

Catch Word #242 – That rings a bell!

Episode description

Hmm, what's today's topic? Oh, that's right! In today's useful Catch Word episode, Andrew and Jeremy will teach you some helpful phrases to use when talking about memory and remembering something. So, before you forget, click that play button and get listening!

Listening to the Culips Catch Word series is a perfect way to learn new English phrases used in common English conversations. Tune in to boost your English skills to the next level by listening to example dialogues chock-full of helpful phrases about remembering things you've forgotten.

Fun fact

Have you ever wished you had a better memory? Then you should research the memory palace technique. The memory palace technique has been used for thousands of years to store vast amounts of information inside the mind. To build a memory palace, think of a place that is very familiar to you. As you mentally walk through that place, add details that you don't want to forget to the surroundings. For example, if you want to remember that your mother's birthday is on December 16th, 1957, then imagine that one room in your memory palace has a calendar of the year 1957 with your mom's picture on it; the calendar is turned to the December page and the 16th is circled in red ink. There you have it! Every time you mentally visit that room in your memory palace, you will see that calendar and recall your mother's birthday.

Expressions included in the study guide

- It rings a bell
- To run into [someone]
- A beast at [something]
- To come back to [someone]
- To jog [someone]'s memory
- To rub [something] in [someone]'s face



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.

Hey there, everyone. Welcome back to Culips. Today's episode is brought to you by all of our fantastic Culips members. Guys, without the support of our members, Culips wouldn't exist. So thank you very much to all of our Culips community and our Culips members. If you want to learn more about how to become a Culips member and all of the awesome benefits that come along with membership, such as unlimited access to our study guide library, ad-free podcasts, and more, just visit Culips.com and you can learn all about membership.

Today we have a Catch Word episode for you all. If you don't know what Catch Word is, it is the series where we teach you very useful and practical English idioms, phrasal verbs, and expressions that will definitely help you improve your English listening and speaking. Today, I am not alone. I am joined by Jeremy, my cohost. Hey there, Jeremy. What are we covering today?

Jeremy: Well, the idea for this episode actually came to me yesterday when I was talking to my wife in the car.

Andrew: OK, what happened?

Jeremy: Well, I guess I'll tell the story after I introduced the expression.

Andrew: OK, that's a good order to do things in.

Jeremy: The expression is **to ring a bell** or **that rings a bell**. In fact, we almost always use this one in the form of **rings a bell**, so with an S at the end of the word ring. And you want to explain what this means, Andrew?

Andrew: Yeah. So, really, guys, what we're doing today is looking at two idiomatic expressions that you can use to talk about memory and remembering something. And so the expression that Jeremy just introduced is **rings a bell**. **Rings a bell**. And this is the action that we do with a bell, right? If we have a bell and then we shake it and it will go ring, ring, ring, ring, ring, ring, ring, OK? This verb is the shaking of a bell, this means ring a bell.

But when something **rings a bell**—when you’re speaking, you could say, “Oh, that rings a bell.” “Hmm, **it rings a bell**.” It means that you have some knowledge of the topic, some memory of something but you don’t remember all of the details. So something seems familiar to you and you feel like you know it, but you don’t quite remember all of the information. In this situation, it’s when we use **it rings a bell**. You could think of your brain as being the bell and when you hear something, like somebody’s name being mentioned or maybe a novel or a book being mentioned, you feel like you’ve heard of it before but you don’t really know about it too much, then your brain is kind of like ding, ding, ding, ding, ding, but you don’t get all of the information. It’s just a slight stimulation.

Jeremy: Yeah, in fact, it may help for me to explain how this idea for the episode came to me. I was in the car with my wife and she was asking me about someone that we met a few weeks ago and she said, “What was his name?” And I couldn’t remember his name very clearly. But I knew that it started with a T and I said, “Is it Thomas?” And she said “Hmm, **that rings a bell**.” And then I wrote down this expression to use for an episode.

Andrew: Yeah, that’s awesome. So I think in, like, 90% of the cases when we use this expression, it’s about trying to remember somebody’s name, **it rings a bell**. And in fact, maybe our Culips listeners don’t know this, but for every Catch Word episode when I am researching the expressions, what I like to do is go on to Twitter and see how native speakers use each expression so I can really get a good sense of how people use idiomatic expressions in everyday life. And while I was searching on Twitter, so many of the Tweets were about this, trying to remember somebody’s name. So I think most of the time, we use this expression when we can’t remember somebody’s name very well.

However, I remember that I also used this expression recently when talking with Kassy, our other Culips host, when we were talking about the movie Forrest Gump. And she explained some detail from the movie Forrest Gump, but it’s been years and years since I’ve seen that movie. So I was like, “Oh, yeah, **that rings a bell**. I think I remember that scene or that line that was said in the movie. But I can’t clearly remember it, because it’s been a long time.” So it’s not limited only to names, but used very often when trying to remember somebody’s name.

Jeremy: And one thing that you mentioned there, I think is important. This usually has to do with sound. So the way that the thing sounds. So when you were talking about the movie, you said, you were talking about a line from that movie, something that someone said in that movie, right? And the bell is an auditory thing. The ringing of a bell is a sound. So this almost always has to do with a sound that sounds familiar, sounds like something that you should know but you’re not quite sure.

Andrew: Yeah, I totally agree.

Jeremy: So should we have a listen to the first example conversation?

Andrew: Yeah, let’s do it.

Friend 1: I ran into **Paul** this week. You know Paul, right?

Friend 2: Hmm ... Paul who?

Friend 1: Paul Peterson. He works at the cafe on Fourth Street.

Friend 2: Paul Peterson. That name **rings a bell**, but I don't exactly remember how I know him.

Friend 1: He played with us in the softball league a few years back. But he was on a different team, the Tigers.

Friend 2: Oh, yeah. Paul from the Tigers, of course. I remember him now. He was **a beast at bat**. How's he doing?

Andrew: In this example we heard a conversation where two friends were talking about a guy named Paul Peterson, PP. And one of the friends couldn't exactly remember who Paul was. He said the name **rings a bell**, sounds familiar, feels like he knows who this guy is, but not quite. But then once he learned some more information about that friend, that he played on the softball team, the Tigers, then it all **comes back to him**. It clicks and he remembers who Paul is.

Jeremy: In fact, the **rings the bell** stage is right before the clicking stage. We say it clicks. And then you get it.

Andrew: Right. So when you make that connection and you remember some information, that's when we say it clicks. It clicked. I remember.

Jeremy, what does it mean to be **a beast at bat**? Paul Peterson is **a beast at bat**. That might be difficult to understand for some of our listeners.

Jeremy: Well, a beast, the word beast is another word for animal, I guess we can say. But it emphasizes the strength and sometimes masculine strength of certain animals.

Andrew: Like a wild animal.

Jeremy: Like when I hear the word beast, I think of, like, a gorilla, for example, a silverback gorilla or something like that. So when we say he was **a beast at bat**, the term at bat means when he is hitting the ball, when he's holding the bat and waiting to hit the ball. So if he's **a beast at bat**, it means he's a very good batter. He's very good at hitting the ball, but almost in an animal-like or scary way.

Andrew: Yes, exactly. Maybe we could do a whole different episode about this expression, because I hear lots of people talking about going into beast mode. When I go to the gym, I'm in beast mode. And there's a lot of fun expressions around this one. So, listeners, look forward to that in the future.

Jeremy: So let's have a listen to our next example conversation.

Andrew: Let's do it.

Friend 1: What are you doing this weekend?

Friend 2: I'm gonna watch that documentary about Keith Haring.

Friend 1: Hmm ... Keith Haring. That name **rings a bell**. I think I've heard of him before, but I don't remember who that is.

Friend 2: He's an American artist. If I show you some of his work, you'll totally recognize it. It's quite iconic. Here, let me show you some on my phone.

Friend 1: Oh. Oh, yeah, Keith Haring. Ah, I totally recognize the name now. Well, cool. Enjoy the doc.

Jeremy: In this example, one friend tells another that he is going to watch a documentary about a certain person, Keith Haring. The other person does not really remember why he knows that name. It sounds familiar, but he doesn't know why. When his friend says that he is an artist and shows him pictures of his work, then everything **comes back to him**. It clicks and he remembers who Keith Haring is.

Andrew: Yeah I think, you know, I use this expression personally, **that rings a bell**, when I'm talking with people who are very knowledgeable about literature or philosophy or even arts or music and they can mention and reference artists and intellectuals, scholars who are well known, but not well known to everybody. So, for example if I'm talking with somebody and they mention a philosopher like Derrida or something. You know, that name **rings a bell**, but I personally haven't read that work so I can't really talk about it. And so when I am talking with my friends who are much smarter than me and can reference writers and artists that I don't know about, then I say, "Oh yeah, that name **rings a bell**." I know that person is famous, but I don't know why.

Jeremy: Yeah often just a name is not enough information for you to know why that person is famous unless of course they are very, very, very famous.

Andrew: Exactly.

Jeremy: But we should also mention that this phrase can be used in a question form. For example, if I was trying to remember a certain song and I could ask Andrew, "Hey, I'm trying to remember this song. It sounds like doo-ta, doo-ta, doo-ta. Does that sound familiar?" Or, "Does **that ring a bell**?"

Andrew: Yeah, exactly. So we can also use it as a question, right? Does **that ring a bell**? Does that sound familiar to you? Do you know what I'm talking about? And this is a very common way to use this expression also, to help somebody remember something or to try and ask someone if they remember something.

Jeremy: It is almost interchangeable with does that sound familiar?

Andrew: Exactly, yes. And, Jeremy, that is actually a very nice transition or segue into our second expression for today, which is **to jog someone's memory**. So we can say, "Oh, that **jogs my memory**." Or that **jogs his memory** or that **jogged his memory**, something like that. So here we're not talking about jogging like the exercise activity. What does it mean, jog, in this context?

Jeremy: So this word means to nudge or to bump slightly, but we don't really use it that way anymore, in the literal sense. In fact, I think this is the only expression where we use this word in that way.

Andrew: Yeah, exactly. So if you **jog someone's memory**, then you help someone to remember something. So if we were to go back to that first example that we listened to today with Paul Peterson, the friend **jogged the other friend's memory**, right? He gave him more details that helped him to remember who Paul Peterson was.

Jeremy: So we could say that giving clues to someone is a way **to jog their memory**. But, you know, I like to add visuals to these—I think Andrew and I both like to give our listeners a visual for each of these. And what I imagine is your head is sort of like a box full of memories, but they aren't very well organized. So if you shake the box a little bit or bump the box a little bit, sometimes the missing piece will fall out and will become obvious to you or you will get it.

In fact, we actually use the term nudge in a similar kind of way. A nudge is like pushing someone with your elbow a little bit, and sometimes we physically do nudge someone to help them remember to do something. For example, if Andrew and I go into a big business presentation and I introduce myself and he doesn't say anything, I might bump him, say "Hey, dude, it's your turn. You introduce yourself now."

Andrew: Go for it. Come on.

Jeremy: Yeah.

Andrew: Yeah, exactly. So I think the core part that people need to understand about this expression **to jog someone's memory** is that it means to push them, to help them remember something, but it's not a forceful, strong, violent push. It's just a gentle push that will help them recall some information.

And with that being said, I think it's time to move on to our conversation examples. Let's listen to the first one.

Roommate 1: Dude, we should totally plan a surprise party for Matt's birthday.

Roommate 2: Don't you remember what happened last time we threw a surprise party for Matt? Let me **jog your memory**. We only invited 10 people, but over 25 showed up. Someone we didn't know started DJing and played the music way too loud. We got noise complaints from the neighbours and the cops even showed up to shut things down. We are definitely not throwing Matt another birthday party this year.

Roommate 1: Oh, yeah, I forgot about that. Well, maybe next year then.

Andrew: In this example, we heard a conversation between two roommates who were talking about a surprise birthday party that they held for their friend Matt last year. And one of the friends didn't remember how that party spiralled out of control. So his roommate **jogged his memory** and gave him all of the details about how that party just got really out of control. And many people showed up, there were noise complaints from the neighbours, and even the cops showed up to shut the party down. So by giving that information, by providing those details, then he was able to remember exactly what happened.

Jeremy: Is this something that happened in your life, Andrew?

Andrew: Not to me personally. But to my friends, yes.

Jeremy: Yeah, I have heard of this happening, as well.

Andrew: I think for young college-age students, this type of occurrence isn't rare in North America.

Jeremy: I would agree.

Andrew: Let's move on to example #2.

Friend 1: All right, it's game time. Can't wait to watch the Yankees win and **rub it in your face**.

Friend 2: Dude, calm down. The Yankees are no match for the Blue Jays. You guys don't stand a chance. In fact, let me **jog your memory** for you. The last time we played, the Blue Jays won. And the time before that, and the time before that, too.

Friend 1: Shut up, dude. Today's our day, you just wait and see.

Jeremy: In this example, two very excited sports fans talk about the upcoming game. One of them says that the Yankees are going to win, and he is going **to rub it in his face**, which means to brag. The other friend says that the Yankees will not win, that they are no match for the Blue Jays. This means that the Blue Jays are a much better team in his opinion. He says you guys don't stand a chance, meaning there's no possibility that you're going to win. And to prove it, he says, let me **jog your memory**. Let me remind you, let me help you remember, the Blue Jays won the last three games in a row.

Andrew: And to all the baseball fans out there, I'm sorry if this is not an accurate representation of the facts. I actually don't follow baseball very much. So I don't know what the win-loss records of the Yankees-Blue Jays series is. So it might not be factually accurate, but what is factually accurate is the way that the two characters used this expression to **jog your memory**.

And, everyone, that brings us to the end of today's episode. So thank you for listening. We hope that you learned a lot today. And when you go out into the world and speak English or watch English-based TV or movies, you guys are definitely going to hear these expressions being used and we hope that when you do, you will now be able to understand them.

Jeremy: It would really help us out if you could leave us a five-star review on Apple Podcasts or wherever you get your podcasts. This will help other people to find our podcast and start learning English with us, as well.

Andrew: Yeah, guys, your ratings and reviews really help us out. But that's not the only way you can help us out. You could also support us by becoming a Culips member. Culips membership offers so many benefits, and it's really the best way to study with us. Please check out our website, Culips.com, for all the details about how you can sign up and become a member.

If you want to get in touch with us, our email address is contact@Culips.com. And we'll be back soon with another brand-new episode. Take care, everyone, and we'll talk to you soon. Goodbye.

Jeremy: Bye, everyone.

Detailed Explanations

It rings a bell

Idiom

If something **rings a bell**, that means that you remember it or that it sounds familiar. If you have some memory of something, but you can't remember all of the information, that's when you use the expression **it rings a bell**. If you feel like you've heard a name, song title, or movie title before but you can't remember all the details of the memory, then you would say **it's ringing a bell**.

Here's one more example with **it rings a bell**:

Hillary: You see that girl over there? Do you know her name?

Lisa: The girl with the brown hair? Isn't that Molly's sister?

Hillary: Yeah, it is, but I can't remember her name right now and it's driving me crazy.

Lisa: I think it starts with an M, too. Like Mary or Margaret or something.

Hillary: Hmm, that **rings a bell**. Oh! I've got it! It's Macy.

Lisa: Oh, yeah, that's right. Macy's her name.

Hillary: Whew. What a relief. Now that I've remembered her name I can think about something else.

To run into [someone]

Phrasal verb

To run into someone is to meet someone in an unexpected way or in an unexpected place. For example, if you go to the shopping mall with your mom and see your teacher there, then you **ran into your teacher** at the mall. The phrase **to run into someone** does not literally mean to collide with or bump into someone else; it means to see someone simply by chance.

Here are a couple more examples with **to run into [someone]**:

Betty: Honey, guess who I **ran into** at the store today.

Derek: I have no idea. Who was it?

Betty: It was Daniel Richards. Can you believe it?

Derek: What? Danny's back in town? I haven't seen him in years, since he moved out West.

Betty: Well, you should call him up and see if he's free while he's in town. You guys were so close in high school. You should really catch up.

Derek: That sounds like an excellent idea.

Hector: I **ran into Colton** at Marty's last night and he told me you got laid off from work. Why didn't you tell me, man?

Tyler: You've got enough on your plate right now with the new baby and your promotion coming up. I didn't wanna bother you.

Hector: C'mon, bro. You can always come talk to me about stuff, no matter how busy I am. Have you decided what you're gonna do next?

Tyler: Not exactly, but I'm working on it. My wife knows a guy who is looking for workers at his construction company. I'm talking to him on Monday.

A beast at [something]

Noun phrase

If you are **a beast at something**, you are really good or really skilled at something. For example, someone who is an amazing guitar player is **a beast at guitar**. You can also use **beast** as a verb to express that you did something really well. For example, if you got a 100% on your math test, you could say, “I **beasted** that math test!”

Here are a couple more examples with **a beast at [something]**:

Lucas: Dude! You really rocked that. Who knew you were such **a beast at playing the piano**?

Richie: I was a little rusty. I haven’t played in years.

Lucas: What are you talking about? Your hands were flying over the keys. I had no idea you could do that.

Richie: Yeah, I wanted to play professionally when I was younger, but after Cindy got pregnant I started working at the store and I just never really had the time.

Lucas: Well, now that Carter’s about to graduate high school, you and Cindy are gonna be empty nesters with a lot of free time on your hands. You should get back into playing again.

Charlotte: Which team is your boyfriend playing against on Friday?

Ava: The Palmyra Cougars, I think.

Charlotte: Oh, brutal.

Ava: Why is that?

Charlotte: I heard they’ve got a goalie on their team who is **a beast at defense**. Almost nothing gets past him.

To come back to [someone]

Phrasal verb

If something **comes back to you**, it means that a memory returns to you. Usually a memory that **comes back to you** has been forgotten for quite awhile, so it's hard to recall all of the details right away. In other words, when a memory **comes back to you**, it might take a few minutes for you to remember everything related to that memory.

Here are a couple more examples with **to come back to [someone]**:

Darius: Do you remember that awesome concert we went to in Queens?

Khalid: Hmm, maybe. Who was playing?

Darius: I forget the name, but it was a new band that had really crazy outfits. You asked the lead singer for her number that night.

Khalid: Oh, right! It's all **coming back to me now**. She never called me back, if I remember. Why are you bringing them up now?

Darius: I saw that girl at an art gallery last night.

Khalid: Wow, small world.

Summer: That's right! I left them in the back seat of my car!

Tara: What's right? What did you leave in the back seat of your car? What are you talking about?

Summer: Oh, sorry. I lost my sunglasses earlier and I just couldn't seem to remember where I'd left them. It's been on my mind all day, and it **just came back to me** that I left them in the back seat of the car.

Tara: That's great news. Can we get back to the game now, though? I'm about to win and I can't wait to see the look on your face when I make this next move.

Summer: Ha, sure. Let's see what you've got.

To jog [someone]'s memory

Idiom

To jog [someone]'s memory is to help or cause someone to remember something that they had previously forgotten. The phrase **to jog [someone]'s memory** implies that there was an external reason that someone remembered something; it wasn't just a spontaneous remembrance. Hearing a familiar sound, looking at a picture, or going to a location that relates to the thing you are trying to remember could cause you **to jog your memory** and remember a piece of information you had previously forgotten.

Here's one more example with **to jog [someone]'s memory**:

Freddy: Grandpa, have you ever been to Australia?

Grandpa: Yes, I have, but it's been a very long time.

Freddy: Can you tell me about it?

Grandpa: Hmm ... I'm not sure if I remember a lot. Maybe looking at some pictures will **jog my memory**.

Freddy: OK, I'll go get your photo albums. I know where you keep them!

To rub [something] in [someone]’s face

Idiom/slang phrase

To rub [something] in [someone]’s face is to make someone feel bad about a mistake they made, an embarrassing moment they had, or a time they failed at something. A person will **rub something in your face** if they want to humiliate you by bringing up something you’d rather forget.

Here are a couple more examples with **to rub [something] in [someone]’s face**:

Irene: What are you doing here, Claire? Did you come to **rub it in my face** that you beat me in the spelling bee?

Claire: Oh, don’t be such a sore loser.

Irene: Sore loser? You tripped me on purpose on my way up to the stage on that final round. I was totally distracted. You didn’t win fairly.

Claire: All’s fair in love and war, honey. Better you learn that sooner rather than later.

Ian: Cody, what are you doing here? I can’t believe you decided to come to the party after how much you sucked in that match earlier.

Deidrick: Shut up, all right? Cody feels bad enough about that match. You don’t have to go **rubbing it in his face**, too.

Ian: All right, all right. I was just joking around.

Quiz

1. Which choice below finishes this sentence: “After I bumped my head, I lost my memory, but now it’s _____”?
 - a) coming over to me
 - b) coming back to me
 - c) running into me
 - d) getting lost

2. Which of the choices below is an example of rubbing something in someone’s face?
 - a) making someone a chocolate cake
 - b) helping someone paint their house
 - c) discussing a problem with someone
 - d) bragging to someone about beating them in a baseball game

3. Which phrase has a similar meaning to it rings a bell?
 - a) it seems loud
 - b) it sounds familiar
 - c) it sounds fishy
 - d) it seems like a problem

4. True or false? If you are a beast at chess, it means you are really bad at playing chess.
 - a) true
 - b) false

5. If you meet someone by chance in an unexpected place, you_____.
 - a) run something by them
 - b) run around them
 - c) run into them
 - d) run them down

Writing and Discussion Questions

1. Do you have a good memory? What do you do to try to jog your memory when you've forgotten something?
2. Are you better at remembering the names or the faces of people you meet?
3. Have you ever run into someone where you didn't expect to meet them? Describe the situation.
4. What is something that you are a beast at?
5. Has someone ever rubbed something in your face? What was it about? How did you respond?

Quiz Answers

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

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