

Catch Word #257 – Hightail it out of there

Episode description

What is your favourite way to say, “I have to leave now, and fast”? In this episode, Andrew and Kassy explain two common English expressions that mean to leave quickly: duck out and hightail it out of there.

The Culips Catch Word series explains idioms, phrasal verbs, and expressions used in everyday life. Today’s audio lesson is designed to help you improve your English listening and speaking skills while also giving you new, fun ways to say that you’re leaving.

Fun fact

In 2003, archeologists in Australia’s Mungo National Park discovered footprint fossils left behind by an Aboriginal hunter over 20,000 years ago. The archeologists estimate that these ancient hunters were running at or over 37 kilometres per hour. That’s faster than the current Olympic sprinters!

Expressions included in the study guide

- Duck out
- Hightail it out of there
- Do [one’s] business
- Bolt
- Worst nightmare
- Make [one’s] heart race



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. This is Catch Word. And if you're not sure what that is or if you're new to Culips, let me explain. Catch Word is our series for intermediate and advanced English learners where we teach you idioms, phrasal verbs, and expressions that will help improve your English listening and speaking. Joining me today is my cohost, Kassy, and we're going to teach you all about two idiomatic expressions about leaving.

Kassy: Yeah, that's right, Andrew, especially when you leave somewhere very quickly. Now, everyone, don't forget that there is a study guide and transcript for this episode that's available for all Culips members. We recommend following along with the study guide while you listen to this lesson with us today. If you're not a member yet, but you want to join, you can learn all the details and sign up on our website, Culips.com, C-U-L-I-P-S.com.

Andrew: And we want to give a shout-out to one of our listeners named Katze, who left us an awesome review and a five-star rating on Apple Podcasts. Now, Katze wrote, "Thanks for providing such a good podcast for learning English. I'm Chinese, but I'm living in Germany now. I started listening to your podcast this year. I've really improved my spoken English and learn lots of words and expressions from Catch Word. Your voices are really passionate and pleasant. And I really enjoy listening to your conversations. Thank you all and I wish you all the best."

Wow. So, thank you so much for the support, Katze. We really do appreciate it. And we're happy to hear that you're learning a lot with Catch Word. Of course, thanks to all of you out there that have been supporting Culips by leaving us comments and reviews on your favourite podcast app, as well. It's really helpful for letting other English learners from around the world connect and study with us, so please keep up the great work.

OK, Kassy, it's time to start with our lesson for today. The first expression that we're going to look at is to **duck out**, to **duck out**. Duck, like the bird, D-U-C-K, quack, quack. Same spelling, actually, different meaning. But that's the word, duck, and then the preposition out. And, Kassy, I'm curious, have you ever **ducked out** of a place or a situation before?

Kassy: Many times, Andrew, many times.

Andrew: Me too, many, many times. So maybe you could tell us what this expression means. What does it mean to **duck out**?

Kassy: To **duck out** is to leave quickly or secretly. Maybe you're in a movie theatre watching a movie and then you get a really important phone call. And you're, like, oh my gosh, I gotta take this. I'm just gonna **duck out** real quick and take this call. So you quietly and quickly leave the movie theatre. That's a good example.

Andrew: Yeah, that's a great example. So you're in the movie theatre. Of course, that's a very rude place to have a phone conversation, so you have to leave the theatre to talk on the phone. And you just want to **duck out**, leave the theatre quickly, talk on the phone quickly, and then come back in so you don't miss too much of the movie, yeah.

Kassy, that's an awesome example. What kind of other situations would you use **duck out** in? What other kinds of places could you **duck out** from?

Kassy: Meetings. I mean, you wouldn't want to, you know, **duck out** of a meeting and just leave forever. But maybe if you have a bathroom emergency, or you really have to blow your nose, you don't wanna embarrass yourself, you'll **duck out** quickly, **do your business**, and then come back in.

Andrew: Sure. That's a good example. What comes to my mind is, like, an awkward social situation, maybe you're at a party and you just feel uncomfortable. You want to **duck out**, you want to leave quickly, or maybe leave secretly, right? You don't want everybody to notice that you've left. So you just kind of maybe escape through the back door or something.

Kassy: I've done that before.

Andrew: Yeah, me as well. Or maybe you go shopping at the mall and you walk into a store and you just want to browse around the store, but the salesclerk comes up to you and is really aggressively trying to sell you that product and makes you feel uncomfortable. And you're like I just wanted to look around, I didn't really want to buy anything. So in that kind of situation, you make an excuse and **duck out**. You leave the store quickly because it's just uncomfortable to be there.

So I think those are some of the most popular situations where we do use an expression like this.

So I mentioned earlier that the duck in this expression isn't related to the bird that you'll see at the park or swimming in the lake or something like that. Kassy, what does duck mean in this context?

Kassy: It means kind of, like, bend over and then move quickly, like in that bent over posture.

Andrew: Yeah, I get that impression, too. So the verb to duck means to, like you said, Kassy, kind of hunch over or bend down or move your head, especially to avoid something. Maybe to avoid being seen or to avoid being hit, right? If you are playing tennis and your opponent hits the tennis ball at you really quickly, right at your face, you need to duck down to get out of the way, right? To avoid it. So, in this expression, even though we see the word duck, it's not related to the bird. It's related to the verb, the action of ducking, which means getting lower or getting out of the way. And I think when you understand that, then this expression makes more sense.

So with that being said, I think it's time for us to listen to some examples. So let's listen to the first conversation example with this expression to **duck out**.

Kassy: Let's do it.

Friend 1: How was the concert last night? Did you enjoy it?

Friend 2: We actually **ducked out** after 20 minutes.

Friend 1: What, really? But I thought you love that band?

Friend 2: I do, but the concert was just too loud. Our seats were unfortunately right in front of the speaker and I should have brought some earplugs, but I totally forgot.

Friend 1: Yeah, if you're watching a rock show in a small club, earplugs are essential.

Andrew: So, in this example, we hear from a guy who **ducked out** of a concert after only 20 minutes because it was too loud. His seat was right in front of the speaker and he didn't have any earplugs with him. So instead of enduring that loud noise and potentially damaging his ears, he **ducked out**. He left. He went home early.

By the way, Kassy, what are earplugs and when do we wear them?

Kassy: Earplugs are little pieces of foam or plastic that you stick inside your ears to block out noise.

Andrew: And many people wear them at concerts. I think they're a good idea to wear at concerts to protect your ears.

Kassy: Or construction sites when you hear those really busy power tools buzzing.

Andrew: Oh, yeah, all the time. Any kind of very loud situation like that, you want to protect your ears with earplugs, for sure. OK, let's listen to the next example.

Kassy: OK.

Friend 1: So, Paul's having a little party at his place on Saturday evening. I'm thinking of going. Do you want to check it out with me?

Friend 2: I'm not sure. I don't really get along with Paul very well.

Friend 1: Oh, come on. It'll be fun. And Paul's a good guy. He's just a little quiet and awkward, that's all. And you could always **duck out** early if you need to.

Friend 2: OK, I'll go, but if it's boring or awkward, I'm **ducking out**.

Friend 1: OK, great. I'll let Paul know we're coming.

Kassy: All right, in this example, we have two friends who are talking about a party at Paul's house. One friend is not excited to go. She's not very good friends with Paul, but the other friend convinces her and says, "Hey, if it's boring or awkward, you can always **duck out**." You can always escape quickly and go do something else more exciting.

Andrew: Yeah, so in this kind of situation, you know, a small party or gathering, maybe you have to make an excuse, and then **duck out**, right? Oh, I'm not feeling very well, I'm just gonna go home, something like that. But here, in this context, **duck out** just means to leave and to escape.

Well, Kassy, I think we're ready now to move on to our second key expression for this episode. And it's similar but different, similar but different. And expression #2 is to **hightail it out of there**. To **hightail it out of there**. And hightail is spelt H-I-G-H-T-A-I-L and it's one word, hightail, and then we have the word it, I-T, and then we can add out of there to it, as well. Now the out of there is optional. Sometimes you'll hear people say **hightail it**. Sometimes you'll hear people say **hightail it out of there**. I would say that I hear both of them very frequently. So, Kassy, now that we know what the expression is, could you let all of our listeners know what it means?

Kassy: To **hightail it out there** is to leave as quickly as possible. And usually it's because you're kind of running away from something. It could be that you broke something and you're like, "Oh my god, we're gonna get in trouble. Let's get out of here. Let's **hightail it out of here**." Or maybe you're getting chased by something. You hear this a lot in TV shows and movies, I think. This expression is always in, you know, crazy, high-energy situations with a chase involved.

Andrew: Yeah, a lot of action movies, probably you see people **hightailing it out of there**, and you hear about people **hightailing it out of there**. So, it's just to leave a place as soon as possible. And I think, Kassy, that what you just said is exactly right. There's usually some kind of dangerous situation. And you're usually trying to avoid or run away from that danger. So, to use the example that you just said of action movies, you know, maybe you'll see a scene where there's some people robbing a bank, and in the middle of the robbery, suddenly the police arrive, and then the robbers say, "Oh my god, we gotta **hightail it out of here**, we gotta escape, we gotta run away as quick as possible." So that's the kind of situation where we **hightail it** away from a place.

Kassy: Yeah, Andrew, I don't know if this is correct, but does this come from, like, deer running away from hunters? You know, the white-tailed deer, their tails go up, and then they **bolt** to avoid getting shot at?

Andrew: Yeah, Kassy, that is exactly right. I heard that the origins of this expression are originally with deer hunting, and deers would run away, when they run away, they put their tail up. So, it's kind of a high tail situation, and the deers are avoiding the danger of the hunter. So good guess on the origin. I am very impressed.

So, Kassy, should we listen to a couple of examples with this expression now?

Kassy: Yes.

Andrew: All right. Let's do it.

Friend 1: So, I saw a story on the news about a hiker who ran into a cougar while hiking on Saturday.

Friend 2: Oh my god, that's my **worst nightmare**. Did he **hightail it out of there**?

Friend 1: No, he was afraid that if he ran away, the cougar might attack. So instead, he slowly backed away from the cougar until he reached his truck, then he was able to drive safely away.

Friend 2: That's so scary. I'm glad the hiker was OK.

Andrew: All right. In this example, we heard about a hiker who ran into a cougar while he was hiking. And a cougar, for listeners who don't know, is a kind of wild cat that lives in North America. And it's quite big. Sometimes they're also called mountain lions. And it's not the kind of animal that you want to run into on a hike, very scary, dangerous, big, wild cat. That's what a cougar is.

Now, a mistake that you can make while hiking and running into a cougar is to **hightail it out of there**. You don't want to turn away and run, because then the cougar might eat you. Instead, it's better to do what this hiker did, which is slowly back away. And don't turn your back to the animal, right?

Kassy: Yeah, no sudden movements.

Andrew: No sudden movements. You don't want to **hightail it**. And thankfully, in the example, that is exactly what the hiker did. He just slowly backed up, backed up until he reached his truck.

Kassy, this example was inspired by a true story that I saw on YouTube about a hiker that ran into a cougar. And he actually filmed the whole encounter on his phone. It was crazy. And it **made my heart race** just watching it, very scary situation. If any listeners are interested, just go to YouTube and type in hiker and cougar and the video will come up, and you can watch and see what it would be like to be in that situation. But I don't recommend it if you're weak of heart, because it's quite scary. Thankfully, he was OK, though. It was a happy ending to the story.

Kassy, should we listen to the next example?

Kassy: Yes.

Andrew: Let's do it.

Coworker 1: Hey, I'm looking for Jeff. Have you seen him around? I've got an important question about the sales report that I need to ask him as soon as possible.

Coworker 2: Jeff **hightailed it out of here** like an hour ago. You know him, as soon as it hits 5 p.m. on Friday, he's out of here.

Coworker 1: I'll give him a call, then.

Coworker 2: You can try, but he probably won't pick up. He never works during the weekend.

Coworker 1: True. Well, I guess I'll just have to wait until Monday morning to talk to him, then.

Kassy: All right, in this example conversation, one coworker is looking for another. And this coworker, Jeff, is nowhere to be found. It is after 5 p.m. on a Friday and he has **hightailed it out of the office**. As soon as it hits 5 p.m., he leaves as quickly as he can. I'm sure our listeners can relate to Jeff.

Andrew: Yeah. In this context, **hightailed** is used more in a humorous way, right? It's almost like comparing the office to a dangerous place. It's almost like Jeff ran away from the office, he **hightailed it out of there** as soon as possible. I don't blame him. He wants to relax, it's the weekend. So, that's another way that you'll hear people use this expression from time to time, is when they're being humorous or joking or being funny.

Kassy: Yeah, that's right. Actually, once you mentioned that, I kind of think of TV shows where a young boy is trying to ask a girl out on a date, and he gets nervous when he goes to approach her. So instead of you know, asking her out, he **hightails it out of there** and runs back to the safety of his friends.

Andrew: Or sometimes the girl will see the guy approaching and know what he's planning to do, and she'll **hightail it out of there**. She'll run away.

Kassy: Exactly.

Andrew: All right, everyone, that brings us to the end of today's episode. Thank you so much for tuning in. We hope that you were able to learn something new with us and improve your English with us today.

Just to recap what we studied, we learned about two expressions that you can use when you're talking about leaving a place. The first expression was to **duck out** and, remember, that means to leave some place quickly or quietly. And the second expression was to **hightail it out of there**. And that means to leave some place as fast as possible, usually because you are in a dangerous situation.

We would love to hear what you thought about this episode. Please share your opinion with us or make some example sentences using the key expressions that you've learned with us here today on our discussion forum and comments section, which you can find on Culips.com.

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That's it for us for now, but we'll be back soon with another brand-new episode, and we'll talk to you all then. Goodbye.

Kassy: See ya.

Detailed Explanations

Duck out Phrasal verb

Duck out means to leave suddenly, often without attracting any attention. When you **duck out**, you might leave without telling anyone or sneak out without anyone catching you or stopping you. For example, if you want to leave class early, you might say, "I'm going to **duck out** of class early." Or, if you need to leave a conversation or social gathering, you might say, "I need to **duck out** on you really quickly."

Duck out has a second meaning: to avoid doing something you're supposed to do. When you **duck out** on a responsibility, you avoid it in a sneaky, improper way.

Here are a few more examples with **duck out**:

Harold: Eloise wants me to take her to see a play. I was thinking of taking her to The Clown. Have you seen it?

Frank: I have. I would not recommend it. Lucie and I **ducked out** after the first act; it was so boring.

Harold: Well, I'll remove that from my list, then. Guess I'll need to keep looking.

Wattana: My son is frustrating me.

Zahra: Why's that?

Wattana: He's incapable of keeping a job. I spoke to his last boss and was told that he's always late for work and doesn't do the tasks assigned to him. I don't know how to explain to him that he can't **duck out** of his responsibilities like this forever.

Zahra: This may be one of those situations where you have to let your children learn their lessons on their own. I don't believe there's anything you can say to convince him.

Wattana: I suppose you're right. Experience is the best teacher, as they say.

Hightail it out of there

Idiom

Hightail it out of there means to leave in a hurry. When you **hightail it**, you're moving at your full speed, retreating as fast as you can. You might also hear this idiom as **hightail it**, as in "Come on, dude. Let's **hightail it**!" People may also use specific places or directions, like "Let's **hightail it out of this place**!"

This idiom is most used in North America. In fact, one common definition of **hightail it out of there** is to flee on horseback, which is why this idiom is often heard in western movies. As Kassy and Andrew mention in this episode, the idiom comes from the way animals, specifically deer, lift their tails when they run away from danger.

Here are a couple more examples with **hightail it out of there**:

Long: Have you seen Sam? I need to ask her a question.

Arabella: Yeah, she was here just a moment ago. The mail arrived and she took an envelope with her name on it, then **hightailed it out of here**.

Long: That's odd. Perhaps the envelope has some news she's been waiting for?

Arabella: I think it is. She applied to college last month. Hopefully it's good news for her!

Eun-Yeong: Oh, no. I can't believe it.

Carlos: What? What's wrong?

Eun-Yeong: You didn't tell me he was going to be here!

Carlos: Who?

Eun-Yeong: I'm sorry, Carlos, I'm **hightailing it**. Thanks for inviting me. It's been fun!

Carlos: Wait! I still don't know who you're talking about. Oh, fine. I'll ask you tomorrow.

Do [one's] business

Idiom

Do [one's] business is a euphemism meaning to use the bathroom. It's a polite way to talk about natural bodily functions, especially when referring to children or house pets. This idiom is often used in situations where you need to be respectful, such as at work, in social gatherings, or in conversations with acquaintances.

For example, in this episode Kassy talks about when you might use the phrase duck out. She says, "Maybe if you have a bathroom emergency, or you really have to blow your nose, you don't wanna embarrass yourself, you'll duck out quickly, **do your business**, and then come back in." Business in this case refers to both using the bathroom and any other activities you might do if you've ducked out of a meeting.

Here are a couple more examples with **do [one's] business**:

Jean: Your dog is so cute! I've been thinking about getting a dog. Do you have any advice?

Matthew: Yeah, Spot is adorable. It took a while to get him housebroken so that he **did his business** outside instead of on our carpets. So if I have any advice for new puppy owners, it's that you should research how to teach your dog that stuff.

Jean: Oh, that's smart. OK! I'll make sure to do my research before we buy our new puppy. Thanks!

Yoshie: Excuse me a moment, if you will.

Kyou: What? Leaving the conversation so soon? We're just getting to the interesting bit.

Yoshie: Well, uh. I'll be back. Won't take long, I promise.

Kyou: Oh? OH! OK, yes. You go **do your business** and we'll continue this conversation when you get back.

Yoshie: Thank you.

Bolt Verb

Bolt means to suddenly move or run away. Animals **bolt** when they're afraid. When they do, they flee, often out of control. "The white-tailed deer, their tails go up," Kassy says in this episode, "and then they **bolt** to avoid getting shot at." When people **bolt**, they suddenly start running, usually from something that frightens or threatens them. For example, a thief would **bolt** if he saw the police.

As mentioned above, **bolt** also means to move suddenly. This can be when someone quickly changes positions due to being startled. For example, if you heard a sudden noise that made you sit up quickly, you **bolted** upright.

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

Solomon: So there we were, right? Swimming in our neighbours' pool, thinking they weren't going to be home until tomorrow.

Edie: Well, yeah. They told you they were staying overnight at that other place. Don't tell me, they didn't stay away?

Solomon: They did not. The light came on and the two of us spun round. There they were! Standing in the doorway, glaring at us!

Edie: Oh man, so embarrassing!

Solomon: Of course, Ellie **bolts**. Just, zoom! She's gone and I'm left there, in my swimming trunks, with our neighbours glaring at me. It was so bad.

Alina: I saw firetrucks last night. What happened? Is everyone all right?

Rafael: Yes, everyone is all right. There was a fire in the barn. It was really bad. The whole thing is charred and ... Well, it's going to take a while to fix.

Alina: Oh, dear. That's terrible! What about your horse? Your dear old Betsy?

Rafael: Ha, she's a smart one! At the first whiff of smoke, she **bolted** from the barn.

Worst nightmare

Noun

Someone's **worst nightmare** is the thing they fear the most. It can be horrible, unpleasant, harmful, or undesirable. When you refer to a situation as your **worst nightmare**, it's the most terrible thing or situation you can imagine.

In a dialogue example in this episode, Friend 1 mentions seeing a story about a hiker who encountered a cougar. Friend 2 calls that their **worst nightmare**. That means they think running into a cougar while hiking is the situation they fear the most.

Note that some people might use **worst nightmare** in exaggeration, to add humour to a situation.

Here are a couple more examples with **worst nightmare**:

Angus: Are you going to the funeral today?

Patricia: Yes. We're all going to support Polly. Do you need a lift?

Angus: If you don't mind, that would be appreciated. I want to be there for Polly, as well. The accident was such a terrible thing to happen.

Patricia: It was, yes. Losing a child is every parent's **worst nightmare**. I can't imagine what she's going through right now.

Conner: Wow, another celebrity game show? How many of these can they even make?

Midori: Apparently, a lot of them. Would you go on one of these if you were famous?

Conner: Nope, never. No, thank you. Doing a game show is my **worst nightmare**. I get really anxious when I'm in front of large groups of people, and the idea that my actions will be viewed by millions of viewers? Nope. Not for me.

Midori: Probably a sign you won't be an actor, then.

Make [one's] heart race

Expression

Make [one's] heart race means to make someone excited, nervous, or afraid. When you're excited, nervous, or afraid, your heart beats rapidly. You could say your **heart is racing**. This might happen when someone sees another person they find attractive, or when they're about to do something scary, like ride a roller coaster.

For example, in this episode, Andrew talks about the hiker who encountered the cougar. "This example was inspired by a true story that I saw on YouTube about a hiker that ran into a cougar," Andrew says. "And he actually filmed the whole encounter on his phone. It was crazy. And it **made my heart race** just watching it, very scary situation."

Here are a couple more examples with **make [one's] heart race**:

Beatrice: I did it! I got the book!

Riko: That's great! I knew you would get it! How was the auction? Did you have fun?

Beatrice: There were so many great things! But I didn't bid on anything else, just the book. Auctions are too scary for me. I was sitting there, with my little sign in my lap, my **heart racing** so fast I thought I was going to faint!

Riko: But it was worth it, right?

Beatrice: Oh, yes! First edition, great condition. This is perfect!

Gemma: You look happy today. What's going on?

Isla: Oh, you know. Just remembering my date last night. It was so wonderful! I have the best boyfriend.

Gemma: I'm glad you had a good date.

Isla: I mean, I just can't wait for my boyfriend to call, you know? Whenever the phone rings, my **heart races**. Like, I just adore him!

Gemma: I can tell. I also happen to know he adores you, too.

Isla: I know! I'm just so happy.

Quiz

1. Which of the following means to flee suddenly?

- a) bolt
- b) screw
- c) nut
- d) nail

2. What does it mean to make someone's heart race?

- a) you challenge them to a running competition
- b) you bore them until they're tired
- c) you make them excited, nervous, or afraid
- d) you give them a heart attack

3. Which of the following might you say when you're thinking of the most horrible situation you can imagine?

- a) worst nightmare
- b) pleasant dream
- c) daydream
- d) night terror

4. If you need to duck out of a meeting, what is it you're doing?

- a) bending down so that you're close to the floor
- b) leaving quickly and quietly so no one will notice
- c) quacking and imitating a duck
- d) dodging items your coworkers throw at you

5. Which of the following means to leave in a hurry?

- a) lowtail it out of here
- b) lowtail it out of there
- c) hightail it into here
- d) hightail it out of there

Writing and Discussion Questions

1. Have you ever ducked out of a situation? What was it and why did you need to leave?
2. Describe a time you had to bolt or hightail it out of a situation.
3. If you have a pet, how often do you need to take them out to do their business?
4. What is your worst nightmare and why?
5. What is something that makes your heart race?

Quiz Answers

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

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