

Catch Word #238 – I let it slip through my fingers

Episode description

In this week's Catch Word episode, Andrew and Jeremy explain three everyday expressions using the word slip: slip up, to slip [one's] mind, and to slip through [one's] fingers.

Fun fact

There are an estimated 60 different phrases that use the word slip. From slip of the tongue (when you accidentally say something you don't mean) to slipping one over on someone (when you deceive someone), each phrase has a unique meaning.

Expressions included in the study guide

- Slip up
- To know [something] all too well
- Get this
- To slip [one's] mind
- To slip through [one's] fingers
- Simple as that



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. I'm Andrew.

Jeremy: And I'm Jeremy.

Andrew: And this is the Culips English Podcast.

Hello there, everyone. Welcome back to Culips. Today, we have a Catch Word episode for you. And if you don't know what Catch Word is, well, let me explain. It is the series where we teach you interesting English vocabulary that is very useful for your everyday life when you are speaking English or especially when you are listening to English. So in Catch Word, we focus on idioms, phrasal verbs, or expressions that are just a little bit difficult. They're on the difficult side. And today, I am not alone. I am joined by my cohost, Jeremy. Hey there, Jeremy, what's up?

Jeremy: Hey, Andrew, how you doing?

Andrew: I'm good. And, Jeremy, today, we have an interesting topic, a very slippery topic. What are we going to focus on in this episode?

Jeremy: Today, we're going to talk about three everyday expressions using the word slip.

Andrew: Slip. Yeah, these are all based around the word slip. So we're going to get to that in just a moment. But before we get started, I wanted to give a shout-out to one of our listeners named Ninkhuslen, who left us a very kind review on Apple Podcasts saying that he likes Culips, and that it's easy to listen to and very understandable. And he also gave us a five-star rating. So thank you very much for that review. And, guys, if you could do us a favour, if you like Culips, if you enjoy studying with us, and if you learn a lot, then please leave us a short, positive review and five-star rating on Apple Podcasts or wherever you get your podcasts. It really does help us out and spread the word about Culips to other English learners.

Jeremy: And don't forget, there is a study guide available for all Culips members. And we recommend following along with the study guide while you listen to this episode. Just visit Culips.com to get it. And if you're not a Culips member but you want to be, you can visit Culips.com to sign up. And if you do become a member, you get ad-free episodes, so you don't have to listen to us talk about the study guide every time you listen to an episode.

Andrew: That's right, Jeremy. That is one of the big perks, in my opinion, of becoming a premium Culips member is that you get right to the good stuff, right to the lesson content, which we should move on to right now.

Jeremy: Let's do that.

Andrew: Our first expression for today is a phrasal verb, to **slip up**, to **slip up**. Now since our episode is related to this word slip, it's at the centre of each of the expressions that we'll check out, maybe we should talk about the core meaning of slip. So, Jeremy, what does it mean to slip or to be slippery?

Jeremy: Well, slip as a verb, we could say is when, for example, you step on a wet floor and your foot loses traction and you slip and fall. Something that is slippery is a surface that has very little traction. Traction might be a difficult word for some of our listeners. It means that it is not very sticky. We could say that slippery is kind of the opposite of sticky.

Andrew: Yeah, that's a great way to phrase it. It is the opposite of sticky. So when you have no grip, you know as a Canadian, in the winter, the sidewalks are very slippery. And it is very easy to slip and fall down when we are walking around from point A to point B. So Canadian people, we **know this expression all too well**. So with that in mind, keeping that core meaning of slippery in mind as being the opposite of sticky, this will really help us to unlock and understand these idiomatic expressions that use slip. So if we move on to **slip up**, the phrasal verb to **slip up**, we could say that **slip up** means to make a mistake or to make an error.

Jeremy: And we should also mention that it can be used as a noun or a verb. So, for example, I **slipped up** or that was a **slip up**. Both of those usages are possible.

Andrew: That's right. So to **slip up**, the verb, means to make a mistake. And a **slip up** is a mistake. And when we use the noun form, a **slip up**, we usually use it with the be verb. Like you just said, Jeremy, that was a **slip up**. Or we use it with make, I made a **slip up**.

Jeremy, is there any difference in feeling, in your opinion, between to make a mistake and to **slip up**? Or are they pretty much interchangeable?

Jeremy: Yeah, I feel like there is a small difference between mistake and **slip up**. Mistake is sort of the basic word for this kind of thing. And we have other ways to say mistake in English. And in this case, when we use the word **slip up** instead of mistake, it's usually because we want to say that it was an accident. It wasn't our fault and it was sort of a small thing. For example, if I was driving Andrew's car and I crashed the car, I could not say that that was a **slip up**, right?

Andrew: No, that would be a big, big mistake.

Jeremy: Exactly.

Andrew: Yeah. Jeremy, I think that imagery of slipping and falling down helps us, right? Just like if you step on some ice and you slip and fall down, that is not really your fault. That is an accidental mistake. Then a **slip up** is similar to that, where it's not a big error, not a big mistake, and something that was not planned, right? It was accidental. Maybe you forgot to do something because you are busy. Or you forgot to submit your homework on time or forgot to sign a document. These would all be examples of **slipping up**.

Jeremy: Speaking of examples, should we listen to our conversation example here?

Andrew: Yeah. Let's take a listen to our conversation example with **slip up**.

Jeremy: Right on.

Friend 1: So **get this**. The other day, I was getting ready to go out for a walk.

Friend 2: All right. Good for you.

Friend 1: Yeah. So I got outside my apartment building and the weather just seemed so nice.

Friend 2: Well, the weather was nice the other day.

Friend 1: True, but it felt especially nice. Like the air just seems so fresh and clean and crisp.

Friend 2: Oh, wait, don't tell me. I think I know how this story ends.

Friend 1: Yup, that's when I realized that I **slipped up** and forgot to put on my mask. So I had to run back to my room and grab one.

Andrew: Jeremy, this is a very current event example here. So if people are listening to this episode in the future, we are recording this episode in the time of COVID, when everybody is wearing a mask. And this happened to me recently, actually. I left my apartment and was walking down the hallway toward the front door. And I was, like, wow, something seems different. Why does this feel different? And then I realized that I didn't have my mask on so I had to run back and grab it. And so in this example that we just heard, it was exactly the same situation where someone **slipped up** and made a mistake and forgot to put on a mask, but then quickly realized their error and fixed the problem, went back and got a mask.

Jeremy: Yeah, I feel like **slipping up** is often associated with some kind of memory issue, forgetting something, forgetting to do something, losing a small item, or doing something slightly incorrectly.

Andrew: Yeah, I think you're absolutely right. Most of the time, it is about making a memory-related error, about forgetting to do a task or do something. But not always, you know, if you were to print a document at work and that caused a paper jam, and then everybody was a little bit angry at you, you could apologize and say, oh, sorry, I **slipped up** while I was printing my document and I caused that paper jam. That would be another context where we could use this word. So, often, it's related to memory, but not always. It can also be used to talk about other small mistakes.

Jeremy: But I think that leads very well into our second expression for this episode, which is **to slip someone's mind** or that **slipped my mind**.

Andrew: Right. We often use this expression when we are talking about ourselves. So we say that **slipped my mind** or it **slipped my mind**. But, of course, if we were talking about somebody else, we could say it **slipped his mind** or it **slipped her mind**, for example. And so what does it mean, Jeremy, if something **slips our mind**?

Jeremy: Well, we keep our memories in our mind. So if something slips out of our mind or falls out of our mind, then it means we forget something.

Andrew: Exactly. So imagine trying to hold something very, very slippery in your hands, like maybe a fish. If you go fishing and you catch a fish and then you have to pull the fish out of the water with your hands, that fish is very, very slippery and shakes around a lot in your hands. It's hard to hold on to, right? I feel like the older we get in life, our memories are harder to hold on to. And they can slip right out of our mind, just like a fish could slip right out of our hands. And so this is the imagery behind this expression. And the meaning is just that you forget something. If something **slips your mind**, then you forget that thing.

Jeremy: So why don't we have a listen to our next conversation example.

Andrew: Let's do it.

Friend 1: Hello?

Friend 2: Hey, man, where are you? Are you almost here?

Friend 1: Almost where? Do we have plans today?

Friend 2: Come on, did you forget? We're playing poker tonight, everyone's here. We're waiting for you.

Friend 1: Oh my gosh, I'm so sorry. It totally **slipped my mind**. All right. I'll be there in 15.

Friend 2: OK, hurry up. See you soon.

Friend 1: Bye.

Jeremy: In this example conversation, we heard about a guy who forgot about poker night, which is playing poker at a friend's house. He said it totally **slipped his mind**, meaning he totally forgot about it.

Andrew: Jeremy, it's interesting with these two expressions, to **slip up** or also to **slip someone's mind**. We use both of these in the same way when we want to minimize the mistake we made or minimize the impact of forgetting some information. It's, like, if you made a big mistake, but you don't want to admit that you made a big mistake, you could make it sound less significant by saying, "Oh, I just **slipped up**." And it sounds like you made a small mistake but, really, it could be a big mistake. And if you forget something important but you don't want to admit that you forgot something important, you could just say, "Oh, it **slipped my mind**." So it minimizes the impact of your error, of making a mistake or forgetting something. And English native speakers use these expressions these ways very, very often. So be careful, listeners, there is a nuance here that sometimes people use these expressions when they're being a little bit dishonest.

Jeremy: It's true, that could be the case. I imagine if, in this situation, the guy said, "I'm sorry, I totally forgot," the other person might be a little bit more angry as a result and say, "How could you forget? This is so important." But when they say, "It **slipped my mind**," it's kind of implying it was an accident. Please don't be angry at me. Right?

Andrew: Yeah, it was an accident. I didn't have control over that. It just naturally exited my brain.

Jeremy: Just like a slippery floor is not in our control, right?

Andrew: Exactly. So there is this nuance behind these expressions, which makes them a little bit difficult to learn, but also very, very interesting, in my opinion.

Jeremy: I agree.

Andrew: And, Jeremy, we have one final expression to look at today, which is to **slip through someone's fingers**. OK, so usually when we're talking about ourselves, we say, oh, that **slipped through my fingers**. But, again, depending on the subject, we can change that pronoun, it **slipped through his fingers**, **slipped through her fingers**, **slipped through your fingers**, for example. So what does this mean, if something **slips through your fingers**?

Jeremy: Usually we use this expression when we're talking about opportunities, and especially when we miss out or we lose an opportunity.

Andrew: Another word that we could use in this situation is squander, squander, which is very fun to say, squander. So if you squander an opportunity, it means that you miss a good opportunity or even that you waste a good opportunity. So you have an opportunity to do something that could really advance your career or help you to be more successful or maybe even have a nice romantic relationship and then you don't take advantage of that opportunity. You squander it. In this situation, we say that it **slips through your fingers**.

Jeremy: Also, to add some visual imagery to this one, if you hold something in your hand very tightly, it will not fall out. Let's imagine that you're holding some coins in your hand, some money, right? If you hold very tightly, the coins will not fall out. But if your hand is very loose, then it's possible for the coins to fall through the cracks in your fingers or **to slip through your fingers**. So that's why we use the word through here as well, because the thing passes through the gaps in your fingers. It means you didn't hold on tight, especially in a romantic situation. Hold on to her tight, hold on to that girl tightly. Don't let her go. And then later on, if it doesn't work out, you can say, oh, she **slipped through my fingers**.

Andrew: Yeah, exactly. This is an expression that we use sometimes to talk about romantic relationships, especially when there is a relationship that we regret. Oh, that girl was so nice. She was so kind, so lovely. But I just treated her poorly and she left me. I really regret acting that way at that time in my life. She really **slipped through my fingers**.

Jeremy: So this expression also implies that the opportunity was a good one, positive.

Andrew: Positive opportunity and something that you had, right? It was an opportunity that was presented to you. It wasn't like a maybe, well, maybe I could do this. Maybe I could do that. No, it was in your hands. You were holding that opportunity. But because of some action that you took, it means that you lost that good opportunity.

Jeremy: Or carelessness.

Andrew: Yeah, carelessness. Exactly. So that is the meaning of **slip through your fingers**. And I think now we're ready to listen to an example. So why don't we do that right now?

Jeremy: All right.

Friend 1: Did I ever tell you that I was once offered a job at a top New York investment bank?

Friend 2: What, really? Are you serious?

Friend 1: Hard to believe, right? But, yup, it's true.

Friend 2: So why didn't you take the job? You could be some fancy-pants rich guy right now.

Friend 1: I know, right? But at the time, I just didn't want to live in New York City. It's as **simple as that**.

Friend 2: Sounds like you really let that opportunity **slip through your fingers**.

Friend 1: Yeah, thinking back on it now, I kind of regret not taking that job.

Andrew: So in this example, we heard about a guy who let a very nice job as a top New York investment banker **slip through his fingers**. So this means that he was offered the job, he could have moved to New York, and could have become very rich and wealthy by working as a banker. But he didn't take advantage of that opportunity. He let it **slip through his fingers**. Why? Because he didn't want to move to New York City, **simple as that**. **Simple as that** is a nice expression that we use when there is a very straightforward reason for something occurring. We can hear people say I didn't take that job because I didn't want to live in that city, **simple as that**. There's a very easy way to explain the reason behind making some decision.

Jeremy: I think it's also useful to mention here that if you hear someone use this expression, it means they think that was a good thing. In this example, if the speaker thought that would have been a bad job for him, then he would not have used this expression, **slipped through my fingers**. He might say something else. So what I'm saying is if you ever hear someone use this expression in real life, then you know it means they think that was a good opportunity. It implies that.

Andrew: Absolutely.

Everyone, that brings us to the end of this episode. Thank you for studying with us today. We hope that you learned a lot. And, hey, if you enjoy listening to Culips, if you find us to be helpful and entertaining and educational, then please consider supporting us. There are many ways that you can do that.

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If you'd like to talk to us, you could send us a message by email. Our email address is contact@Culips.com. We'll be back soon with a brand-new episode and we'll talk to you then. Goodbye.

Jeremy: Bye, everyone.

Detailed Explanations

Slip up

Phrasal verb and noun

To **slip up** means to make a mistake. As a verb, it means make a small error or blunder, often the due to not thinking carefully. **Slip up** is a noun as well; it is sometimes hyphenated to make **slip-up**. "When we use the noun form, a **slip up**, we usually use it with the be verb," Andrew says in this episode. "That was a **slip up**. Or we use it with make, I made a **slip up**." As a noun, a **slip up** is a minor or careless mistake made by not paying enough attention. You could also say **blunder**.

There is a variation worth noting. If you add a noun or pronoun between "slip" and "up," the meaning changes. To **slip someone up** means to cause someone to make a mistake or error. You're interfering with them and their ability to do something.

Here are a couple more examples with **slip up**:

Hanne: Can you send me the slides for our presentation tomorrow?

Pankraz: What? Why?

Hanne: I want to double check all the data to make sure everything is correct.

Pankraz: I've already checked all the data. Why would you need to check it again?

Hanne: This is a huge presentation and worth a lot of money. I don't want to lose it just because we **slipped up** and didn't double-check the data.

Pankraz: Fine, I'll send you the slides. It's all correct, though. I checked it myself.

Maddie: Where's Pankraz this week? I haven't seen him since he messed up during the presentation on Friday.

Gregory: Oh, right. Pankraz was let go on Monday. He had one too many **slip ups** and the presentation was the last one the bosses could take.

Maddie: Aw, poor Pankraz. He was fun to have around.

To know [something] all too well

Idiom

To know [something] all too well means to be very familiar with something, so much so that you can't forget it. This idiom is most commonly used for things that are difficult, bad, or unpleasant.

In this episode, Andrew mentions that Canadian sidewalks are very slippery in the winter. He says, "Canadian people, we **know this expression all too well**." He means that Canadians are very familiar with slipping up, even if they don't want to be. Since slipping on icy sidewalks is unpleasant, that means the knowledge is unpleasant.

You can also use **to know [pronoun] all too well** when talking about someone. For example, let's say you have an annoying colleague named Susan, and you see her when you are out grocery shopping. You could tell your friend, "I **know Susan all too well**." Your friend would then know that you know Susan, and you also find her to be annoying or unpleasant.

Here are a couple more examples with **to know [something] all too well**:

Orli: I was driving down highway 33 the other day and I smelled something absolutely wretched. I thought maybe an animal had died.

Veronica: Ha, no, not an animal. I **know that smell all too well**. There's a mushroom plant just up one of the side streets and it smells all the time.

Orli: Gross! Who would want to live near there?

Veronica: It's not bad all the time. It just depends on which way the wind is blowing. When it's blowing in our direction, we can smell it at our place and we're 10 minutes away!

Yasin: Argh! These applications are making me cross-eyed! If I have to answer "why do you want to attend this school?" one more time, I'll scream!

Narayan: I **know that feeling all too well**, my friend. I had to fill those out a few years ago when I was applying to universities. Just keep at it, it will all be over soon.

Yasin: Thanks. After all this, I better get into one of these schools!

Get this Slang

Get this draws attention to something you're about to say. It means listen or pay attention because I've got something interesting to tell you. Mostly used in spoken or casual text-based conversations, **get this** emphasizes that the following statement is surprising or interesting. You could also say **check this out** or **can you believe this?**

Here are a few more examples with **get this**:

Philippa: I really like your outfit today, especially that shirt.

Raisa: Neat pattern, right? It's really comfortable, too.

Philippa: Where did you find it?

Raisa: I got it at that new second-hand shop around the block from school. And **get this**, the whole outfit only cost \$15!

Philippa: \$15 for a whole new outfit! I know what I'm doing after class!

Leonard: Are we still on to watch the game tonight? I've got the beer. You bring the snacks?

Akbar: Oh, man. **Get this**, my girlfriend surprised me this morning with tickets! But she only got two and wants to go with me.

Leonard: Whoa, dude! That's awesome. You've gotta keep this girl. And don't worry about me. I'll look for you in the crowd when I'm watching.

Melvin: Hey! Did you see they posted a new collector's item up on the website today?

Lee: I saw! In fact, I was just checking the site and, **get this**, there are only two left!

Melvin: What! They sold 100 of them in less than 12 hours? That's insane. Also, we need to buy ours now.

Lee: Already at the checkout. You can pay me back whenever.

To slip [one's] mind

Idiom

To slip [one's] mind means to forget. This is used when someone forgets something important, like an event, task, obligation, or person. The structure of the idiom is a bit different than you might expect. The person who forgot is not the noun in the sentence. Instead, the forgotten thing is the noun. For example, saying “her birthday **slipped my mind**” is the same as saying “I forgot her birthday.”

As Jeremy and Andrew explained in this episode, the idiom comes from the idea that memories are slippery and can fall out of our minds. “I feel like the older we get in life, our memories are harder to hold on to,” Andrew says. “They can slip right out of our mind, just like a fish could slip right out of our hands. And so this is the imagery behind this expression.”

Here are a couple more examples with **to slip [one's] mind**:

Eve: Welcome home, honey! Do you have the milk?

Wayne: Milk? What? Oh, no.

Eve: Don't tell me. You didn't pick up milk?

Wayne: I didn't even go to the store on my way home! It completely **slipped my mind**. I'm so sorry, love.

Eve: Well, don't take your coat off! You've got 30 minutes. Go, go, go!

Aaliyah: Did you have your meeting with the director today?

Uwe: Yeah, but it didn't go well. I showed up and we talked a bit. But it was obvious the reason I was there had **slipped his mind**. He was flipping through papers like he was trying to remember who I was!

Aaliyah: Oh, no! That's not the best start. Did he figure it out at all?

Uwe: In a way, I guess. I dropped a bunch of hints while we were talking and eventually he stopped looking through his papers and started actually answering my questions. So I guess it did go well, in the end.

To slip through [one's] fingers

Idiom

To slip through [one's] fingers means to lose something or someone by a narrow margin. It could be something you had at one point. The thing could be a prize, reward, or anything that you might lose due to bad choices or lack of effort. If this idiom is used to refer to a person, it's usually a romantic interest or partner.

To slip through [one's] fingers also means to not take advantage of an opportunity. For example, if you had the opportunity to interview for your dream job, you would take it even if you already had a job, because you wouldn't want to let that opportunity **slip through your fingers**.

To slip through [one's] fingers could also mean to escape or avoid being caught, captured, or held in custody.

Here are a couple more examples with **to slip through [one's] fingers**:

Theodore: What should I do about this invitation to audition? It's a huge opportunity, but it's across the country!

Linda: Did I ever tell you about the time I was asked to audition for Broadway?

Theodore: No! Why didn't you? You're a fabulous stage actress.

Linda: I was too nervous and had zero confidence, so I let it **slip through my fingers**. It's my biggest regret.

Theodore: So ... I should definitely audition, then. Thanks, Linda!

Sung-Min: How is it that Chad always needs us to cover his bill when we go out to eat? I'm getting thoroughly annoyed with this man.

Yi: Try not to be too mad at the guy. Money has **slipped through his fingers** all his life. I promise, I've worked with him on his finances and even I have no idea what's happening.

Sung-Min: He probably wasn't honest with you, then. Because if you worked with him, he shouldn't be having any issues!

Yi: I think he just has really bad luck, though. His car broke down last month and this month the plumbing in his house broke. That's a lot of issues in a short period of time!

Simple as that Idiom

Simple as that means easy to understand or not at all complicated. When something is as **simple as that**, it is easy and not more difficult than it appears. The expression most often used in casual conversation.

Simple as that can also be used to emphasize how easy or quick it was for someone or something to improve. For example, “We were losing in the first half, but then in the second half, **simple as that**, our team scored four goals.”

One very interesting thing about this idiom is that it originally had an action to go with it—snapping your fingers. People would snap their fingers when they said “that.” This was a way of illustrating how simple it is—it’s as easy as snapping your fingers. It’s so easy even a child could do it. The finger snap is still used on occasion, but it’s no longer required to get the point across.

Here are a couple more examples with **simple as that**:

Yun-Seo: Will all the new staff need to take the orientation course?

Nora: Yes.

Yun-Seo: Even Jay? He worked here back when you were still working the cash registers.

Nora: Yes, even Jay. All new staff must take the orientation course, it’s as **simple as that**.

Ryan: All right, so hold your hammer like this. Good!

Angela: It’s really heavy, Ryan.

Ryan: Is it? Try moving your hand up the handle a bit more.

Angela: Like this?

Ryan: Yup! There you go. OK, now we’re going to hold the nail like this and hit the straight end of the hammer on the head of the nail while keeping the pointy edge on the wood. **Simple as that!**

Angela: Ouch! No, not simple! Why did I let you talk me into helping with this?

Quiz

- 1. Which of the following could you use if you forgot to schedule a doctor's appointment?**
 - a) it sliced my mind
 - b) it's stuck in my mind
 - c) it slipped my mind
 - d) my mind slipped on it

- 2. What does someone mean when she says she doesn't want the chance to slip through her fingers?**
 - a) she has slippery fingers
 - b) she wants to miss this opportunity
 - c) she doesn't want to drop the chance on the floor
 - d) she doesn't want to miss this opportunity

- 3. Which of the following would you say to show that you're familiar with something unpleasant?**
 - a) I know it all too well
 - b) I don't know it at all
 - c) I have some knowledge of it
 - d) I have all the information about it

- 4. Fiona slipped up when she made a money transfer. Which of the following might have happened?**
 - a) she successfully completed the money transfer online
 - b) she made a mistake and sent the money to the wrong person
 - c) she completed the money transfer at the bank
 - d) she slipped and fell at the bank

- 5. Which of the following could you use to tell a friend that a task is very easy?**
 - a) you're as simple as that
 - b) it's as silly as that
 - c) it's as simple as that
 - d) it's not as simple as that

Writing and Discussion Questions

1. Describe a time when you slipped up. How did you fix the mistake?
2. Tell about an interesting fact that might make you say “get this!”
3. Describe a time when something slipped your mind. When and how did you remember what you needed to do?
4. Have you ever had an opportunity slip through your fingers? What was it and what happened?
5. Are there any tasks in your life that others find difficult, but you consider as simple as that? What are they and why do you think others find them difficult?

Quiz Answers

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

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