it is a stronger expression, so you’d want to avoid saying this to your boss. Even if your boss did a bad job, you might think in your head, “Oh, he **half-assed it**,” he **blew this sales pitch**, right? Like, we almost had a sale and then my boss **blew it**, he made a mistake, he **half-assed it**. But we wouldn’t say that to him.

Kassy: Yeah, you would totally ignore that and then, when you go to the bar with your friends ...

Andrew: You’re complaining about him.

Kassy: Then you would use this expression.

Andrew: Yeah, so be careful who you’re talking to, because it is a strong expression and could definitely be rude or offensive depending on the situation. And I think a lot of times this is used between friends, right? Or when you’re complaining about somebody and especially, yeah, the situation you just mentioned, if you’re hanging out with coworkers after work, what do you guys talk about? Usually you talk about work, right? And so this type of expression comes up a lot. I think we are ready to listen to some examples using this expression, to **half-ass something**.

Kassy: OK, let’s get to it.

Friend 1: Looks like I'm gonna have to work late tonight. I'm sorry, but I don't think I'll be able to meet up for dinner after all.

Friend 2: Oh, is anything wrong?

Friend 1: No, not really. I have to make a presentation tomorrow and I just realize that my colleague **half-assed the PowerPoint slides**. I'm gonna have to fix them up tomorrow so I don't look like an idiot in front of everyone.

Andrew: So in this example, we just heard about a guy who has to work overtime. Oh no, why? Because his colleague did a poor job when making some PowerPoint slides. He **half-assed it** and the work needs to be redone.

Kassy: I'm sure a lot of people have experienced this who work in a company with a lot of coworkers.

Andrew: Any team work situation, right? When somebody doesn't pull their weight. Pull their weight is an expression that means to do your equal share of the work. So if somebody doesn't pull their weight and you're in a team work situation, that means that you might have to go back and correct or fix some of the work that your colleagues do. And this is exactly the context that we heard this expression, **half-assed** used, right? My colleague **half-assed the PowerPoint slides**.

Kassy: Yeah, and in this example, he's not complaining strongly. But he is emphasizing, like, I have to go back to work because of someone else's mistake.

Andrew: Right. The implication is that the colleague was lazy, right? This is essentially what it's communicating, oh, my colleague was lazy, he didn't do a good job and now I have to fix it. I have to work overtime. Interestingly enough, Kassy, we don't have the expression to full-ass something, right?

Kassy: It sounds hilarious just saying it. How about quarter-ass something?

Andrew: Yeah, we can only use **half-assed**. So I know sometimes English-language learners like to be creative, right, and to alter expressions, but you can't alter this one. It's a very fixed expression.

OK, final example for today's episode. Let's get to it.

Friend 1: Did you see the game yesterday?

Friend 2: Yeah, what a terrible performance.

Friend 1: I know, right? I can't believe the team just **half-assed it** like that.

Friend 2: Right, for a professional team they sure didn't put in an honest effort.

Friend 1: I hope they regroup for the next game. If they don't start winning soon, they'll never make it to the playoffs.

Kassy: So in this example, we hear about a team who really **half-assed their performance**, and you can see their loving fans are not happy about it.

Andrew: Yeah, so, again, we hear this expression criticizing a performance or a job that was poorly done, right? And I think this is really common, we hear it when talking about sports and athletes, right?

Kassy: Yeah, like you expect athletes to put in the best to their ability each time they get on that field or that court, and apparently this team just, they really **half-assed it**. They went out there and lost badly.

Andrew: Yeah, every game needs a winner and a loser and if you're the loser, then we could say you **half-assed it**, right? Almost always.

Kassy: Yeah, especially if you don't just lose, you like burn in fire, total destruction losing, like, I don't know, 40 to 1.

Andrew: Yeah, when your team just self-destructs. Sometimes when you watch sports, you can see the confidence and the energy just drain out of the losing team.

Kassy: Exactly.

Andrew: And this is this type of situation, these guys we're talking about, I think.

All right, everyone, so just to recap what we covered here today. We looked at two expressions that you can use when talking about doing a poor job or doing just the **bare minimum** effort. The first expression we learned was to **cut corners** and the second one was **to half-ass something**. Again, if you want more example sentences and more details about how you can use these expressions in your everyday lives, check out the study guide for this episode, which is available on our website Culips.com.

Andrew: Don't forget to follow us on social media. We are on YouTube and Instagram, Twitter and Facebook. So give us a follow on whatever platform works best for you. If you'd like to get in touch with us, if you have a question or a comment or even a suggestion for a future episode, please drop us a line. Our email address is contact@Culips.com. That is it for us today, we'll be back soon with a new episode, we'll talk to you then. Goodbye, everyone.

Kassy: Bye.

Detailed Explanations

To cut corners

Idiom

To cut corners is to do something with the bare minimum effort in the fastest, easiest, or cheapest way possible. In the end, **cutting corners** usually leads to a bad result or a poorly made product.

Here are a couple more examples with **to cut corners**:

Johnson: Did you hear that Daniels got fired?

Vince: Really?! Why? What happened?

Johnson: Apparently the boss found out that Daniels was **cutting corners** in the production process and skimming money off the top of the profits.

Vince: So not only was he making a poor product, he was stealing from the company as well? Man, that's shady.

Johnson: Yeah. Not only did they fire him, but I also heard they're suing him now, too, for defamation of the company name. They've had to recall a bunch of the products he was in charge of distributing.

Anita: Could you give me a ride to work tomorrow? My car is in the shop.

Tony: Again? Didn't you just take it in to get repaired recently?

Anita: Yes, but the last mechanic did a horrible job. He **cut corners** everywhere and my car broke down again.

Tony: That's terrible! Of course I can give you a ride tomorrow.

Bare minimum

Noun

The **bare minimum** is the smallest amount or the least effort needed to adequately fulfill some purpose. For example, doing the **bare minimum** at work will not get you fired, but it will never get you praise or a promotion.

Here are a couple more examples with **bare minimum**:

Kaley: Wow, your skin is so nice. What do you do?

Francesca: Oh, only the **bare minimum**, really. I use a nightly face mask followed by toner, emulsion, and overnight deep moisturizing lotion. Then in the morning I use an SPF 15 BB cream and rosewater for when my face gets dry throughout the day.

Kaley: That's the **bare minimum**? I don't even know what half of those things are!

Francesca: Really? Some of the beauty YouTubers I follow have a 12-step routine that they follow along with special vitamins they take to give their hair and skin a healthy glow.

Kaley: I really need to step up my game. I'm lucky if I wash my face in the morning!

Teacher: Roger, you really need to get a good grade on this final assignment. The **bare minimum** isn't going to cut it this time, you hear?

Roger: Yeah, Teach. I get it.

Teacher: No, I don't think you do. If you don't get at least a B+ on this final assignment, you're going to fail this class.

Roger: What! Fail? My grades are that bad?

Teacher: I'm afraid so.

Surefire Adjective

The expression **surefire** means certain to succeed. For example, in this episode, Andrew says a **surefire** way NOT to get hired for a job is to cut corners when preparing for the interview. In other words, if you do a poor job preparing for your interview, it is almost certain that you will not succeed in getting the job.

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

Izzy: What're you drinking?

Jasmine: Oh, it's a Skinny Smoothie.

Izzy: What's that?

Jasmine: It's my diet drink. I heard online that drinking this is a **surefire** way to lose weight fast.

Izzy: You shouldn't believe those diet trends you read about on the internet.

Jasmine: Well, I need to lose 3 kilograms in 2 weeks, so I'll try anything at this point.

George: Did you hear? Jake and Danice are dating now.

Hector: I thought Danice was dating Brian.

George: She was, but she broke up with him to date Jake.

Hector: Wait a minute. I thought Brian and Jake were best friends.

George: They are ... Were. I'm not so sure if they are friends anymore.

Hector: Well, yeah. Stealing your best friend's girlfriend is a **surefire** way to lose a friendship. So much drama.

To smell [something] Phrase

To smell [something] literally means to perceive an odour or scent; however, there is another meaning, which is to sense or predict something. For example, in one example in this episode, a man said he **smelled a promotion** for his coworker. In other words, he predicts that she will get promoted soon, because she did well in her marketing presentation.

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

Jared: Dude! Mom says if we mow the lawn and take out the trash she'll give us some money for the movies.

Frankie: What? She usually makes us do that for free. Why does she wanna pay us this time?

Jared: You know how she is. She always gets all happy and excited when she starts seeing a new guy.

Frankie: You're right. Hmm ... I **smell money** in our future!

Mom: Lucy, did you take my coral lipstick out of my purse?

Lucy: No!

Mom: Hmm. I **smell a rat**.

Lucy: No way! I'm not lying!

Mom: Then what's that on your lips?

Lucy: Um ... Orange popsicle?

To half-ass [something]

Slang phrase

To **half-ass [something]** is similar to cutting corners; it's to do something poorly in a careless, lazy, and rushed manner. People often use this expression when complaining about someone else's poor performance, especially when it negatively affects their own lives.

Here are a couple more examples with **to half-ass [something]**:

Nancy: You are such a disappointment. The kids beg you and beg you to make a tree house and this is what you come up with?

Kevin: What? I made the dang tree house like they asked.

Nancy: Yeah, but it took you 6 months of me nagging you to even start it, and then you do this **half-assed job** of it. Why did you even bother?

Kevin: C'mon. What do you want from me? It looks good enough.

Nancy: Good enough? It looks like it could blow over with a strong gust of wind. I'm not letting them go up there alone.

Yu-Jin: Let's play badminton together soon.

Trevor: Sounds good to me. Should I ask Mia if she wants to play, too?

Yu-Jin: No! I hate playing with her. She always just **half-asses it** and the game ends up being boring. We should play with Ralph instead.

Trevor: OK, sure. I'll give him a call.

To blow it

Slang phrase

To blow it means to make a mistake that has consequences. For example, if you **blow it** during a job interview, it means that you say or do something wrong and, because of this, you won't get the job. Or if you **blow it** while playing basketball, you make a mistake that hurts your team and makes it difficult to win. When you make a mistake that prevents you from taking advantage of a good opportunity (like a new job or winning a game), then you've **blown it**. You can **blow it** by half-assing an opportunity, saying or doing the wrong thing, or by not doing your best to show others what you are capable of.

Here are a couple more examples with **to blow it**:

Tony: Brad, why are you so upset? We won the game.

Brad: Yeah, our team might have won, but I sucked today.

Tony: So? It's just one game.

Brad: No, it's not! My dad brought some college recruiters to watch me play today. He was hoping I could attract their attention and get a scholarship.

Tony: Oh. That sucks.

Brad: Yeah. I had one chance to show the college recruiters what I could really do, and I totally **blew it**. Dad's gonna kill me.

Belinda: How did your date go last night?

Ji-Young: Oh ... That. I **blew it**, big time.

Belinda: What? How so?

Ji-Young: Well ... I wanted to make Harry a home-cooked meal, but I didn't realize he was allergic to peanuts. He ended up in the emergency room.

Belinda: Oh my gosh! That's terrible! Is he OK?

Ji-Young: Yeah, he's OK, but I'm sure he never wants to talk to me again.

Belinda: Ha, don't be so dramatic. I'm sure he'll forgive you.

Quiz

- 1. Which expression has a similar meaning to cut corners?**
 - a) half-ass something
 - b) drive aggressively
 - c) readjust something
 - d) avoid something

- 2. Which expression means to do the smallest amount of work possible to avoid punishment?**
 - a) the weakest link
 - b) the lazy boy
 - c) the underachiever
 - d) the bare minimum

- 3. Which is an example of blowing it?**
 - a) puncturing a tire
 - b) exploding
 - c) failing a test
 - d) getting your driver's license

- 4. True or false? To half-ass something means to do a poor job, and to full-ass something means to skip doing the job completely.**
 - a) true
 - b) false

- 5. Which word is a synonym for surefire?**
 - a) spicy
 - b) definite
 - c) aggressive
 - d) temporary

Writing and Discussion Questions

1. Have you ever cut corners on a project? What happened as a result?
2. Have you ever bought a product that seemed like corners had been cut during its production process?
3. Do you prefer to do the bare minimum amount of work to get by or do you like to be an overachiever?
4. What do you think is a surefire way to live a happy and successful life?
5. Have you ever had an occasion where you really blew it? How did you mess up, and what happened as a result?

Quiz Answers

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

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