Catch Word #225 – Four ways to use -ish

Episode description

You may have heard many English speakers put -ish at the end of certain words. It is quite common. In this Catch Word episode, hosts Andrew and Kassy explore four different ways to use -ish in everyday speech.

Fun fact

In this episode, our hosts talk about eye colour. There is some debate as to whether green eyes or amber eyes are the rarest in the world. The most common? I'm sure you guessed it. It's brown; roughly 79% of the world's population has brown eyes.

Expressions included in the study guide

➢ To stand corrected

➢ -ish (for colours)

➢ -ish (for time and age)

➢ -ish (attached to a noun)

➢ -ish (attached to an adjective)

➢ To have what it takes

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. The transcript has been edited for clarity.

Andrew: Hello, everyone. My name is Andrew.

Kassy: And I'm Kassy.

Andrew: And you're listening to Culips.

Andrew: Hey, there everyone. We have a Catch Word episode planned for you today. If you don't know what Catch Word is, well, let me explain. It is the Culips vocabulary series where we teach you the English idioms, vocabulary, phrasal verbs, proverbs, all of these different types of vocabulary that you need to understand English. And we hope that by studying with this series, the world of English will become unlocked and you will be able to understand what native speakers say and understand your favourite song lyrics and movies, all of these sorts of things. Today, I am joined by my cohost Kassy. Kassy, hello.

Kassy: Hello.

Andrew: How are you doing, Kassy? Is your day all right so far?

Kassy: Yeah, it's going well. It's extremely windy, but no complaints.

Andrew: Yeah, it's a really windy day here today, isn't it?

Kassy: The sky is a beautiful blue colour, not a cloud in the sky. But it's like a frigid Arctic blizzard out there with all of the wind.

Andrew: It's been so windy all week. Actually, I was out running the other day and I always wear a hat when I run to protect me from the sun. Like you say, it's a beautiful sunny day. It's been really sunny but windy and my hat blew off my head and hit an old man that was walking. So I felt bad about that, didn't mean to hit him with my hat, but it happened. I didn't injure him, at least.

Kassy: That's good. It almost feels like last week, you know, Earth gave us a little taste of summer and then decided, nope, that's not for you and then brought back the freezing spring.

Andrew: For listeners who are listening to this in the future, it is around the end of April right now. So it's just in that transition time where sometimes the weather is really hot. Sometimes it's still frigid. But we should enjoy it while it lasts, Kassy, because pretty soon it is going to be super, super hot when the summer comes around.

Kassy: That's true.

Andrew: Anyways guys, we're not here to talk about the weather today, we are here to talk about some interesting English vocabulary. And today's episode topic was another suggestion from our listener from Russia, Vera. And Vera wrote us recently to say that she enjoys listening to Culips, and that she wants to know what the word ending -ish means, -ish, which is spelled I-S-H. So she asked, -ish, what does it mean? How and when can we use it? You know, when someone says something like, well, the weather is **normal-ish**, OK? Wow, Kassy, maybe we are talking more about the weather today.

Kassy: You **stand corrected**.

Andrew: I **stand corrected**, yes. So thank you for the question, Vera. That is a great episode suggestion, because it's true that native speakers do use this suffix, this word ending -ish all the time. I think I use it probably every day.

Kassy: Me too.

Andrew: What about you, Kassy, you too?

Kassy: Every single day for effect.

Andrew: OK. And there are different ways that we can use it. We use it in different contexts to mean different things. And there are four different ways, in fact, that we can use it and that is what we are going to look at today. We're gonna take a close look at the -ish ending and the different ways that native speakers use this.

Andrew: But before we do that, guys, I wanna let you know that you can download the study guide for this episode from our website, Culips.com. It is the best way to study with us and it is jam-packed with materials that we have developed to help you get the most out of today's lesson. And to download it, just visit Culips.com.

Andrew: All right, Kassy, so I thought we should start with the easiest way that we can use this expression and then progress in difficulty as we go along.

Kassy: I think that's an excellent idea.

Andrew: Yeah, let's start easy. So the first way that we can use -ish is to describe colours. To describe colours. Do you wanna maybe give an example of that, Kassy?

Kassy: Yeah. When using -ish to describe colours, you're talking about something that, when you look at it, it might not be exactly that colour, but, you know, reminds you of that colour. For example, I use this a lot when talking about people's eye colours. Like, you look at someone and you say, wow, your eyes are brown, but they're also a little bit **greenish**, that's unique.

Andrew: When it's kind of in between a colour, right? If we said something was **greenish**, then maybe it's a little bit green, but a little bit yellow. And it's not a pure representation of a typical green colour that we could say it's **greenish**. Or, you know, we also use this as an adjective to describe other colours. So I could say, oh, it's a **yellowish** orange. So that means it's orange colour that has a kind of yellow quality to it. So **yellowish** orange.

Kassy: Or like a **bluish** purple. It's not a bright purple. It's more of a dark bluey purple, **blueish** purple.

Andrew: Right, exactly. So, everyone, what we're going to do here, instead of having some dialogue examples, we're going to give you some example sentences. And we hope that you can follow along with us and actually practice doing some English speaking today. So we're going to give you the opportunity to listen to us and to repeat what you hear. We're going to give you three example sentences using -ish to describe colours, and we would like you to repeat after us. I will read the example first and then Kassy will say it and then it's your turn. We'll give you some blank airspace for you to repeat what you've heard. So here we go with the first example sentence.

Andrew: That sweater is a **greenish** colour.

Kassy: That sweater is a **greenish** colour.

Andrew: It's hard to talk about colours on a podcast, Kassy, but when I think of **greenish**, I think of a combination of green and maybe brown, kind of like a dark green in between green and brown.

Kassy: Kind of green.

Andrew: That's all you need to know, guys, is that when we apply -ish to a colour, it means it's not a pure representative of that colour. It's like a mixture with a different colour. OK, let's listen to the next example.

Andrew: My car is pretty ugly. It's like a **reddish** brown colour.

Kassy: My car is pretty ugly. It's like a **reddish** brown colour.

Andrew: OK, so here we hear **reddish** to describe brown. Now we know that the colour of the car is brown, but it has some red qualities to it. So, yeah, I could imagine that's a pretty ugly car.

Kassy: Yeah, the reason why is if you think **reddish** and brown, you think of rust, which is that crusty, **reddish** brown crud you get on your car when you let it sit in the rain or it gets too old.

Andrew: Yeah, when the metal starts to deteriorate and break down, you get rust.

Kassy: Not pretty.

Andrew: Let's listen to the final example sentence.

Andrew: Look at the sunset. The sky is all **pinkish** and purple.

Kassy: Look at the sunset. The sky is all **pinkish** and purple.

Andrew: OK, so the sky is all **pinkish**. You know, if you can imagine the sunset in the sky, you have a lot of different colours and sometimes the sky is **pinkish**, right? It's not all pink, but it has some pink elements, some pink qualities to it. It's very beautiful.

Kassy: Colours are kind of swirled together. You don't know where one colour starts and one colour ends. They're all just mixed and they become one **biggish**, **pinkish**, **purplish**.

Andrew: **Pinkish purplish**. Beautiful.

Andrew: All right, so let's take a look now at the second way that English speakers use -ish. And I gotta say, I think this one is maybe the most common, Kassy.

Kassy: Yeah, this is the one I use the most.

Andrew: OK. And so that is that we apply -ish to a time or to an age when we are talking approximately, right? So we're not exactly sure of the exact age that someone is or we're not exactly sure of the exact time we will arrive, for example. But we're saying it's around there. It's close. It's almost that time or almost that age, but we're not 100% certain. So really, we're communicating a little bit of uncertainty when we do this.

Kassy: Yeah, that's right.

Andrew: Like, Kassy, I don't know exactly how old you are. But maybe I could say, you must be like, early **20s-ish**. Something like that.

Kassy: Exactly. That's right. I am.

Andrew: Yeah. I guess the younger somebody is, the easier it is to guess their age.

Kassy: Yeah, especially without insulting them.

Andrew: Right. So that's a good point that you just brought up there, Kassy, you know, in Western culture, it's kind of impolite to talk about people's age, right? When you first meet somebody, I know here in Korea where we live, you know, it's kind of common to say, oh, how old are you? Because there's a whole different cultural system that values age. But in Western culture, it can be really rude to ask somebody, how old are you? Especially if that person is older than you.

Kassy: Especially if they're women.

Andrew: Yeah, some women can be sensitive about this topic. Of course, everybody's different. So this means that we often don't know how old people actually are, right? But we could guess. We could say, oh, how old do you think your professor is, Kassy?

Kassy: You know, he's like, **50ish**.

Andrew: Right. **50ish**, right? So we can, we can do it like this. All right. Why don't we take a listen to some example sentences, right now?

Andrew: Let's meet around **5:00ish**.

Kassy: Let's meet around **5:00ish**.

Andrew: So, Kassy, if I said to you, Kassy, let's meet up around **5:00ish**. What time would you arrive at the meeting place?
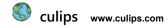
Kassy: This is what I really love about -ish, actually, I am always late. If people say let's meet around **5:00ish**, that makes me feel like I am allowed to be at least 5 or 10 minutes late, because it's not exactly 5:00, right? It's **5:00ish**.

Andrew: Yeah, I would say that it gives you maybe about a 10-minute window to be, to be late, if you say let's meet at **5:00ish**. If you say let's meet at **5:00ish**, and then you arrive at 5:30, I'll be a little angry. I would say why didn't you say **5:30ish**, right? Because then you could have come at 5:40 and it would have been OK. So, yeah, when people add -ish, I think they're accounting for about a 10-minute window of being late.

Kassy: Or early.

Andrew: So this is great in—or early, yeah. So, you know, a lot of people live in cities where the traffic is bad. And if you get stuck in traffic, you're going to be a little bit late. So this just gives you a little bit of an excuse for if you arrive late.

Kassy: Yes, it's great. You should use this every time you make plans. There will be many less arguments.

Andrew: I agree. Let's listen to another example sentence.

Andrew: She must be around **60ish**.

Kassy: She must be around **60ish**.

Andrew: So, again, this is just another example of how we can apply -ish to an age to say that somebody is around that age, but we really don't know exactly how old they are.

Andrew: And our final example sentence with this usage pattern.

Andrew: I studied for **3ish** hours or so.

Kassy: I studied for **3ish** hours or so.

Andrew: We can also apply this for duration, right? For length. You can say, oh, I studied for **3ish** hours. I lived there for **5ish** years or so. And often when we're talking about duration, we add the or so to the end too, don't we?

Kassy: It means, like, it's not exactly that, but, you know, around there.

Andrew: Yeah, around there. Very good.

Andrew: All right, let's move on to the third way that we can use -ish. And this is where things start to get a little more difficult, because that is that there are some adjectives in English, not too many, but probably at least 50 or so that have the -ish suffix built right into the end of them. So it's a set word, where English speakers, we're not adding -ish to the adjective to change the quality. It's already a built-in part, it's a part of that word already. So I'm thinking of words like **bookish**, **feverish**, **sluggish**, **ticklish**, **outlandish**, OK? These are all just adjectives that you could look up in the dictionary and find their meaning. And so what that -ish suffix is communicating here is that you are like that thing or you are of that quality. So somebody that is **bookish**, Kassy, what is a **bookish** person like?

Kassy: Somebody who is **bookish** is someone who, you know, they're a little bit, I would say they're a little bit stuffy. Like, you know, books are, books are great, but sometimes there's a stereotype that they're old and dusty. And they're inside, you know, so someone who's **bookish** would be someone who studies a lot, stays inside, maybe is a little bit uptight.

Andrew: What about somebody who's **feverish**?

Kassy: So a fever, you know, is when you have a high temperature. So someone who is **feverish** would be someone who is either feeling like they have a fever, or they're overly excited and kind of crazed like you feel when you have a fever.

Andrew: And I was complaining to you off air, Kassy, that today, I feel a little bit **sluggish** because I had a bad sleep last night. So **sluggish** means that you just feel very tired and low energy, right?

Kassy: Because slugs are slow and low-energy insects.

Andrew: Right. So all of these words, then, we can see that the -ish suffix is communicating that they're kind of like that thing. A person that is **bookish** likes books and spend a lot of time with books. Somebody that's **feverish** is very passionate and is kind of like a hot fever. Somebody that is **sluggish** is kind of like a lazy slug, which is an insect that you often see moving very slowly through a vegetable garden, for example. So I'm sure if our listeners wanted to find a complete list of these adjectives, they could Google or use the dictionary. But that is just the third way that we can use -ish, is when it's built in to the word itself. And it's actually not a manipulation of the speaker to change the meaning of the word by adding -ish. So I think, Kassy, we should read some example sentences so that our listeners can do some listen and repeat practice. How about that?

Kassy: Sounds great.

Andrew: He's been so **standoffish** since his girlfriend dumped him.

Kassy: He's been so **standoffish** since his girlfriend dumped him.

Andrew: So if you are **standoffish**, it means that you are confrontational and not very friendly and, you know, that you kind of keep people at a distance. You're not too welcoming or open.

Kassy: Yeah. Or you always want to pick a fight.

Andrew: Yeah, pick a fight and you're just not a nice person, really, when you're **standoffish**.

Andrew: All right, the next example.

Andrew: I love her style. It's so **boyish**, but she really pulls it off.

Kassy: I love her style. It's so **boyish**, but she really pulls it off.

Andrew: So **boyish**. **Boyish** means, like, what a boy would wear. So this woman has a kind of **boyish**, a kind of tomboy style, but she looks really good wearing these types of clothes.

Andrew: Stop acting so **childish**. You're 30 years old, for crying out loud.

Kassy: Stop acting so **childish**. You're 30 years old, for crying out loud.

Kassy: This is a really common one, calling an adult **childish**.

Andrew: Right, especially, I think, when people are arguing, right? If somebody's being immature, you could say stop acting so **childish**, grow up.

Kassy: I think I've used this once or twice, maybe on my sister or someone.

Andrew: Yes, me as well. And I think, actually, people have called me **childish** before. Probably that's even more common.

Andrew: All right, so we have one more way that we can use -ish that we are going to look at today. And, Kassy, I think this is maybe the most difficult way that English native speakers use -ish. And that is that we can attach it to adjectives when we want to downplay the quality of that adjective and say that it's only a little bit like that thing or kind of like that thing. And here, the way that we pronounce the word is really, really important. When we add -ish to an adjective in this way, we have a little pause, a little delay, and we also change the intonation pattern of our speech. OK, so you can hear, like, when we say **childish**, **bookish**, **feverish**, it's a very smooth pronunciation, right?

Kassy: Yeah, it flows nice.

Andrew: It flows. There's no delay between book and -ish. It's just **bookish**. It's very natural. But if I want to apply -ish to a different adjective, OK, so maybe I want to use cheap, let's use cheap for an example. I don't say **cheapish**. I say it's **cheap-ish**. Can you hear that delay? It's **cheap-ish**. I don't say it's **cheapish**. It's **cheap-ish**. There's just a slight delay there. And I think that's really an important feature of this final usage pattern.

Kassy: I think also listeners should realize when we have the more smooth, like **bookish**, the "I" is very soft, just /ɪ/, but when we do it with this pattern, like **cheap-ish**, the "I" is very harsh. /ɪ/ **cheap-ish**.

Andrew: **Cheap-ish**. Yeah. It's more pronounced, right? Yes, that's a great point. And I think maybe what we should do here is just get right to some examples so that we can actually let our listeners hear what we're talking about. And then we can explain and pick apart each example sentence and give more details in the context of those examples. Listeners, remember to speak along with us, OK? So I'll say the sentence, Kassy will say the sentence, and then it's your turn to talk. Here we go.

Andrew: He's **smart-ish**, but I don't think he **has what it takes** to study at Harvard.

Kassy: He's **smart-ish**, but I don't think he **has what it takes** to study at Harvard.

Andrew: This is almost like an insult, right, Kassy? If somebody told me, oh, Andrew, you're **smart-ish**, then I kind of assume that they think I'm stupid.

Kassy: Yeah, it's like almost—this is a good form of sarcasm, almost.

Andrew: Yeah, he's a little bit smart, but he's no genius, right? He can't go to Harvard.

Andrew: Let's take a listen to example sentence #2.

Andrew: She's **pretty-ish**, but she'll have to lose weight to become a fashion model.

Kassy: She's **pretty-ish**, but she'll have to lose weight to become a fashion model.

Kassy: I felt, like, kind of dirty just saying that. It's such a mean thing to say.

Andrew: It's a very mean thing to say, that's a good point. I really feel like with these two example sentences, the speaker is speaking behind the back of somebody. So this is maybe something that you would hear somebody say when they're gossiping, but you wouldn't really say this very often to somebody's face, would you?

Kassy: No, because, like you said before, it's kind of insulting.

Andrew: And let's listen to one more example and this one is not offensive. So that's good. Let's take a listen.

Andrew: This restaurant is **expensive-ish**, but I've been wanting to go forever. Is it OK if we check it out?

Kassy: This restaurant is **expensive-ish**, but I've been wanting to go forever. Is it OK if we check it out?

Andrew: OK, so, here, the speaker modified expensive by adding -ish to the end of it to say that, you know, the restaurant is expensive, but it's not really, really, really expensive.

Kassy: It won't break the bank. It won't make you, like, spend a good chunk of your paycheck, but it's not, you know, like going to a ramen place or to a burger joint.

Andrew: Yes, it's more expensive than the typical restaurant, right? It's **expensive-ish**. So this is another way that we can modify what an adjective means to mean, you know, we're downplaying the quality, right? When we say somebody is **smart-ish**, it means they're not really smart. She's **pretty-ish**. She's not really pretty. It's **expensive-ish**. It's expensive, but it's not really expensive.

Andrew: Kassy, I have one final question for you.

Kassy: Yes.

Andrew: And that is do you think we could apply -ish to any adjective? Or are there some exceptions that you could think of? That's a difficult question off the top of your head.

Kassy: You know, especially with this last use of -ish, these are not real words, right? Like you said, the, the third use of -ish can be found in the dictionary: **bookish**, **standoffish**. But this fourth one, I'm pretty sure you could use it with anything, even if it's the first time anyone has ever used it in that way.

Andrew: Yeah, I think it's a creative use of language. So, yeah, we could probably use it with almost any adjective that's out there. Whether your listener understands what you mean or not might depend on how creative it is. That's one of the beautiful things about English is we can be really flexible with our language and, you know, English speakers are always making up new words and new verbs and coining new terms. Honestly, I think this happens in every language, but this is just one example of how we can do this in English.

Kassy: Maybe our listeners could test it out, they could try to make some new English words using -ish and see how it goes.

Andrew: Yeah, hey, they could even send us an email and see if we can understand them.

Kassy: That's an excellent idea. I'm looking forward to it.

Andrew: So if you guys want to get in touch with us, all you have to do is send us an email to contact@Culips.com. Of course, we would also love it if you sent us a topic for an upcoming episode just like Vera did for today's episode. And thank you again, Vera, for the email.

Andrew: If you'd like to follow us on social media, we are on Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, and Twitter. Just search for the Culips English Podcast and you can find us that way. And finally, guys, don't forget about the study guide for this episode. It's jam-packed with a lot of materials that we've designed to help you improve your English and it can be downloaded from our website, Culips.com.

Andrew: That's it for us. We'll be back soon with another brand-new episode and we'll talk to you then. Goodbye.

Kassy: See you later.

Detailed Explanations

To stand corrected
Phrasal verb

After beginning this episode talking about the weather, Andrew says that they're not there to talk about the weather this time. But a few seconds later, Andrew talks about the weather again! Kassy says to him, "You **stand corrected**." Andrew agrees and also says that he **stands corrected**. **To stand corrected** is to acknowledge that you said something incorrect or misleading. Think of a situation when you tell your friends a fact. Your friends later research the fact and find out that you were wrong. In this situation, you can say, "I **stand corrected**." It's a polite way to say you were wrong.

Here are a couple more examples with **to stand corrected**:

Maxim: Hey, remember when we were talking about Michael Jordan the other day?

Nolan: Yes, I do.

Maxim: You said that he won seven championships with the Chicago Bulls.

Nolan: And?

Maxim: Actually, he only won six.

Nolan: Oh, that's right. Then I **stand corrected**.

Hadley: Good morning, Anna. All is well?

Anna: Pretty good. And you?

Hadley: Same old thing. Actually, did you read my email about the meeting this afternoon?

Anna: Yes. It's at 3:00, right?

Hadley: No, I made a mistake. It's really at 4:00. I **stand corrected**. Sorry.

Anna: OK, no problem.

-ish (for colours)
Suffix

This is used when the colour you are trying to describe isn't a pure version of one colour. It is between two or more different colours. Think of a beautiful sunset. You can see a mixture of pink and purple. In that case, you can say the sky is **pinkish** purple or **purplish** pink, depending on your perspective.

You can also use this suffix when saying something has a bit of a certain colour. For example, something **greenish** is something that is kind of green.

Here are a couple more examples with **-ish (for colours)**:

Sabrina: Check this out. It's a picture of my new car.

Arnold: Cool. Actually, I can't see it too well. What colour is that?

Sabrina: It's actually a **bluish** green. It looks green in the sun, but blue in the shade.

Arnold: I see. Either way, it's pretty nice. Are you happy with it?

Sabrina: For sure.

Sally: I heard you just repainted your living room. What colour is it now?

Travis: Pretty much white.

Sally: What do you mean, pretty much white?

Travis: Well, it's **whitish**.

Sally: Like off-white or beige?

Travis: It's hard to explain. How about you come over and take a look for yourself?

| **-ish (for time and age)** |
| Suffix |

This is used when you don't know the exact time or age of something. It's like giving an approximate time or age. For example, imagine you are going to visit a friend in the early afternoon, but you don't know the exact time you will arrive. In that situation, you can say you will arrive at **1:30ish**. The same thing applies when discussing someone's age without knowing exactly how old they are. You can say someone is **25ish** if you think that person is somewhere in their mid-20s. It is more polite than trying to give an exact age, because you might be wrong and end up insulting the person.

Here are a couple more examples with **-ish (for time and age)**:

Noor: Oh, you're late!

Andrea: I'm not late. It's only 5:40.

Noor: You said you would be here at 5:30. I've been waiting for a while now.

Andrea: No, no. I said I would show up around **5:30ish**.

Noor: Fine. Let's get some food.

Cody: Nice necklace. Was that a gift from someone?

Nikki: Yeah. My mother gave it to me.

Cody: How long have you had it?

Nikki: You know, I can't remember. I think I got it when I was **20ish**.

Cody: And how old are you now?

Nikki: That's none of your business!

-ish (attached to a noun)
Suffix

In this episode, our hosts use words like **bookish**, **feverish**, and **sluggish** to explain another way of using -ish. When you attach -ish to the end of a noun, it gives you the qualities of that thing. For example, a slug is a slow and low-energy creature. If you say that you are **sluggish**, that means you are not energetic and your brain is working a little slowly. These are not informal words. They are words you can easily find in a dictionary.

Here are a couple more examples with **-ish (attached to a noun)**:

Kayla:	Do you like my new dress?
Dominic:	Wow, it's really nice.
Kayla:	Thanks. Do you like this one more than the one I wore yesterday?
Dominic:	Yes, definitely. This one is far more **stylish**. I like the modern design.
Kayla:	Cool. I'll make sure to wear this one on my date this weekend.

Remi:	How was the movie?
Lula:	Just OK.
Remi:	Really? I thought you liked comedies.
Lula:	I do, but I felt this one was too **cartoonish**. I like a more serious comedy.
Remi:	I see. I'll suggest one of those next time.

-ish (attached to an adjective)
Suffix, informal

The fourth way of using -ish is when you attach it to an adjective. This is when you want to downplay the quality of that adjective. For example, if your friend is **cheap-ish**, he is cheap but not very cheap. If your friend is **smart-ish**, he is smart but not extremely smart. Be careful how you use these. You don't want to insult someone. Remember, when using -ish with an adjective in speech, there is a slight delay. You would say cheap, pause, then -ish.

Here are a couple more examples with **-ish (attached to an adjective)**:

Rose: Today is report card day! Did you check your grades yet?

Saoirse: Yes.

Rose: Did you get the high grades you were expecting?

Saoirse: **High-ish**.

Rose: Oh, that doesn't sound good.

Saoirse: Let's not talk about it.

Sebastian: Who is that guy I saw you talking to the other day?

Anne-Marie: That's my new boyfriend.

Sebastian: Congratulations!

Anne-Marie: Did you notice something special about him?

Sebastian: Now that you mention it, I thought he seemed a little **old-ish**.

Anne-Marie: Yeah. He's 15 years older than me.

Sebastian: Oh well. If it works out, then it's no problem.

To have what it takes
Idiom

In one of the example sentences used in this episode, a person is smart-ish but doesn't **have what it takes** to get into Harvard. In this expression, the word "it" refers to a requirement in a particular situation. In the example, it means that this person does not have the credentials or maybe the intelligence needed to get accepted into Harvard. Think of **what it takes** to be a tennis champion. You would need the tennis skills to be very good at it. You can also turn this expression into a question. It is common for coaches to ask their players, "Do you **have what it takes** to win?" In that sense, it is meant to be motivational.

Here are a couple more examples with **to have what it takes**:

Ismail: I see you put Mark in charge of the new project.

Olga: Yes. Is there a problem?

Ismail: I don't want to be mean, but I don't think he **has what it takes** to lead our team.

Olga: Why do you say that?

Ismail: Frankly, he lacks the leadership skills. The last time he was in charge, it was a disaster.

Olga: OK. Let me rethink it.

Craig: Do you want to sign up for the marathon on the 30th?

Patrick: It's unlikely I will.

Craig: Why do you say that?

Patrick: I really don't think I **have what it takes** to finish a marathon.

Craig: Sure you do. Just take it slow and easy. You can do it.

Quiz

1. When can you put -ish at the end of a colour?

a) when you like the colour
b) when it is too dark
c) only during sunsets and sunrises
d) when the colour is a little mixed

2. If your friend says, "Let's meet at 3ish," what time will you meet?

a) 2:55-3:10
b) 3:15-3:20
c) quarter after 3
d) quarter to 4

3. What does putting -ish at the end of an adjective do?

a) the adjective becomes weaker
b) the adjective becomes enhanced
c) the adjective becomes stronger
d) the adjective becomes lovelier

4. To have what it takes to do something means that you _____.

a) have the ability to accomplish it
b) have the confidence to do it
c) have to try it again
d) have the will to do it

5. What does it mean to stand corrected?

a) you have correct posture
b) you speak with correct English
c) you acknowledge a past mistake
d) you prefer standing more than sitting

Writing and Discussion Questions

1. What kind of suffixes do you have in your native language?

2. How are the suffixes in your native language used differently?

3. Not every language describes colours in the same way. In what ways have you noticed differences between your native language and English?

4. English is said to be a language that evolves quite quickly. Would you say the same about your native language?

5. In the culture you grew up in, is it polite to ask someone their age? Do you have any stories regarding different cultures and their etiquette around age?

Quiz Answers

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

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