

Catch Word #251 – You’ve improved by leaps and bounds!

Episode description

We’re back with another Catch Word episode! In this episode, Andrew and Kassy teach you some idiomatic expressions or phrases to use when talking about something that improves or gets better. Tune in to improve your English listening skills by leaps and bounds!

Catch Word is a great series that focuses on key vocabulary and phrases used in all sorts of common everyday English conversations. While this episode focuses on phrases that you might use when talking about making progress, improving, or getting better at something, it is also chock-full of other useful expressions highlighted in the study guide.

Fun fact

There are thousands of books and articles out in the world telling people how to improve their mental health, sleep patterns, exercise habits, study habits, financial literacy, and much more. What’s interesting is that these articles and books all say the exact same thing to a certain degree. Most self-improvement or self-help books tend to agree that the #1 way to make significant improvements in anything you set out to achieve is to make small, concise goals and then a routine or plan to achieve those goals, and to consistently execute that plan each and every day.

Expressions included in the study guide

- By leaps and bounds
- To bomb [something]
- Out and about
- On the up and up
- To be in the moment
- To branch off



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 there, friends. Welcome back to Culips. Today we have a Catch Word episode planned for you. Now, Catch Word is the Culips series where we teach you idioms, phrasal verbs, or expressions that will help you improve your English listening and speaking. And in this episode, we'll teach you two idiomatic expressions that we use when talking about something that improves or gets better. And to help me teach this lesson today, I'm joined by my cohost, Kassy. Hello there, Kassy.

Kassy: Hey, Andrew, and hey, everyone. Today we're going to learn how to use the expressions **by leaps and bounds** and **on the up and up**. We use both of these expressions when we want to emphasize how much something has improved or is improving. We'll start the lesson in just a sec. But before we do, guys, make sure to follow along with the study guide and transcript for this episode. It's available for all Culips members on our website, Culips.com, and is the best way to study with us here today.

Andrew: Absolutely. Now, we also want to give a shout-out to NHP, that was the username, Kassy, NHP, one of our listeners from Vietnam who left us a five-star rating and a great review on Apple Podcasts. NHP wrote, "Your channel is hands down the best podcast I've ever heard. Please keep up the good work."

Kassy: The best.

Andrew: Thanks a lot, NHP. That is a very, very kind review. We really appreciate it. And, listeners, if you'd like to get a shout-out in an upcoming Culips episode, then please just leave us a five-star rating and a short review on your favourite podcast app.

And now it's time for us to start this episode in earnest. So let's do that by taking a look at the first expression for today, which, Kassy, as you said just a moment ago is **leaps and bounds**. Or sometimes we say **by leaps and bounds**. And it means to quickly or substantially improve or get better. So when something improves very, very quickly or by a lot, there is a great improvement, then we can use this expression **by leaps and bounds**.

Kassy, why don't we break this one down piece by piece? Because I think there are some words in it that maybe our listeners are not familiar with. So as a whole this expression, it's an idiom, so it has a different meaning when we put it all together, but the individual words, what do they mean? What is a leap? L-E-A-P, leap. What does that mean?

Kassy: So a leap is like a big jump. For example, a frog leaps across the ground. Frogs are extraordinarily great jumpers. So a leap is a big jump.

Andrew: Yes. And a bound—the spelling here is B-O-U-N-D, bound. And this is also very similar to a jump. It's like a running jump. When you're running and you take a jump, maybe you could picture an Olympic athlete doing the long jump or something, right? They run down to the line and then they bound or leap. It's this kind of motion. And so both of these words mean kind of to jump or to move yourself forward while moving very quickly.

And then when we put it together, we get the idiomatic meaning, which means to substantially improve or get better. So you could almost visualize your current self and then if you take a jump forward, you are more advanced, right? You are farther along than where you started. And I think this is the imagery behind this expression is that you're jumping forward, you're improving, you're getting better. Would you agree with that, Kassy? Is that what you think of when you picture this expression?

Kassy: I think this expression is really easy to visualize, you know, learning a language or learning a new skill is a journey. And if you're, you know, improving really quickly, you're, you know, going ahead on that journey faster. You're leaping to the next level.

Andrew: And apparently this expression is quite old. It was first used by Shakespeare back in the day, back hundreds of years ago. So, for whatever reason, since we read it in Shakespeare, English speakers found themselves attached to this expression and we've been using it ever since to talk about improving a lot.

So, Kassy, I think now we're ready to take a listen to a couple of examples. Why don't we listen to the first conversation example with this expression, **leaps and bounds**, now?

Kassy: Sounds great.

Coworker 1: Great job today. Your presentation was awesome.

Coworker 2: Thanks. I didn't seem too nervous?

Coworker 1: No, not at all.

Coworker 2: That's a relief. Last time I made a presentation, I totally **bombed** because I was just way too nervous.

Coworker 1: No, today's presentation was **leaps and bounds** better than last time. You must have practiced or something.

Coworker 2: Yeah, after the disaster from last time, I practiced a ton to make sure I wouldn't **bomb it** again.

Coworker 1: Well, it worked. It was honestly a really great presentation.

Coworker 2: Thanks.

Andrew: So in this example, we heard two coworkers talking about a presentation that was **leaps and bounds** better than a previous presentation. So one of the coworkers made a presentation in the past and she was really nervous and **bombed it**. Now, Kassy, to **bomb a presentation**, what does that mean?

Kassy: It means to utterly fail. You did a horrible job.

Andrew: Yeah. So if you **bomb something**, especially, we use this expression, when we're talking about public speaking, right? If you're making a presentation, or I hear sometimes stand-up comedians talk about **bombing**, they go on stage to tell some jokes, and nobody laughs and they totally fail.

Kassy: That's the worst.

Andrew: It's got to be a bad feeling. They say, "Oh, I **bombed**." So it means to do really poorly when in front of other people presenting or talking. So that presentation was a failure. And so she didn't want to **bomb** again so she went home and practiced. And when she made the presentation this time, it was much better. It was **leaps and bounds** better. So that means that there was a significant improvement between the first presentation and the most recent presentation.

Kassy: Yes, that's exactly right. And how about we take a listen to our next example?

Friend 1: Maybe it's because I haven't visited your neighbourhood for a while, but it seems like it's really grown a lot. There are so many people **out and about**. I remember it being really dead last time I was here, but it seems so vibrant and bustling now.

Friend 2: Yeah, over the last year or so the neighbourhood has grown **by leaps and bounds**. There are a few new apartment buildings that were built and some small businesses have opened up. It's really changed a lot, but I love it here.

Friend 1: I'm gonna have to come hang out here more often.

Friend 2: Yeah, next time you come we can check out this cool used bookstore that just opened up last month.

Friend 1: Oh, yeah. Let's totally do that. Sounds great.

Kassy: OK, so in this example, two friends are walking through a neighbourhood that has grown **by leaps and bounds**. And this means that not that long ago, this neighbourhood was dead. There wasn't much to do. There weren't many people hanging out there. But since the friend last visited the neighbourhood, the neighbourhood has grown significantly. It has grown **by leaps and bounds**. There are small businesses opening up and lots of hustle and bustle and things to do.

Andrew: Yeah, exactly. So it sounds like this neighbourhood has really grown a lot recently. And to emphasize that big growth, that big expansion of new apartments and small businesses and more people and a bustling, vibrant atmosphere, the friend said that the neighbourhood has grown **by leaps and bounds**.

All right, so, Kassy, I think it's time for us to transition into the second key expression for today, which is **on the up and up**, **on the up and up**. So **on the up and up** means to be continuously improving. So to compare that with expression one, **by leaps and bounds**, when we use **leaps and bounds** to describe something, it means that it's already improved a great deal. However, when something's **on the up and up**, it means it's in the state of improving, so it's getting better. Maybe it's not perfect yet, but it's improving. It's getting better and continuously doing so.

Kassy: That's right. Yeah, both expressions are similar but it depends on if you're talking about something that already happened versus something that is currently happening.

Andrew: And again, with this expression, I think it's pretty easy to visualize because that word up is repeated twice, right? **On the up and up**, you could almost just visualize somebody climbing a ladder, and with each step that they climb, they're getting higher, they're getting better, they're improving, and they're continually moving up, right? It's this kind of imagery behind this expression.

Kassy: Well, Andrew, shall we take a listen to example #1?

Andrew: Yeah. Let's take a listen to a conversation example with this expression right now.

Sister: So Mom told me you started a YouTube channel?

Brother: Yeah, I did. It's about car maintenance. I just made a few short videos to show people how to fix a flat tire or to do an oil change, that kind of thing.

Sister: So how many views do you have?

Brother: So far, not so many. But my last couple of videos got a few hundred plays each and I also got some new subscribers. So I think my channel is **on the up and up**.

Sister: Cool. Send me the link and I'll subscribe too.

Brother: Yeah, will do.

Andrew: So in this example, we hear a brother and a sister having a conversation about the brother's YouTube channel. He just started a new YouTube channel about car maintenance. And you know, he hasn't really become a popular YouTuber yet. But he's getting some more subscribers and getting a couple of hundred plays on each video. So this means that the brother thinks that his channel is trending in the right direction. It's becoming more popular, it's **on the up and up**.

Kassy: Exactly right. Let's take a listen to conversation #2.

Andrew: All right, let's do it.

Friend 1: Did you watch the game last night?

Friend 2: Yeah, it was a good one. That comeback in the last inning was so exciting.

Friend 1: So now we've won like five games in a row or something? It seems like we're finally **on the up and up**.

Friend 2: Yeah, after losing for like a month straight, it sure feels good to win some games.

Kassy: OK, in this example conversation, two people are talking about a team that has been on a losing streak. They were losing a lot in the past. But the last few games have been going really well. They're **on the up and up**. These two friends think that the team has, you know, made a comeback, a turnaround, and they're improving continuously compared to the beginning of the season.

Andrew: Exactly. Hey, Kassy, I wanted to focus on one thing from this example that we just heard, which I think is really interesting and that our listeners will find helpful as well. And that is when we talk about a sports team that we support, or that we're fans of, for some reason, we usually change the pronoun of the team to include ourself. So those two fans were talking about their favourite baseball team. And they said, "We've won like five games in a row now." "Wow, we're **on the up and up**." But they're not really players on that team, right? They're not connected to the team in any way other than they're just fans. But it's something that we do all the time when we're talking about our favourite sports team is we talk about it as if we're a part of the team and we usually say we instead of they.

Kassy: Yeah, it's really interesting, huh? I guess it's because, you know, as a fan, you're just, you feel like you're **in the moment** and sincere. A lot of the times you're watching the games live as they happen. You feel like you're really a part of it.

Andrew: Exactly. So, everyone, when you're talking about your favourite sports team in the future, you can use **we** to show that you're a big fan of that team. You could say, "I hope we win." "We've got to win this game." "Oh no, we lost." You can talk like that about your favourite team.

Kassy, there's one more thing that I wanted to mention before we wrap this episode up. And that is that **on the up and up** has another meaning. And just so that our listeners don't get confused in the future if they hear **on the up and up** used in a different context, could you tell us what the second meaning of this expression is? It's actually completely different from the first one that we already talked about.

Kassy: Yeah, that's right. So I don't know if it's like this in Canada, but in the US, we use this expression to talk about businesses that are, what's a good word, clean. Like, they're not doing any shady business. They're not doing anything illegal.

Andrew: They're not corrupt.

Kassy: Yes, they're not corrupt. They're **on the up and up**.

Andrew: So **on the up and up**, then when we're talking about a business or a business deal or maybe a politician, even, it means just a business or a person that is acting in a very correct moral way, without taking bribes or cheating or breaking the law, right? If you're **on the up and up**, you're acting in the way that you should.

Kassy: Yeah, which is so different from, you know, how we learned about it earlier in the episode, to continuously improve. I wonder how those two, you know, **branched off** way back when?

Andrew: I don't know. But that is an interesting question. And, yeah, we just thought that we would explain that quickly here just so that our listeners aren't confused if in the future you hear **on the up and up** to describe a business that is not corrupt or not breaking the law.

So that brings us to the end of this episode, everyone. Thank you so much for listening and learning English with us today. We hope that you find this episode helpful for your English listening and speaking development. So just to recap what we covered today, the first expression that we looked at today was **leaps and bounds** and it means to very quickly or very substantially improve. And the second expression was **on the up and up**, which means to continually improve, or in other contexts for a business or a person to act in a way that is very good and wholesome, without breaking the law or being corrupt.

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If you have a question or a suggestion for an upcoming episode, we'd love to hear from you. Our email address is contact@Culips.com.

We'll be back soon with another brand-new episode and we'll catch you then. Goodbye, everyone.

Kassy: See ya.

Detailed Explanations

By leaps and bounds

Idiom

To improve **by leaps and bounds** is to improve quickly and greatly. A leap or a bound is a big jump, so if you are improving **by leaps and bounds**, then you are making big jumps in your progress. Someone who is getting better **by leaps and bounds** can clearly see their progress, because the level of improvement is significant and noticeable.

Here are a couple more examples with **by leaps and bounds**:

Seungmin: Wow! Is that Hayul playing the piano right now?

Minji: Yes, it is. Isn't it amazing?

Seungmin: It's marvelous! She's improving **by leaps and bounds**. She just started learning to play a few weeks ago and she can already play a song like that?

Minji: Yes. She's a natural. It's hard to believe she's only 6 years old.

Aidan: Ugh. I'm still not getting this. Why is math so hard?

Jason: Maybe you should hire a tutor.

Aidan: Isn't that kind of expensive?

Jason: Yeah, but it's totally worth it. I hired a tutor to help me prepare for an exam last summer and it was worth every penny. I never would have passed my exam without my tutor's help. Once she started helping me, I improved **by leaps and bounds**.

Aidan: Does that tutor of yours teach math?

Jason: Sure. You want her contact info?

Aidan: Yeah, why not? I'll try anything at this point. I'm desperate.

To bomb [something]

Verb, slang

To bomb something is to completely fail at something. This slang verb is most often used in reference to tests. If you **bomb a test**, then you get a really horrible grade. However, you can refer to anything that you fail as **bombing it**, such as **bombing a date**, **bombing a dance competition**, or **bombing a new recipe**.

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

Nina: How did your interview go yesterday? Did you get the job?

Jasmine: Oh my goodness, no. I totally **bombed it!**

Nina: Really? How?

Jasmine: Well, the boss asked me to list three different kinds of steak and I couldn't do it.

Nina: You want to be a waitress in a steakhouse and you don't even know three different kinds of steak?

Jasmine: I'm a vegetarian! Anyways, I wanna serve the food, not eat it. I don't think it matters whether I know the names of the steaks before I get the job. That's what training is for.

Nina: I guess. Maybe you could prepare a bit more and then ask for another chance.

Calvin: What's the matter with Suzy? She's been crying in her room for the last hour.

Bryce: She had cheerleading tryouts today. She didn't tell me what happened, but I'm guessing she **bombed the tryouts**.

Calvin: Ah, that really sucks. Well, one of us should go in and cheer her up. That's what brothers are for.

Bryce: There's no way I'm going in there when she's in one of her moods. You can do it!

Out and about Idiom

To be **out and about** is to be active, going to different places and engaging in different activities. For example, you can see a lot of people **out and about** in a public market. In other words, a public market is full of people going various places and doing various activities, like running errands, eating, or talking with friends. The word out in **out and about** refers to being outside of your house and about means that you are going to more than one place while you're out of the house.

Here are a couple more examples with **out and about**:

Micah: Hey, Tracey. What are you doing **out and about** this early in the morning?

Tracey: Hey, Micah, long time no see! I take a hot yoga class around here at 6:00 on Tuesdays and Thursdays. How about you?

Micah: Ah, I'm on my way to work. I'm a little behind on the latest project and thought I'd go in early to catch up on my work.

Tracey: Well, I won't keep you from that. It was good to bump into you.

Micah: You too! I'll see you around.

Tracey: Bye!

Laurel: What's going on? It seems like there are a lot more people **out and about** than usual today.

Tate: Don't you know why?

Laurel: No, that's why I'm asking you.

Tate: You must live under a rock. Didn't you hear that they're filming the new Marvel movie a couple blocks down the road from here?

Laurel: Really? I had no idea. I'm not really into the whole superhero movie thing.

Tate: Well, a lot of people are. They're out here hoping to catch a glimpse of a celebrity before camera crews start roping the area off.

On the up and up

Idiom

On the up and up was one of the main phrases of this episode, and it has two main definitions. The first definition of **on the up and up** is to improve or get better. For example, if someone owns a coffeeshop and his sales are **on the up and up**, then that means his coffee sales are increasing and his coffee business is becoming more and more successful.

The other definition of **on the up and up** is to be trustworthy, clean, or honest. This definition of the phrase **on the up and up** is often used to refer to businesses. If a business is shady or breaking the law, then that business is not **on the up and up**; however, businesses that are honest to their employees and pay their bills and taxes fully and on time are considered **on the up and up**.

Here are a couple more examples with **on the up and up**:

Mom: How are you feeling, sweetie? You looked absolutely awful last night.

Cara: So much better, Mom. I'm **on the up and up**. A good night's sleep and that medicine you gave me last night really did wonders.

Mom: Anytime, honey. I'm just glad you're feeling better.

Cara: That makes two of us. I really hate being sick.

Mom: Then let's hope you don't get sick again for a long while.

Reggie: Is it true Sal's Pizza is closing?

Trent: Yup, turns out Sal's wasn't exactly **on the up and up**. Sal's Pizza was part of a money laundering operation with the local drug gang.

Reggie: No way! Sal's had the best pizza in town.

Trent: Not only that, but they also had the best drug hookups in town, too. They were bound to get busted by the police eventually.

Reggie: Bummer. Looks like we'll have to find a new place to order from for our poker nights.

To be in the moment

Phrase

To be in the moment is to focus on enjoying the present without worrying about the future or things you can't control. In this phrase, the moment refers to what you are currently doing. For example, if you are currently at the park with your friends, you should **be in the moment**, enjoying your time with your friends instead of worrying about work tasks you need to complete or errands you need to run. Cellphones, TV, and other distracting technology make it harder to simply **be in the moment**, so turning off the tech in your life is a key way to leave the distractions behind and enjoy the present.

Here are a couple more examples with **to be in the moment**:

Keith: Are you taking another picture?

Vivi: Of course. The lighting is fantastic here.

Keith: Can't you just put your phone away for 5 seconds and **be in the moment**? Do you really need to Instagram everything we do?

Vivi: Yes! If I don't post it, how will my followers know what I'm up to?

Keith: Your followers will survive without your daily posts.

Corynne: So, what's your idea of a perfect date?

David: Hmm ... Good question. My idea of a perfect date is spending time with someone I can connect with, talk to, and joke with. Someone I can just **be in the moment** with, without all of life's distractions. The location doesn't really matter for me.

Corynne: Wow, what a perfect answer. Can I make that my idea of a perfect date, too, if someone asks me this question in the future?

David: Sure, why not?

Corynne: Thanks.

To branch off

Phrasal verb

To **branch off** is to separate from something and go in a new direction. This phrase could be used literally, like talking about a stream that **branches off** from a big river, or it can be used figuratively to describe something that goes in a new direction. For example, a group of people could be talking about jungle animals, but then **branch off** into talking about survival in the jungle, jungle plants, or famous jungles around the world. In other words, the group started talking about one topic, but separated from that topic and started talking about new things different from, but similar to, the initial topic of jungle animals. Thus, if something **branches off**, it means it was originally part of something, but eventually split away to become or do its own thing.

Here are a couple more examples with **to branch off**:

Lucy: Hey, wasn't Rosa supposed to be in our group?

Hillary: Yeah, she was, but she decided to **branch off** and do her own thing.

Lucy: That's a bummer. She's really good at art. She would have been a big help when designing our poster.

Hillary: I agree, but it was her choice not to join us. We'll just have to work with the skills that we've got.

Tucker: What is this?

Jerry: It's the project you asked me to finish.

Tucker: What? This looks nothing like what I told you to do.

Jerry: Yeah, I know. But don't worry, I improved it. I took your original idea and kind of **branched off** from there. I added some cool elements here and took away a few things over here. What do you think?

Tucker: I think you shouldn't have changed so much without asking me first.

Jerry: Oh ... I didn't realize you would be upset by the changes I made. I thought you would like it.

Tucker: It's not that I don't like it, but we should have consulted about it first. Anyways, it looks pretty cool. Thanks for this, even if it's not what I expected.

Quiz

1. True or false? If you bomb a math test, then you got an amazingly good score.

- a) true
- b) false

2. What word should go in the blank to complete the phrase? To improve by _____ and bounds.

- a) jumps
- b) bounces
- c) leaps
- d) loads

3. In the phrase “to be in the moment,” what is a synonym for “moment”?

- a) short time
- b) present
- c) silent
- d) place

4. Which of the choices below might be a reason someone is out and about?

- a) she has errands to run
- b) she doesn't like going outside
- c) she wants to be alone
- d) she needs some rest

5. Which TWO choices below describe a business that is NOT on the up and up?

- a) a business that has doubled its sales in one year
- b) a business that is almost bankrupt
- c) a business that is getting a lot of positive media attention
- d) a business that is not following proper safety standards

Writing and Discussion Questions

1. Can you think of a time in your life when you excelled at something, improving by leaps and bounds? What was it? How did you improve so quickly and significantly?
2. Is there anything in your life that you would like to improve? Can you think of a plan to help you improve?
3. Have you ever bombed something? What was it? What did you do afterwards?
4. Can you think of a place in your neighbourhood where you can find a lot of people out and about? What kind of place is it?
5. Have you ever read something in the news about a company or person that wasn't on the up and up? What kind of scandal were they involved in?

Quiz Answers

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

Episode credits

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