

Catch Word #246 – Butterfingers

Episode description

Are you clumsy and uncoordinated? You're not alone! In this episode, Andrew and Kassy teach us two ways to talk about being clumsy and share stories where they broke things by accident.

Culips' Catch Word series teaches you idioms, phrasal verbs, and expressions that help improve your English listening and speaking skills. Our online English grammar episodes are the best way to learn English. With Catch Word, you learn common phrases used by native English speakers while listening to a casual, natural conversation. You'll even learn new ways to refer to clumsy actions!

Fun fact

According to a 2007 study from the University of Delaware, clumsiness is something we're born with. They quizzed 1500 student athletes and found that those with the slowest mental reaction times and processing speeds were the most likely to get injured. If you're a naturally clumsy person, doctors suggest slowing down and taking in your surroundings before you act—that will help reduce the number of accidents.

Expressions included in the study guide

- Butterfingers
- Klutz
- Pump [someone] up
- Deets
- Lighten the mood
- Umbrella term



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 there, everyone. My name's Andrew.

Kassy: And I'm Kassy.

Andrew: And this is the Culips English Podcast.

Hello, friends. Welcome back to Culips. Today we have a Catch Word episode prepared for you. Now Catch Word is our series where we teach you idioms, phrasal verbs, and expressions that will help improve your English listening and speaking. And in this episode, our topic is breaking things and being clumsy. And we'll teach you two informal ways that you can talk about clumsy and uncoordinated people. And to help me teach this lesson, I have my cohost Kassy here with me. Hey, Kassy. How's it going?

Kassy: Doing great, Andrew.

Andrew: Good. And we're gonna kick it off today with a shout-out from one of our listeners from Columbia, who recently left us a five-star rating and nice review on Apple Podcasts. That listener's name is Ricardo and, Kassy, do you want to do us the honours and read the review that Ricardo left for us?

Kassy: Of course. So Ricardo wrote, "Culips is the best ESL podcast I have ever found. In the last 5 years I've been studying English through different podcasts. And this podcast is by far the most incredible one. The topics are very interesting. The sound quality is great. The pronunciation is crystal clear. And, of course, the hosts are really nice. It is so strange sometimes I think that Andrew, Kassy, and Jeremy are kind of like old friends. I highly recommend this podcast to anyone who wants to improve their English level. Thank you guys. God bless you. You really changed my way of learning English, making it fun and easy. Please keep going with these fantastic podcasts." Wow, Ricardo, that was an amazing review.

Andrew: Yes, thank you, Ricardo. It makes our day to read reviews like this and to hear that what we are doing is valuable. And it's really motivating and encouraging for us. So we would encourage everyone to support what we do here at Culips by leaving us a nice review, like Ricardo's, and a five-star rating on Apple Podcasts or whichever podcast service you use. It does **pump us up** and motivates us to keep making helpful English lessons for everyone. And at the same time, it helps spread the word about Culips so that English learners around the world can find us and learn with us. So we would really appreciate that. And thanks again, Ricardo, for that awesome review.

Don't forget that there's a transcript and a study guide for this episode that's available for all Culips members on our website, Culips.com. And following along with the guide while you listen to us here today is the best way to study with us and we highly recommend it. And, plus, when you become Culips members, you'll get a bunch of other awesome benefits, like invitations to our monthly livestreams and access to our members-only series, the Fluency Files. So to sign up, become a member, and get the study guide and transcript for today's episode, just visit Culips.com.

Now, Kassy, it's funny that I just mentioned the Fluency Files, because today I recorded a brand-new Fluency Files episode for all of our Culips members. And it was a very sad episode because I talked in that episode about how I've been a **butterfingers** lately and have been breaking things all around my house over the last 6 months or so, accidentally. I won't get into the details. I'll save all of those **deets** for the Fluency Files episode because I don't want to spoil it for our Culips members, but it inspired me to create this Catch Word episode today using this word **butterfingers** and talking about clumsy people. And in fact that is our first expression for today, **butterfingers**.

So, Kassy, could you explain what it means to all of our listeners: who is a **butterfingers**?

Kassy: A **butterfingers** is a person who drops things really easily or often. You can kind of think like your fingers are coated in greasy butter. So every time you pick something up, it slips right through your fingers and drops to the ground.

Andrew: Yeah, exactly. I think that is the best way to imagine it. I actually think of a hand that is just carved out of butter. So like the whole hand is made out of butter and you're trying to pick something up.

Kassy: What?

Andrew: That's just the image I have in my head. And you try to pick something up, and it just falls through because you have no grip, no traction when your fingers are greasy like that. So just anyone who can't hold things very well, is always dropping things, that person we can call a **butterfingers**.

Kassy, do you think this is an offensive thing to call someone? Like if you dropped something and I said, "Oh, Kassy, you're such a **butterfingers**," would you have hurt feelings? Is this a strong expression, or how would you feel?

Kassy: I think if you're a sensitive person, yeah, but for most people, no. But it just, like, adds insult to injury a little bit, like, you already feel stupid for dropping it. And now they just, you know, push those buttons and make you feel worse.

Andrew: Right. I mean, I'd rather somebody call me a **butterfingers** than a loser or an idiot or stupid or something like that. So I think it's a little bit lighter. But, yeah, it could hurt you in the right context. But I think overall, it's a pretty lighthearted expression.

Kassy: Yeah. And then, lastly, I think it's better to make a joke out of something like that. Instead of, you know, jumping to anger, like, "Come on, man why'd you drop that?" Like, "What's with you?" Instead if you're just, like, "Haha, **butterfingers**," like, it **lightens the mood**.

Andrew: Kassy, I've hinted here that I'm a bit of a **butterfingers**. And lately I've been breaking and dropping things around my house. But what about you? Are you a **butterfingers** like I am?

Kassy: No, not generally, unless I'm playing baseball or kickball, then I can never seem to catch the ball, I'm a total **butterfingers**.

Andrew: One thing that I just thought of here, as well, is that a **butterfingers** even though we are comparing somebody's hands to that of somebody's hands that are, like, covered in butter or grease doesn't necessarily mean that somebody's got, like, dirty, greasy fingers and that's the reason that they're dropping things, right? Like, I'm not walking around in my house with dirty hands that are greasy and slippery, everyone. Please don't get it confused. It is just a way, a kind of metaphor that we use to talk about people who drop things.

Kassy: Exactly.

Andrew: All right, so with that being said, had to clear that up before people get the wrong impression about me, we should move to conversation example #1. So let's take a listen to it now.

Kassy: Sounds good.

Friend 1: So, I have a confession to make.

Friend 2: Uh oh, what is it?

Friend 1: I broke your grandma's teapot.

Friend 2: You what?

Friend 1: I didn't mean to. It was an accident.

Friend 2: You're such a **butterfingers**.

Friend 1: I know, it just slipped out of my hands. I'm so sorry. I'll pay to replace it.

Friend 2: You can't replace a family heirloom. Do me a favour and don't touch any of my stuff again.

Andrew: In that conversation example, we heard about a guy who dropped his friend's grandma's teapot and broke it. And when he told her, she wasn't very happy to hear about that and she called him a **butterfingers**. And this is a perfect example of a **butterfingers**. He accidentally dropped the teapot, maybe when he was making tea or something, and broke it and this is what a **butterfingers** does. They drop things accidentally.

Kassy: Great. Now let's take a listen to example #2.

Friend 1: My brother's such a **butterfingers**. I just heard from my mom that he dropped his new phone and shattered it into a million pieces.

Friend 2: Oh, wow. That sucks. I've done that before, too.

Friend 1: Yeah, I guess so have I, now that I think about it.

Friend 2: I guess we're all **butterfingers** then.

Kassy: In this example, we hear about a bunch of people who are all **butterfingers** because each of them at one point in their life have dropped their phones and broken the screens, which, I don't know about you, Andrew, but I have also done this.

Andrew: Yeah, I've done that twice in my life, Kassy. But hopefully I will never do it again. Thankfully, the phones are getting better and better at not breaking even if you drop them because, in fact, I have dropped my current phone. But thankfully it didn't break. So I was a **butterfingers** and I dropped it. But I was lucky in that it didn't shatter and break when I did.

Let's move on to our second expression for today, which is **klutz, klutz**. And this is a fun one to say. It feels really fun when it comes out of your mouth. And the spelling for all of our listeners is K-L-U-T-Z, or zee if you're an American, like Kassy, and the pronunciation is **klutz**.

So, Kassy, break it down for us. What is a **klutz**? What does this mean?

Kassy: A **klutz** is kind of like an **umbrella term** for a clumsy person. It's a really uncoordinated person who might drop things, fall down, or bump into things. They're just not so good at moving in general. They're not coordinated.

Andrew: Yeah, exactly. Moving through space is difficult for people who are **klutzes**. We can also use this as an adjective to say that someone is klutzy, right? He walks in such a klutzy way or he tries to catch the ball in such a klutzy way. That is another form of this expression.

Kassy: Yes, I can say honestly that I am a bit of a **klutz**.

Andrew: A bit of a **klutz**. But you play a lot of sports and you're really athletic, Kassy. I usually don't think of athletic people as being klutzy.

Kassy: You'd be surprised, because in the sports that I do, I'm kind of coordinated. But in any other sport that I try, I'm a major **klutz**. I don't know how that works, but that's how it is for me.

Andrew: I can say that I am a bit of a **butterfingers** from time to time, but I don't think I'm too klutzy. I don't feel super uncoordinated. And usually when I want my body to move in some direction, it does. And, in fact, sometimes I am amazed by how quick our bodies can subconsciously react. You know, like, if you're going to trip or fall or something. It's like your body can catch itself and be, whoa, you're like a cat or something.

Kassy: You would think so. But this really brings to mind one of my students this year. I love him to death but he is the biggest **klutz** I've ever met, Andrew. He has fallen and proceeded to cut himself every single day this week. Every day, I end up taking him to the nurse during recess. And Miss Lee, the nurse, goes, "Oh, you're here again." It's become kind of a joke in our school that this student falls every single day.

Andrew: Yeah, well, I think for kids and especially for teenagers who are going through puberty and maybe a growth spurt, you know, they are adjusting to the changes in their body. And that can be a really awkward time where they're very uncoordinated and clumsy, really, and just act like a **klutz** until they kind of grow out of it and get used to moving in their bodies. So definitely there are kids and teenagers out there who are huge **klutzes**.

And, Kassy, we're gonna listen to some conversation examples now where we'll get to hear about some of these **klutzes**. So let's take a listen to conversation example #1 right now.

Kassy: OK.

Friend 1: Did you ever play on a sports team when you were younger?

Friend 2: Yeah, I played on the Little League baseball team when I was seven.

Friend 1: You did? I never knew that. Were you any good?

Friend 2: No, I was terrible. I was such a **klutz** when I was younger. I struck out every time I was at bat.

Friend 1: Well, at least you grew out of it.

Friend 2: Yeah, I'm not nearly as awkward and klutzy as I used to be.

Andrew: So in this conversation, we heard two friends talking and they were chatting about baseball. One of the friends played on the Little League baseball team when he was an elementary school student, around 7 years old. Little League baseball is the name that we call children's and teenagers' baseball leagues in North America. And this guy, he was a **klutz** when he was younger. He was a terrible baseball player. He didn't have any hand-eye coordination. His fine motor skills were lacking. And he just couldn't hit the ball when he was trying to hit it when he was batting, so he was a **klutz**. But at least as he grew up and he got older, he grew out of it and he's not klutzy anymore.

Kassy: Great. With that example conversation out of the way, let's move to example conversation #2.

Friend 1: What's the most embarrassing thing that's ever happened to you at work?

Friend 2: Oh, boy. So, one time when I worked at a restaurant as a server, I tripped and dropped a whole plate of spaghetti onto one of my customers.

Friend 1: Oh my gosh, really? So what happened next?

Friend 2: Get this. He was wearing a white suit. It was completely covered in tomato sauce. It looked like a murder scene.

Friend 1: So did you get fired?

Friend 2: Yeah, I got fired for that one. I mean, I guess it was kind of the restaurant's fault in the first place for hiring a **klutz** like me.

Kassy: OK, so in this conversation, we hear a hilarious story about a girl who got fired for being a total **klutz**. She was so uncoordinated that she tripped and spilled an entire plate of spaghetti onto one of her customers, which ended up in her being fired, unfortunately. I can say from experience as a server, though, those trays are heavy, even if you're not a total **klutz**. Sometimes mistakes happen.

Andrew: Absolutely. Absolutely.

Well, everyone, this brings us to the end of today's episode. So thank you for listening. We hope that you learned a lot with us here today. Just to recap, what we covered were two expressions that you can use to talk about people who are uncoordinated and awkward and not very good at holding onto things or moving through space. So the first expression was **butterfingers**, and the second expression was **klutz**.

If you enjoyed this episode and if it helped you to improve your English, then we'd love it if you could support us. There are several ways that you can do that, such as signing up and becoming a Culips member on our website, Culips.com. This is the best way to support us. And we appreciate all of our Culips members so much.

But that's not the only way that you can help us out. You could, of course, follow us on social media, tell your friends who are learning English about us, or leave us a five-star rating and a nice review on your favourite podcast platform, like Apple Podcasts or wherever you get your podcasts.

If you have any questions for us, then please send us a message. Our email address is contact@Culips.com. We read all of our messages and respond as soon as we can.

That is it for us for now. But we'll be back soon with another brand-new episode and we'll talk to you then. Take care, everyone. Goodbye.

Kassy: Bye.

Detailed Explanations

Butterfingers

Noun

Butterfingers is a person who often drops things they are carrying or trying to catch. Usually, this person is clumsy in general, but that isn't always the case. **Butterfingers** is used two ways. First, someone can be a **butterfingers**. Andrew used the term this way in the episode when he said, "I've been a **butterfingers** lately." Second, you can have **butterfingers**. For example, you could say, "I dropped my phone! I have **butterfingers** today."

Butterfingers was first used between 1830 and 1840. It comes from the idea that hands covered in butter are slippery, making it difficult to hold or catch things. It's often used in baseball as an insult to players who don't catch a ball during the game.

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

Ellen: I really like my old phone, but as you can see, I drop it a lot.

Salesperson: Then we'll set you up with this solid case that has a rubber back, so it won't slip out of your hands as much.

Ellen: Oh, that sounds good! Though I'll have to test it out to believe it. I'm such a **butterfingers**, I drop everything I try to carry!

Salesperson: Don't worry! The case is reinforced, so it'll protect your phone even if you drop it. I've got **butterfingers** too, and I use this case. Dropped my phone from my second floor balcony once, and there wasn't a single scratch!

Sung-Hyun: What are we going to do, Jae!

Jae: What? What happened?

Sung-Hyun: I dropped the cake!

Jae: What? Oh no ... Way to go, **butterfingers**.

Sung-Hyun: I know, I know. I feel bad enough as it is. The party starts in an hour!

Jae: I'll go to the store and buy one. It'll be OK! Just keep setting up.

Klutz

Noun

A **klutz** is a person who runs into things, drops things, and has accidents. They are very clumsy and sometimes awkward or foolish. As Kassy explains in this episode, a **klutz** is “a really uncoordinated person who might drop things, fall down, or bump into things. They’re just not so good at moving in general. They’re not coordinated.”

Klutz is most often used in Canada and the United States. It’s an Americanized version of the Yiddish word klots, which means “block or lump.”

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

Eric: Are you and your brother free this weekend? I need some help moving. I’ll give you beer and pizza!

Christopher: Yeah, we’re free. I’m always up for beer and pizza! What time should we be at your place? And where are you moving?

Eric: Can you swing by around 10:00? I’m moving down the street, not too far. It just means carrying a lot of things a few blocks. I have a cart, though, for the heavier things.

Christopher: Sounds good. We’ll be there for 10:00. Don’t let my brother carry anything fragile, though! He’s a huge **klutz**.

Eric: Oh, I remember. I’ve got lots of unbreakable things he can carry. We’ll handle the fragile stuff!

Georgia: We’re going out dancing tomorrow night! You wanna come?

Demi: Sure! If you don’t mind that I’m a terrible dancer.

Georgia: How is that possible? Didn’t you study ballet for, like, all your childhood?

Demi: Oh, I did. Doesn’t mean I was any good at it! Turns out I’m too much of a **klutz** to dance.

Georgia: Ha, I didn’t know that! Don’t worry, the dance floor is usually packed, so you can just bob your head and wave your arms to the beat.

Demi: Sounds perfect. I’m in.

Pump [someone] up

Phrasal verb

Pump [someone] up means to make someone feel more confident, excited, or enthusiastic. In this episode, Andrew says that reviews “**pump us up**.” He means that the reviews make us feel more confident and excited, which is what motivates us.

The “someone” can be a single person or a group. For example, a coach **pumps the team up** before a game. You can also **pump yourself up**. In this case, you’re boosting your confidence and telling yourself you will succeed.

This phrase comes from the idea that when you pump up something, you inflate it or increase its volume. So when you **pump someone up**, you’re inflating or increasing their excitement and energy.

Here are a couple more examples with **pump [someone] up**:

Mariko: Wow. That test was, like, so hard! I thought I was ready for it, but I definitely wasn’t. You know?

Heather: I know! I was super nervous, I even **pumped myself up** before class started. But it wasn’t enough.

Mariko: I hear you. I think Mrs. Monoko wants us to fail!

Heather: Same here. I studied so hard! Ugh. I guess I’ll have to do those extra credit projects after all.

Dexter: That concert was wicked, man! I’m so glad you invited me along.

Katsuito: It was awesome, wasn’t it? I really like seeing those guys in concert.

Dexter: I was totally floored by the fireworks! Do they always have stuff like that at their shows?

Katsuito: Pretty much, yeah! They have this way of **pumping up the crowd** with their performances, so it’s always a good time.

Deets Slang

Deets is short for details. It most often refers to gossip or contact information. For example, you might ask someone for all the **deets** about an argument or situation. You could also ask them for their **deets**, meaning their phone number or email address. In this episode, Andrew says he'll "save all of those **deets** for the Fluency Files episode." He's using **deets** in the first sense: he'll save his story's details for the Fluency Files episode.

Deets first appeared between 1985 and 1990. It's used more in text-based communication such as emails and text messages than in spoken conversation.

Here are a few more examples with **deets**:

Kyō: You moved last weekend, right?

Eric: Yup! Getting all settled into the new place.

Kyō: Sorry I couldn't come to help you move! My mom needed help with some stuff around the house. I can swing by today, though, if you need help unpacking.

Eric: Actually, yeah! That'd be great. I have a few things that should definitely be done with two people.

Kyō: Cool! Send me your **deets** and I'll head over now.

Saori: Did you hear about Katelyn and John?

Lillian: No! Did something happen? Are they having trouble?

Saori: Something did happen!!

Lillian: Oh my goodness, Saori, don't keep me in suspense! I need **deets**, like, now!

Chelsea: Hi! I'm leaving work in about 30 minutes. What's the plan for tonight? What time should I meet you and where? Who is going to be there? Text me back with the **deets**!

Lighten the mood

Idiom

Lighten the mood means to make a situation or attitude less serious or boring. When you **lighten the mood**, you're making the environment or atmosphere more relaxed and happier. This can be done by telling a joke or changing the conversation topic.

You can also **lighten somebody's mood**. If someone is in a bad mood—maybe they're angry or impatient—you could tell a joke or encourage them. You make the other person more cheerful, happy, and relaxed.

This idiom is used in different ways. For example, you could also say **lighten the atmosphere** or **lighten things up**. You can also tell someone to **lighten up**.

Here are a couple more examples with **lighten the mood**:

Yusuf: Man, I really like hanging out with you. I dunno what it is, but I can just never stay mad or upset when you're around.

Jong: It must be because I'm a middle child. It's my job to be funny and happy and, you know, **lighten the mood**.

Yusuf: There's so much that gets me down nowadays and hanging with you keeps me positive, you know?

Jong: That's really awesome, dude. I'm glad I can be a little ray of sunshine for you.

Sakurako: So, this scene here is really dark. I like it, it works with the plot, but the scene right after is just as dark. I think we need something here, but I can't figure out what.

Joe: Oh, yeah, I was thinking the same! We need a little scene there to just **lighten things up** a bit. Give the audience a little breather from the seriousness.

Sakurako: Yeah! That's it exactly! Hmm ... What if we added a comedic encounter between the main character and, I dunno, a cat? A kid? What will **lighten the mood** enough?

Joe: I see what you're getting at. How about ... You know, I like the cat idea. We could have him try to befriend a stray cat on his way from the meeting to the funeral? And, like, the stray leads him around the set, and he keeps tripping on things?

Sakurako: Perfect! Let's get the others here and we'll write this out.

Umbrella term

Noun

An **umbrella term** is a word or phrase that refers to a group of concepts or words that belong to a specific category. You can also say **blanket term** or **hypernym**.

For example, heart attacks, angina, and arrhythmia are all types of heart disease. So “heart disease” is the **umbrella term** for different types of heart conditions. Kassy mentions another example in this episode. She says, “A klutz is kind of like an **umbrella term** for a clumsy person.” There are different ways to be clumsy. You could drop things a lot, frequently bump into furniture or walls, or behave in an awkward way. These are all clumsy behaviours and included in the term klutz.

Here are a couple more examples with **umbrella term**:

Teacher: Today, we’re continuing with English grammar

Katherine: What? Did I miss the lesson on idioms? I thought that was today.

Teacher: Well, yes. We’ll be covering idioms today.

Katherine: But you said we’ll be talking about grammar!

Teacher: Grammar is an **umbrella term** referring to all the whole system and structure of language. Idioms are a part of that, so they’re included in English grammar.

Katherine: Oh, OK. So I didn’t miss a lesson?

Teacher: No, you did not. Now, may I continue teaching?

Min-Jun: I’m so glad you’re cool with driving me home after work tonight. Where’s your car parked? I can meet you there when we’ve clocked out.

Shi: I drive a truck.

Min-Jun: Oh, sorry. I know. I was using car as an **umbrella term** for, you know, things that we drive.

Shi: Ah, OK. Sorry for being short with you. I’m parked in the north lot. We can meet at that exit there.

Quiz

1. Klutz and butterfingers are words that describe:

- a) dirty hands
- b) clumsy people
- c) annoying objects
- d) beautiful things

2. Which of the following means a word or phrase that refers to a group of concepts or words that belong to a specific category?

- a) umbrella academy
- b) blanket fort
- c) umbrella term
- d) terms of endearment

3. The coach pumps his team up before the game. What is he doing?

- a) making the team more confident
- b) blowing air into the team
- c) making the team do weight exercises
- d) inflating the balls for the game

4. If someone asks you for the deets, what should you give them?

- a) the bug spray
- b) nothing
- c) the details
- d) a hug

5. When you lighten the mood, you are:

- a) turning on the lights
- b) opening up the blinds
- c) filling a balloon with helium
- d) making a situation less serious

Writing and Discussion Questions

1. Describe a time when you were a klutz or had butterfingers.
2. How would you pump a friend up if they were nervous about a test or competition?
3. Has anyone ever asked you for your deets? How did you respond?
4. Imagine your group of friends is sad about a team losing a game. Share a few ideas on how you would lighten the mood.
5. Write down a few umbrella terms in your native language and what they describe.

Quiz Answers

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

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