

Catch Word #244 – Connect the dots

Episode description

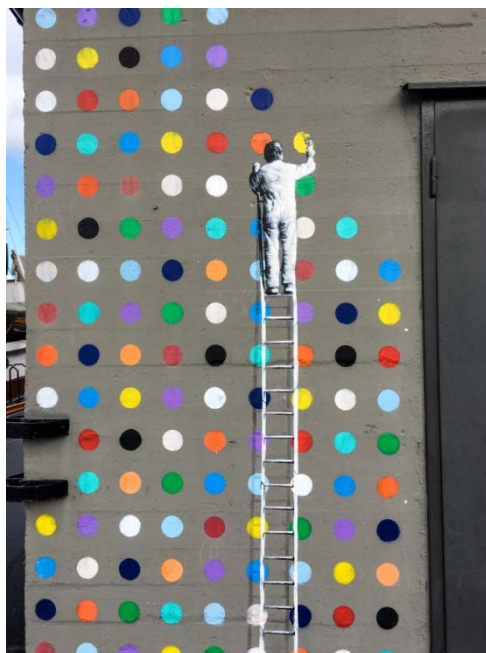
Some people can't get enough of jigsaw puzzles. They like connecting the dots and the challenge of piecing everything together. In the end, it's always important to pay attention to the bigger picture. In this Catch Word episode, that's exactly what hosts Andrew and Jeremy are talking about. Their two main expressions are to connect the dots and to piece together [something]. They explore the similarities between these two expressions and how to use them. Give it a listen!

Fun fact

Did you know that there is an annual puzzle competition called the World Puzzle Championship? It features several different puzzles where competitors must connect the dots and piece together logical information as best as they can.

Expressions included in the study guide

- To connect the dots
- To piece together [something]
- The whole picture
- To funnel money
- I never would have guessed
- To be up to no good



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 Culips listeners. How is it going? Welcome back to another edition of the Culips English Podcast. Today we have a Catch Word episode for you all. And Catch Word is a series where we teach you idioms, phrasal verbs, or expressions that will help improve your English listening and speaking.

And we're going to kick this episode off with a shout-out. I wanted to say thank you to Ben, who left us a nice comment on Castbox. In Ben's review, he said that he enjoys listening to Culips and the more that he listens, the more that he likes it, and it's one of his favourite podcasts and he feels like he's just hanging out with us and that we're his buddies. So thanks, Ben, for your comment.

And everyone out there, if you guys like listening to Culips, if you learn a lot with us and you would like to support us, one of the ways that you can do that is by leaving us a five-star rating and a comment on Castbox or Apple Podcasts or wherever you get your podcasts. It just helps other English learners find us and helps grow our Culips community.

I'm not alone today, I am joined by my cohost, Jeremy. Hey there, Jeremy. What's up?

Jeremy: Hey there, Andrew, and hello to all of you out there. Thanks for listening to Culips today. Today, we have a very interesting set of idiomatic expressions for you guys. These ones are—hmm, how would you describe these, Andrew? These ones are very interesting.

Andrew: So the two idiomatic expressions that we're going to teach everyone about today are **connect the dots** and **piece together**. And we use both of these expressions when we are talking about understanding **the whole picture**. And now, actually, this is also another idiom, **the whole picture**, but that means to understand a situation completely or fully. And we often use these two idioms when we're talking about taking information from many different places and assembling that information so that we can understand the whole situation completely. So that is what we will talk about in this episode.

Jeremy: And if you'd like to follow along and use the study guide that we've created for this episode, you can find out how to get access to it at Culips.com.

Andrew: So let's kick it off by talking about expression #1 for today, which is **connect the dots**. **Connect the dots**. Now, Jeremy, I know you have a little boy at home, you have a son. And I'm curious if he enjoys doing **connect the dots** puzzles?

Jeremy: Not yet. We're not there yet. But he has started with puzzles. I know when I was little, I really liked those **connect the dots** drawings. So for those who don't know, usually like at a restaurant, they give worksheets to kids. And they would give the kids, you know, some crayons. And I remember doing these when I was a kid when I was waiting for my food at the restaurant. And each of the dots has a number. And so you have to draw from number one to number two to number three, like that. And when you're finished, you see a picture. So it's kind of a fun little exercise, I guess.

Andrew: Right. I mean, these are kind of puzzles that are designed for kids who are quite young, 4 or 5 years old. And when you look at the image for the first time, you just see a bunch of random dots. And then if you follow the numbered sequence and connect all of the dots with your pencil, then the end result is an image, like a mountain or a sunset or something like that.

So this is I think the basic imagery behind this expression, right? You're taking all of these different data points, all of these different dots, and you're putting them together, connecting them. And the end result is that you can see the image clearly, you know what's happening. And so we use this as a metaphor in our English speaking, as well, for other situations, not just about kids' puzzles, but about any situation where you have to take information from multiple sources and put together, assemble that information, so that you can understand something totally and completely.

Jeremy: So for example, if my wife and I walk into a room and we see a bunch of cookie crumbs on the floor and my son is not there, but then we go find him and he has cookie crumbs on his face, we could say, ah, we **connected the dots** and we realize that he ate all the cookies when he wasn't supposed to, or something like that. Even in this situation, it's not really difficult. But there is information in two different places. One, there are cookie crumbs on the ground. And two, there are cookie crumbs on his face. So even with just those two data points, we can use this expression **connect the dots**.

Andrew: Perfect. And I think you'll often see this expression used when talking about detectives or police officers solving a crime, because this is exactly what they have to do, right? They have to look for clues and examine the clues and talk to witnesses and kind of put all these different things together to find the criminal. So you'll hear **connect the dots** often on the news when talking about crime stories or when you're watching movies about detectives and crime. You'll hear this used often. It's really frequent when talking about crime and the police.

Jeremy: That's what our first example dialogue is about. So why don't we have a listen to our first example dialogue?

Andrew: Let's do it.

Coworker 1: Did you hear that Jason from accounting got arrested?

Coworker 2: What, really? That's crazy. What happened?

Coworker 1: Apparently, he's been stealing money from some of our clients.

Coworker 2: What? That's insane.

Coworker 1: Yeah, right? After some clients complained, our company did an internal investigation and they were able **to connect the dots**. Turns out that Jason's been **funneling money** into an overseas bank account for the last several years.

Coworker 2: Wow, I can't believe that. He really seemed like such a normal guy. **I would have never guessed.**

Andrew: So in this example, we hear from two coworkers who are talking about Jason from the accounting department, and Jason **has been up to no good**. He has been stealing money from some of the company's clients. And so some of these clients complained and the company launched an internal investigation. So this means that some employees of the company investigated Jason. So it wasn't like the police or an outside organization. It was the company doing the investigating. And they were able **to connect the dots**. There's probably different pieces of evidence and different information that they found during their investigation. And they found that Jason had been **funneling money** into an overseas bank account. So what does it mean, Jeremy, **funneling money**?

Jeremy: **Funneling money** means that Jason was taking small amounts of money over time and putting them into a bank account far away that couldn't be tracked. An overseas bank account, or something like that. So he was redirecting money from the company's cash flow into his personal account. So in this situation, if, for example, if Jason just admitted that he was stealing money or made it very obvious somehow, then we wouldn't use this expression, **connect the dots**. So **connect the dots** is only really used when the information is not very obvious. Like there are lots of little pieces that need to be put together to understand what's going on.

Andrew: Exactly. All right. So I think it's time now to listen to example #2.

Friend 1: How did you do on the exam?

Friend 2: I don't feel very good about it. Especially that final question.

Friend 1: Yeah, that one was hard.

Friend 2: Yeah, the prof wanted us **to connect the dots** and summarize everything that we've learned this semester, but my mind just went blank.

Friend 1: Well, I mean, at least we're finished with it now. I'm hungry, let's go get something to eat.

Friend 2: Yeah, OK. Let's do it.

Jeremy: In this example, two students are talking about taking a test. On the final question of the test, the professor wanted the students **to connect the dots** and summarize all the information that they had learned that semester. In this context, **connect the dots** means to take a lot of information and bring it together and make one picture out of it, sort of fully understand everything, we could say.

Andrew: This is one of the key skills that you learn at university is how to take a big amount of information and summarize it. And so I remember when I was a student, a lot of my professors would ask us to do things like that, which I hated because it's difficult to do. It's hard **to connect the dots** sometimes and analyze a big amount of information. But that's what we go to school to learn.

I think it's time for us to move on and we will introduce our second expression now. And it is **piece together**. **Piece together**. It's not the peace like P E-A-C-E, world peace, it's not this peace. It is piece like a part, P-I-E-C-E. So a little part, a little piece of something.

Jeremy: And in this expression, it is actually used as a verb.

Andrew: Yeah, it's a phrasal verb, right? **To piece together something**.

Jeremy: The word piece is almost always used as a noun. But in this expression, it is used as a verb, I **pieced this together**, or she **pieced that together**, like that.

Andrew: Exactly. And so when you **piece together something** or, Jeremy, as you just explained, there are two different styles we can use, we can **piece something together** or we can **piece together something**, both are OK. When you do this, it means that you learn the truth about something, you get to understand the full situation because you put together, you assembled, multiple pieces of information to understand **the whole picture**. So, again, it's very, very similar to **connect the dots**.

Jeremy: To me, **piece together** feels like it emphasizes that the thing is difficult to understand. It emphasizes that point a bit more, whereas **connect the dots** is more about figuring out something. It doesn't necessarily emphasize the difficulty. So when you look at our example dialogues in a moment, we're going to talk about why **connect the dots** would not fit in these examples.

Andrew: All right, let's do that. So I think then we should take a listen to conversation example #1 right now.

Friend 1: Dude, I just got a text from Tom. He says he got dumped by Chelsea.

Friend 2: Can't say I'm too surprised. What happened? Did she finally **piece together that he's been cheating on her?**

Friend 1: He didn't say, but I'm sure that was the case.

Friend 2: Well, good for her. I think she can do way better than Tom.

Friend 1: Agreed. He's been acting like a slime bag lately. Hopefully this will wake him up a bit.

Andrew: All right. So in this example, we hear two friends talking about their buddy Tom. And Tom just got dumped by his now ex-girlfriend, Chelsea. And the reason that Chelsea dumped Tom is that he has been cheating on her. And she was able to finally **piece together that he's been cheating**. So she found out about his cheating. So probably, I mean, we don't know, but probably she found different clues that kind of gave Tom's secret away, right? Maybe she found some text messages or some suspicious behaviour or something. I'm not exactly sure what gave Tom away, but she was able to **piece together** and to learn about the real situation. Once she learned about it, then she dumped him.

Jeremy: In this example, actually, I think that **connect the dots** could be used. I think that it would work in this situation, saying did she finally **connect the dots** and figure out that he has been cheating on her? That sentence sounds perfectly fine to me. But in our next example dialogue, **connect the dots** would not work.

Andrew: Exactly. So we're going to take a listen now to a way that we can **use piece together** in a slightly different way then **connect the dots**. So let's take a listen to this example right now.

Coworker 1: Could you give me a hand here for a second?

Coworker 2: Sure, what's up?

Coworker 1: I'm just working on this report and I can't seem to **piece together the best way to organize it**. Any ideas?

Coworker 2: It looks good. But I'd include a summary of the key information at the start. But other than that, it looks great.

Coworker 1: Brilliant. Thanks for your help.

Jeremy: In this dialogue, two coworkers are talking about a report. And one of them says that he can't seem to **piece together the best way to organize the report**. In this situation, **to piece together** means to figure out, but it is emphasizing how difficult this task is for the person who's speaking. So in this example, **connect the dots** would not make sense. Because what this person is doing is not something that involves little pieces of information from different sources. This is something that is just hard to do and maybe a bit tedious. Would you agree, Andrew?

Andrew: Yeah, so **pieced together**, I think, is a more dynamic expression compared to **connect the dots**, because there are different ways that we can use it. Of course, like we saw in the first example, we can use it to talk about assembling multiple information sources to understand something completely. But we can also use it in a different way, like we just heard in conversation #2, and that is when we don't know how to do something because it is difficult. So organizing a report, right? I can't seem **to piece it together**. I can't seem to do it, it's difficult. We can use this for any kind of task that is really difficult to do. I can say I can't seem **to piece it together**. I can't seem to do it. I can't do it.

Jeremy: Yeah, I agree.

Andrew: All right. But we certainly hope that our listeners today were able **to piece together the lesson** and learn these two expressions.

Jeremy: I think we gave you enough information so that you can **connect the dots** and use these expressions in your daily life.

If you learned something in this episode and you'd like to support Culips, you can do so by following us on social media or by becoming a Culips premium member. You can find out how to do that at Culips.com. And there are lots of benefits, so go ahead and check it out.

Andrew: But of course, that's not the only way you can support us. You could also really help us out by telling your friends who are learning English to check out Culips or by leaving us a five-star rating and a nice review on Apple Podcasts or wherever you get your podcasts.

If you have any questions or comments for us, please get in touch. Our email address is contact@Culips.com. We read every email we get and respond as soon as we can.

So that'll bring us to the end of today's episode. Thanks for learning English with us, everyone, and we'll talk to you next time. Bye.

Jeremy: Bye now.

Detailed Explanations

To connect the dots

Idiom

The first main expression in this episode is **to connect the dots**. This expression means to understand a situation or a problem after having thought about it. Think of those children's mental exercise books where you have a series of dots with numbers beside them. It looks like random dots on a page, but when you draw lines **connecting the dots**, a picture emerges.

You can say this expression when you understand the bigger picture because you linked together all the different bits of information that you have.

Here are a couple more examples with **to connect the dots**:

Freddie: Did you enjoy the movie?

Winston: Not all that much. I didn't understand it.

Freddie: Really? It's not that complicated.

Winston: Actually, I'm pretty terrible at **connecting the dots**. Would you mind explaining what happened to the sister in the movie? I don't get it.

Kathy: I heard your wife is pregnant. Congratulations!

Frank: Thanks! Yeah, it's amazing.

Kathy: How did she tell you about it?

Frank: It's pretty funny. She came home one day from the supermarket. But in the groceries, there were diapers and baby pyjamas. I thought that was strange, but finally I **connected the dots** and figured it out.

Kathy: Ha! That must have been a shock.

To piece together [something]

Phrasal verb

The second main expression in this episode is **to piece together [something]**. This expression is similar to the first one since they both deal with figuring something out using information. The main difference between the two key expressions in this episode is that **to piece together [something]** often implies difficulty. There is some kind of challenge in finding the information and **piecing it together**. However, when you are connecting the dots, the solution can be very simple, with all of the information laid out in front of you.

You can also say **to piece together [something]** when you are assembling something from different parts. For example, you can **piece together a meal** from yesterday's leftovers.

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

George: I'm still having difficulty with this problem.

Teacher: Did you go through steps 1 to 5 like I asked you?

George: Actually, I skipped step 5.

Teacher: That's the issue. You see, after you complete all the steps, that's when you'll be able **to piece together what you've learned**.

Patrick: Have you been following the news?

Nelly: Just a little. What's been going on?

Patrick: There's an association of 10 countries in the region that are trying **to piece together a trade agreement**.

Nelly: Oh, boy. How do you think that will affect our company?

Patrick: We'll have to see what kind of agreement they come up with.

The whole picture

Phrase

Both main expressions in this episode deal with trying to make sense of a bigger picture. Sometimes you can only understand a situation when you take a step back and look at **the whole picture**. For example, if you only pay attention to one small corner of a painting, you cannot fully appreciate the whole painting, or **the whole picture**.

The whole picture is a useful expression to say when you feel like you are only looking at some small aspect of a problem. In that case, you should remind yourself to look at **the whole picture**, which means to look at all the aspects of the problem.

Here are a couple more examples with **the whole picture**:

Benji: It seems like our kitchenware department is hurting our total profits.

Kiko: I agree, but I don't think that's the only problem. We need to look at **the whole picture**.

Benji: How will we do that?

Kiko: I suggest we hire someone from outside our company. We need a fresh pair of eyes.

Benji: OK. I'll tell human resources.

Dana: I don't think I'll come jogging with you this afternoon. My knee is still sore.

Julianne: Still?

Dana: Yeah. I've been to a knee specialist, but I'm still having problems.

Julianne: Maybe you should look at **the whole picture**. Often enough, when you have a muscle problem somewhere, the cause might be somewhere else. It's all connected.

To funnel money

Idiom

In the first example dialogue of this episode, two coworkers talk about another coworker who had been doing something illegal. He was **funnelling money** into an overseas bank account. **To funnel money** is to transfer money. However, this expression is almost always used when talking about criminal activity. Criminals will **funnel money** in the hopes that no one notices the missing funds because the amounts are small.

You can also funnel other things, such as goods or information. That also has the sense of something illegal. However, you can funnel water or other liquids. In this sense, you are transferring the liquid through a narrow passage.

Here are a couple more examples with **to funnel money**:

Victor: Is Charles coming with us this weekend?

Shane: No, he isn't. Actually, I have some bad news. Charles has been accused of **funnelling money** at his work.

Victor: Oh, no.

Shane: Yeah. He's already been to court to plead not guilty. He's not in jail, but I doubt he wants to hang out with us this weekend.

Chelsea: Did you hear about the spy they arrested?

Evie: A spy? Do those people exist in real life?

Chelsea: It looks like it. Apparently some low-level government official was **funnelling state secrets** to other governments.

Evie: Just like in the movies? I'm pretty shocked to hear this.

I never would have guessed

Idiom

At the end of the first example dialogue, one of the coworkers says **he never would have guessed** that their coworker Jason was a criminal. You can say **I never would have guessed** when you are surprising at hearing something. Because Jason seemed like a normal guy, the coworker was surprised to hear of his criminal activity.

The idea behind this expression is that if you were given all the guesses in the world, you still wouldn't have come up with that answer or situation. You can also change the subject in the expression, as in **he never would have guessed** or **you never would have guessed**.

Here are a couple more examples with **I never would have guessed**:

Heather: How was the wedding ceremony?

Miyoung: It was pretty sweet. Everyone was really well dressed and the decor was romantic.

Heather: Did they have a good DJ?

Miyoung: Yeah. Some people even took to the microphone to sing. Do you know Sheila?

Heather: Of course.

Miyoung: **I never would have guessed** it, but she's an amazing singer. She killed it.

Heather: Wow. She's usually a pretty shy person.

Vickie: Take a look at this picture.

Melissa: Oh, wow, did you get a dog?

Vickie: We sure did.

Melissa: **I never would have guessed** you were a dog person. I always thought you were a cat person.

To be up to no good

Idiom

After the first example dialogue, Andrew describes Jason as **being up to no good**. **To be up to no good** is a common expression meaning you do bad things. There is also the sense that it's on purpose. Your actions might be immoral and possibly illegal, and you intended them to be that way.

Here are a couple more examples with **to be up to no good**:

Jessica: What were you like when you were a teenager?

Peter: Oh, you don't want to know.

Jessica: Why's that?

Peter: Let's say that I **was often up to no good**.

Jessica: Oh, you were one of those teenagers.

Peter: Yeah. I got in trouble a lot. But don't worry, I've been a good boy ever since I became an adult.

Mother: Where are you off to?

Jimmy: I'm going to hang out with a friend.

Mother: OK. Which friend?

Jimmy: Just Benny.

Mother: Jimmy, you know I don't like it when you hang around him.

Jimmy: But, Mom, he's my friend.

Mother: I know that. But he's **always up to no good**. One of these days you'll get in trouble too. I'm sorry, but I don't want you playing with him anymore.

Quiz

1. What does it mean to connect the dots?

- a) to draw
- b) to build something
- c) to understand something
- d) to connect with someone

2. Which of the following is NOT a good example of something you can funnel?

- a) money
- b) information
- c) liquid
- d) affection

3. If you are up to no good, what kind of things are you doing?

- a) good things
- b) bad things
- c) neither good nor bad
- d) it depends on the situation

4. In what situation would you say I never would have guessed?

- a) when you can't guess the answer
- b) when you are surprised
- c) when you don't want to guess the answer
- d) when you never try to guess the answer

5. Which of the following does NOT have a similar meaning?

- a) to connect the dots
- b) to piece together something
- c) to fully understand a problem
- d) to not care about a problem

Writing and Discussion Questions

1. Are you the type of person who likes to piece things together? Talk about a recent situation when you either have or haven't tried to piece something together.
2. What's the most difficult puzzle you have ever tried to solve? You can talk about a jigsaw puzzle or some kind of difficult mental exercise.
3. When is the last time you realized you needed to take a step back and look at the whole picture?
4. Who was someone you knew in your neighbourhood growing up who was always up to no good?
5. You can say the expression I never would have guessed when you are surprised at hearing some kind of news. When is the last time you could have used this expression?

Quiz Answers

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

Episode credits

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