

Catch Word #274 – Cream of the crop

AD-FREE

Episode description

In your opinion, which player is the cream of the crop on your favourite sports team? Who would you say is the poster child of success in the business world? If you're not quite sure how to answer, Andrew and Kassy will help you understand the meanings and usages of these idioms in this Catch Word episode. They explain the origins of these helpful expressions and provide many example scenarios and synonyms.

Fun fact

One synonym for “cream of the crop” is “*crème de la crème*,” a saying that has been borrowed from French and means “the cream of the cream.” It's similar to saying “the best of the best.” You can use this pattern to emphasize other adjectives, too. For instance, a really suave actor might be described as “the coolest of the cool” or a trillionaire could be called “the richest of the rich.” Try playing around with this structure and coming up with some creative ways to express superlative adjectives!

Expressions included in the study guide

- Cream of the crop
- Poster child
- To cover for [someone]
- Stacked
- First-rate
- Politically incorrect



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: Catchword episode 274. "Cream of the Crop". Featuring Andrew and Kassy.

Kassy: Andrew, I have a question for you to kick off today's episode.

Andrew: A question. I love it. OK, sure. Go ahead. What's on your mind?

Kassy: OK, my question is, did you have any role models or people you really admired when you were younger? You know, like a superstar athlete or a pop singer or something like that.

Andrew: Superstar athlete. Yes. Vancouver Canucks player number 10, Pavel Bure. Ice hockey player. My favorite.

Kassy: Such a Canadian reference.

Andrew: Yeah. Well, why do you ask, Kassy?

Kassy: I'm asking because in today's episode, we're going to teach our listeners two idiomatic expressions that describe outstanding individuals. You know, people that have differences from others that sets them apart. And the first expression we're going to teach is: **Cream of the crop** and the second expression is: **Poster child**. And Andrew, maybe now you'll understand why I was curious about your childhood role models. Because role models are usually, you know, the cream of the crop or the poster children of our society.

Andrew: I see the connection now, Kassy. Well, I think this is going to be an awesome lesson. And these are wonderful expressions for everyone to learn and to add to their vocabularies. They are very common English expressions. OK, Kassy, let's get into today's lesson. As we mentioned, we're exploring two idiomatic expressions with quite different meanings. But they're both related because they both describe remarkable individuals, or in some cases, remarkable things, as with the first expression. The expressions are "Cream of the crop" and "Poster child". Kassy, which one should we start with? What do you want to talk about first?

Kassy: Let's start with the first one you mentioned, "Cream of the crop". It might be the slightly more challenging expression, but I think it's more commonly used.

Andrew: Yeah, I think so. So, let's first start by spelling out the expression, because I know some listeners are driving in their cars right now and they don't have access to the transcript. So, let's spell this out for them. Cream is like the dairy product, right? C-R-E-A-M, cream. And then we have of the crop, crop, C-R-O-P, which is not the most common word in English. So, there may be some listeners out there that are like, "What the heck is a crop?" So, let's start by talking about that. Kassy, what the heck is a crop?

Kassy: Sorry, it's so funny when you say that word a bunch of times. Crop, crop, crop, anyway. "Crop" is the produce that farmers grow on their fields. So, you know, vegetables, fruits, anything that's grown on the fields.

Andrew: Yeah, it's like the product that you farm is your crop, right? So, if you are a corn farmer, then at the end of the farming season and you harvest all of your corn, then all of that corn that you have, that is your crop, your crop of corn. And I agree with you, Kassy. That word does sound very funny now that I say it again and again. So, let's put it all together then. What does it mean in its idiomatic sense? Cream of the crop.

Kassy: Cream of the crop refers to the very best of a particular group or category. It's used to signify a high-quality item or thing. And there's a similar expression like "la crème de la crème." I don't know. I think, yes, so the cream of the crop is, you know, very similar, the English version of that. And it just means the best of the best.

Andrew: Yeah, I think our French listeners right now, and maybe some other Romance languages as well, I'm not sure, but they're probably like, "Yeah, I got it. I know this expression right away!" Because crème de la crème is like the cream of the cream, right? And I'm not really a dairy expert, but I think the cream is the best part of the milk when you're making milk. That thick, fatty, good part that's probably most healthy and most calorie dense. And so that is the best part of the milk, right? So, the cream of the crop, it's like making a metaphor between farming and dairy, essentially. It's just saying like maybe if you have a crop of pumpkins, maybe your biggest, most beautiful pumpkin, that will be the cream of the crop. But of course, since it's an idiom, we're not using it literally to talk about farming things. We're talking about it to describe other things in life. And Kassy, a similar expression comes to mind, which is: "The cream rises to the top." The cream rises to the top. Have you heard that expression before? I'm sure you have.

Kassy: I have. Not as much as "Cream of the crop." But yes, similar idea. You know, the best of the best are going to be the ones on top every time. And that's why they're considered the cream. OK, Andrew, we've talked a lot about what "Cream of the crop" means, but could you give us some sort of scenario, a situation where we could use this expression in everyday life?

Andrew: OK, Kassy, let's imagine a university where students from all over the country apply. It's a very prestigious, very famous university. And among those students, there are a few selected to receive a prestigious scholarship for their amazing academic and extracurricular achievements. So, these students, we could call the cream of the crop. They are the university's best of the best, right? The students who get accepted to that university are already elite. They're already very high level. But among those high-level

students, they are the best of those students. They are the cream of the crop. So, I think that will help illustrate it. But now I would like to give some examples to our listeners so they can hear how they'll be able to use it in a casual, everyday kind of English conversation setting. So, Kassy, we have a few examples prepared for everyone to listen to. How about we get to the first one right now?

Kassy: Yeah, let's do it.

Friend1: Did you hear about the jazz festival next month? The lineup looks awesome.

Friend2: Yeah, it's impressive. Definitely the cream of the crop.

Friend1: Yeah, I know. It's not too often you get to see so many good musicians perform in one place. The tickets are expensive, though, but I'm thinking of going. I don't know. What do you think?

Friend1: I have to see if I can get the weekend off from work. But if someone can **cover for** me, then I'm definitely in.

Andrew: All right. In this example conversation, we heard two friends talking about a jazz festival, and they were very, very impressed with the lineup. The lineup is the acts, the musicians, the performers who will play at the festival. And so, it was a **stacked** lineup. And a stacked lineup just means there are tons of great musicians who will perform at that festival. So, they described that lineup as being the cream of the crop. It was the best of the best, the best the jazz world has to offer. Kassy, there was one other kind of cool expression we heard in that example conversation when your character said, "Oh, I have to see if I can get the weekend off of work. But if someone can cover me, then I'll go to the festival." What does it mean if someone covers for you at work?

Kassy: I've used this expression a lot in my lifetime, Andrew.

Andrew: Yeah, me too.

Kassy: You know, if you haven't called off in advance for work, then you need someone to take over your shift or take over your duties. So, if someone covers for you, it means they are working instead of you doing your work as like a substitute person.

Andrew: Yeah, exactly. So, often businesses can't really afford or they're not able to just like give you time off because somebody needs to do the work, right? That's why you're there. That's why they hired you in the first place. But if you can find one of your co-workers who will cover for you, who will replace you while you take a day off or an afternoon off or something, then sometimes the boss or the management says, "OK, yeah, you can go." So, that's the meaning of that expression. All right. We have one more example with "Cream of the Crop." Let's listen to it now.

Staff: Hi, excuse me. I noticed you were looking around. Can I give you a hand with anything or are you just browsing?

Customer: Oh, actually, I had a question about these backpacks. I'm planning a hiking trip and I need a new bag. Any recommendations?

Staff: Well, this one here, the Trailmaster, is absolutely the cream of the crop. It's durable and comfortable. And we sell a ton of these.

Customer: Wow, it looks great. You know, comfort is key on a long hike. I'll need something that can handle a few days' worth of supplies, though. Is this one OK for that?

Staff: Yeah, it should be big enough. Let me open it up here for you and you can take a closer look.

Kassy: All right. In this example conversation, we had a worker at a outdoor store and a customer, and this customer was interested in buying a new hiking backpack. And I don't know if any of our listeners are avid backpackers, but you need really good, durable, sturdy backpack if you want to go hiking in the woods for days on end and carry everything on your back. And this employee recommended the Trailmaster, which was a type of hiking backpack. And she said that it was the cream of the crop. Out of all the backpacks in the store. This one was the one she recommended the most.

Andrew: Yeah, you wouldn't want to be stuck out in the woods on a multi-day hike with a really low-quality backpack, right? You want the cream of the crop because, yeah, that's just one other thing that you'd have to worry about on that kind of difficult trek. So, yeah, good, high-quality backpack, the cream of the crop. That's what you want. Kassy, just before we wrap up here and move on to the next expression, there's similar expressions in English to cream of the crop. We've mentioned a few of them already. We talked about elite, something being elite, something being the best of the best. And I always joke at my house when I had Pinky and actually recently my wife and I were dog sitting as well. So, we had this little dog, Gabby, over here. And I always joke with the dogs when I give them food. I say it's the best of the best at our house. We give them very high-quality dog food. And the reason I make that joke is because the dog food is made in Canada. Nothing but the best, best of the best here. So that's a great expression as well. But can you think of any other similar expressions to describe something that's really elite, really the cream of the crop, really the best of the best?

Kassy: Yeah, I can think of two more. One of them would be "Top notch," which means, you know, like the top quality. Where does top notch come from? Like the highest peg on a setting? I'm not sure.

Andrew: Yeah, I'm not sure either. By the way, could you spell notch for us? Because that's a very unique word.

Kassy: Sure. Notch is spelled N-O-T-C-H.

Andrew: Kassy and I are both unsure of the exact meaning of this, which means listeners, you don't need to know either. Just know that it means the best of the best.

Kassy: Yeah. Cream of the crop. Best of the best. Top notch. And the last one is: **First-rate**.

Andrew: Yeah. “First-rate”. And again, something that's first-rate just means like it's rated first. It's rated as the best. It's really, really good and excellent quality, better than the rest. So that'll wrap it up for our discussion about “Cream of the crop.” But we have one more expression to introduce to you today, and it is: “Poster child.” Poster child. And that is, I think, the kind of just generic expression. Sometimes you also hear poster boy, poster girl or poster child. I've never heard poster man or woman before.

Kassy: Me neither. It sounds so weird when you just said it like that. I was like, what?

Andrew: Yeah. So, it's always used with children. I think poster child is the best one to learn. Kassy, let's get into the meaning of poster child. Could you share the definition with us?

Kassy: Sure. “Poster child” refers to a person or thing that is seen as a typical example or the most notable representative of a particular quality, issue, cause or business.

Andrew: Let me ask you a question. Who is the poster child of fast food?

Kassy: I got to say McDonald's. That's the number one that comes to mind.

Andrew: I think a lot of our listeners would agree as well. It's kind of the representative image that pops into so many people's minds when we hear fast food. Right. We just get that image of McDonald's. And I'm sure all of the executives over at McDonald's are very happy about that fact. It's good for business when you are the poster child in a way like that.

Kassy: Or like the poster child of soda would probably be Coca-Cola.

Andrew: The poster child of basketball would be like Michael Jordan, right? The poster child of pop music, maybe you could say, is like Michael Jackson, right?

Kassy: Or Taylor Swift these days.

Andrew: Yeah, Taylor Swift these days, right? When we describe someone as being a poster child, then it means that that person really represents the issue or the thing that they do, right? Because often we use this in a political way too to say like she's a poster child for protecting the environment or something like that. Some kind of issue or some kind of cause. And actually, Kassy, this expression has a really interesting origin. And listeners, if you go on Google and do some image searching, you can find some examples here. And we'll try and throw some in the study guide as well so you can see what I'm talking about.

But back in the 1920s and 30s, now I guess around 100 years ago or so, Kassy, these kinds of posters were common to see. So, charities would advertise their charity and try to raise money and raise funds by putting a child on the poster. Maybe the images of the children pulled on the heartstrings of the people who saw those posters. And they felt more inclined, more willing, more open to donating money to that charity.

So, for example, I saw one which is weird. You know, it's like 100 years ago, but the culture really changes. So, when I saw these posters, I was laughing almost because it's so **politically incorrect** these days to use the language that were on these posters. But they had pictures of children who had some kind of mobility issue. These days, we would say "mobility issue," and that just means they have a problem walking or maybe a problem moving, right? A mobility issue.

And so, there was images of children, like, missing a leg and using crutches to get around. And then at the bottom, it said, like, "Save the crippled children." And that word "crippled" is one that's very politically incorrect. It's not a word that we would use these days at all. So, when I saw those images on Google, I was shocked. I was like, "Oh my god!" But that's where it comes from. It's like those kids on the posters that charities would use to raise money for kids back in the day with mobility issues, for example. So that's like the

origin. But now we use it in contexts where someone exemplifies a behavior or characteristics or issue very, very clearly.

And the idea that came into my mind when I was thinking about this expression a little bit earlier, Kassy, was of Elon Musk, because such a controversial figure, right? He was, like, loved 10 years ago, and now he's hated. He went from this, like, genius to somebody who's hated, really, by so many people around the world. It's a crazy trajectory that he's on. But I think many people kind of think this, and I've heard many people say this recently. They'll say something like, "Oh, Elon Musk is the poster child for demonstrating how to ruin a business."

Kassy: Poor Elon. I don't know if it's poor Elon.

Andrew: Yeah, it's more like rich Elon, I think. But...

Kassy: Yeah.

Andrew: But that is a very good demonstration of how we can use that expression, because he represents ruining a business, right? We can all watch how Twitter has changed, now X, has changed so much over the last year or so. And so, yeah, I've heard people say things like that before.

Kassy: That's a good example, Andrew, because we can say that a poster child does not necessarily represent the best person of a category. It can also represent, you know, the best person of a bad category. Elon Musk is the best representative of a negative thing, ruining a business. So, yeah, it just means being the most recognized person of any category, good or bad.

Andrew: That's a great point, Kassy. And just to add, I think that also we almost use it in that way more than we do in the positive way. It's like he's the poster child of how not to do

that thing, right? If your friend was a really dangerous driver, you'd say, "Oh, my friend's a poster child for how not to drive." Right?

Kassy: I've had one of those friends before.

Andrew: Me too. So, yeah, that's a great point. Kassy, just before we get into the examples, do you think you could share a scenario or a situation with us of how we might be able to use this expression in our regular everyday lives?

Kassy: Sure. For example, we could imagine a company that started as a small startup, and it grew into a large and successful corporation. And the founder of this company could be described as the poster child for entrepreneurship. They represent the ideal of turning a small idea into a big business, embodying the characteristics of innovation, risk-taking, and determination. For example, I think Steve Jobs was probably the poster child of, you know, technology when he brought the iPhone into existence.

Andrew: Yeah, absolutely. Very good example. So, with that being said, let's hop into the first example conversation now. Here we go.

Coworker1: I heard Gavin's getting promoted to assistant director.

Coworker2: That's terrific news. Good for him.

Coworker1: Yeah, he really worked his butt off last year. It's great to see him be recognized for that.

Coworker2: Yeah, seriously. He's like the poster child for how to get ahead in life. He started at the bottom as this lowly intern, and now look at him. He's going to be assistant director. So cool.

Andrew: All right, let's break this example conversation down. So, in it, we hear two coworkers talking about their brand-new assistant director. That guy's name is Gavin, and Gavin got a promotion. Why? Because he worked his butt off. And "To work your butt off,"

or a little bit more rudely, some people say, “Work their ass off.” OK? It exists. I wouldn't recommend using that one at work, in the office, but a lot of people do say it. It means to work really hard. So, he worked really hard, and one of the coworkers described Gavin as being like the poster child for how to get ahead in life, because he started at the bottom as an intern, and now he's the assistant director. And so, this means he's a really good representative. He's like the perfect fit of somebody who's hardworking and knows how to get ahead in life. He's the poster child. If you were like trying to advertise a book for steps you could take to get ahead in life and to get ahead in your career, then maybe you'd want to put Gavin's image on the cover of that book. He represents that idea so well.

Kassy: Perfect explanation, Andrew.

Andrew: Thank you. OK. Shall we listen to the next one?

Kassy: Yes. OK, example two.

Friend1: I love that sweater on you. Is it new?

Friend2: Thanks. Yeah, I just bought it last week, actually.

Friend1: Well, it looks amazing.

Friend2: I appreciate that, because I'm usually the poster child for what not to wear, but I think I did OK with this one.

Friend1: You totally nailed it.

Kassy: In this example, one friend is complimenting her friend's new sweater, and this friend takes the compliment and says, “Thank you so much. I'm usually the poster child for what not to wear.” So that means that this friend is not fashion forward. They usually wear like mismatched clothes, maybe different colored socks, and they don't usually look that great. But they picked this great sweater today, and they are no longer the poster child for what not to wear. Maybe they can be the poster child for what to wear.

Andrew: Yeah, they're really stylish today. And Kassy, just as you were explaining that a thought came to my mind, and that is just how we can elevate our English and improve our fluency with expressions like this, right? If you were a lower-level English learner, perhaps you would say something instead similar to, "I'm not so stylish," or "I have bad style." Right? You're expressing the same idea, but there's no colour to the language. It's not a very interesting way to express that. But by learning an expression like this, you can say, "I'm usually the poster child for what not to wear." And although you're expressing the same core idea and the message is the same, it's just a lot brighter, a lot more interesting, a lot more flavorful way to express yourself. And so, there's levels of fluency, right? And I think adding an expression like this to your vocabulary can just take you up a little bit and make you sound more natural and more fluent.

Kassy: I totally agree. The first expression that Andrew used, "I don't have good fashion, I'm bad at dressing," like, people would just say, "Uh, yeah." But if you said, "I'm the poster child for what not to wear," like, that might make your group members laugh because it's such an interesting and unique phrase.

Andrew: Yeah, absolutely. So definitely, I recommend adding this one to your vocabulary, everyone. And if you get a chance to practice speaking English sometime soon, well, why don't you try it out and see how it goes over? And maybe your conversation partners will be as impressed as Kassy would be. Well, I think that will bring us to the end of today's episode, everyone. So, thanks for listening and learning with us today and great job on completing an English study session here.

Kassy: To summarize what we covered today, we learned two idiomatic expressions, "Cream of the crop" and "Poster child."

Andrew: So, everyone, now we want to throw things over to you. We want you to practice making and leaving some example sentences with these two expressions. Show us what you learned and connect with other Culips listeners from around the world on our Discord

community. It's free to join and you can do so just by following the link in the description for this episode. So that's it for us for now, everyone, but we'll be back soon with another brand-new episode. So, until then, take care and goodbye.

Kassy: See ya.

Andrew: That brings us to the end of this lesson. Talk to you next time, bye!

Detailed Explanations

Cream of the crop

Idiom

The first of two expressions featured in this Catch Word episode is **cream of the crop**!

Kassy and Andrew explain that this is an idiom that means the best people or thing in a particular group. **Cream of the crop** most often means the best of a group that is already excellent—for instance, most professional soccer players are excellent at soccer, but only the **cream of the crop** (the best of the best) can participate in the World Cup.

Andrew explains that this expression comes from the idea that cream is the best and most delicious part of milk, so the **cream of the crop** is like the best milk product you get from your cows. However, this expression evolved to apply to many different fields, not just farming!

Cream of the crop is used as a superlative—it talks about the highest degree or quality, such as the doctors at a particular hospital being the **cream of the crop** (the best in their fields). You do not want to use **cream of the crop** to describe people or things that are decent, sufficient, or just good enough—this idiom is only for describing the best.

Although it's far less common, you may also see a possessive pronoun used (like **cream of my crop** or **cream of their crop**) if you're talking about a company's product or someone's collection. For example, you could say, "I have a huge record collection, but the **cream of my crop** is over on this little shelf."

Here are a couple more examples with **cream of the crop**:

Ella: Howard, have you thought of applying to Harvard?

Howard: Harvard? Are you kidding? Only **the cream of the crop** gets accepted to Harvard. My grades are not nearly good enough.

Ella: I don't know, I think it's worth a shot. If you were accepted, I have confidence that you would excel.

Rebecca: What would you recommend for a high-end leather handbag I could buy for my mother's birthday?

Marcus: If price is of no concern, may I suggest this Gucci bag made of premium Italian leather? It's **the cream of the crop** in stock right now.

Poster child Idiom

The second main expression featured in this episode is **poster child**.

Kassy explains that a **poster child** is a person or thing that is the most representative example of its category. In other words, it's the first thing that pops into your head when you think of a category. If someone said, "Name a popular pop star," who is the first person you'd think of? Right now, it's probably Taylor Swift. So, you could call Taylor Swift the **poster child** of pop music.

It's often used in a positive way to highlight someone as an excellent advocate for a specific concept. For instance, if someone is exceptional at recycling and promoting sustainability, they could be considered the **poster child** for environmental consciousness.

However, **poster child** is different from cream of the crop in that it doesn't always mean the best—it's just the most representative example. It's the perfect example of a category, but that category can be a bad thing. For instance, the punk band Green Day is often criticized by fans for selling out (giving up their values in exchange for money). Many fans felt betrayed that Green Day abandoned their punk roots and signed to a major label, becoming rich. In this way, Green Day might be the **poster child** of selling out.

As Andrew and Kassy mentioned, **poster child** is NOT made plural into poster children. You also don't see people calling men and women poster men or poster women—whether it's a person or a thing, an adult or a baby, the idiom is almost always **poster child**.

Here are a couple more examples with **poster child**:

Zack: Apparently that popular Disney actress is giving a talk at my brother's high school next month about cyberbullying and trolling online.

Lily: That doesn't surprise me. Recently, that actress has become the **poster child** of anti-bullying efforts. She's really devoting herself to the cause.

Zack: I wonder if she has a history of being bullied.

Layla: Ha, look at my high school yearbook photos.

Jonathan: Oh god, did you really style your hair like that?

Layla: Unfortunately ... I think I was the **poster child** of bad 90s fashion choices.

To cover for [someone]

Phrasal verb

In the first example dialogue for cream of the crop, one of the speakers says that she would love to go to the jazz festival but she has to see if someone can **cover for her** at work.

The phrasal verb **to cover for someone** means temporarily take on that person's responsibilities. It means handling tasks or assignments on behalf of someone who is absent or unavailable. We usually hear this verb used about the workplace—for example, if a coworker is away, you might **cover for them** by managing their projects or answering their emails. This is the way **cover for someone** is used in Andrew and Kassy's example dialogue.

However, there is another use of **cover for someone**—rather than take on responsibilities, it means to lie or make an excuse on behalf of someone else. For example, if two teenage brothers have a curfew of 11 p.m. and one of them is going to come home late because he was at a party, he might tell his sibling, "**Cover for me!**" This means he is asking his brother to come up with an excuse about why he is late so their parents won't get mad or find out the truth.

Here are a couple more examples with **to cover for [someone]**:

Aidan: I have a family emergency and need to leave the office early today. Can you **cover for me** in the afternoon?

Eva: Of course, Aidan. I'll make sure everything is taken care of in your absence.

Aidan: Thank you so much.

Charlotte: I need a favour.

Liam: What is it?

Charlotte: I have a job interview for a different company but it's during our regular working hours. I really want to go, but I don't want our boss to know why. Can you **cover for me** if anyone asks where I am and tell them I'm sick?

Liam: Sure, no problem. I'll tell them you were coughing and sneezing at the end of the day yesterday. Good luck with the interview, by the way!

Charlotte: Thanks, you're the best!

Stacked Adjective

In the first sample dialogue for cream of the crop, two friends are discussing a jazz festival featuring an incredible lineup of musicians. Andrew calls this a **stacked** lineup.

Stacked is an adjective that is used to describe a group of people or things that are exceptionally impressive in terms of quality, talent, or strength. When you call a cast, lineup, or team **stacked**, it means that it includes highly skilled or renowned individuals. For example, people often refer to movies that feature several A-list actors like Meryl Streep, Leonardo DiCaprio, and Robert DeNiro as **stacked**.

Be careful with this one, since **stacked** has a few other meanings, too. When a deck of cards is **stacked**, it means it's arranged unfairly so that one player loses. When you describe an individual as **stacked**, it means they are either very muscular or very curvy.

So just remember, when **stacked** is used to mean exceptionally impressive, it can ONLY be used to describe groups of people, like lineups, casts, or teams.

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

Zoey: My fantasy football team is absolutely **stacked**. There's no way I'm going to lose this season.

Eli: It's not fair! How did you end up with all of the best players?

Eric: Did you see that Paul Thomas Anderson has a new movie coming out?

Chloe: I didn't. Does it look any good? I didn't love the last one.

Eric: I don't know much about the story yet, but it has a **stacked** cast. Steven Yeun, Florence Pugh, and Colin Farrell are all main characters!

Chloe: Wow, I love Florence Pugh!

Eric: Me too. With a cast that **stacked**, I have high hopes that it'll be great!

First-rate Adjective

Andrew mentions **first-rate** along with best of the best and top notch as synonyms for cream of the crop.

This adjective should be pretty easy to remember—if something is rated first, you could call it **first-rate**! It's number one. It is of very high or the highest quality. For instance, Harvard University is a **first-rate** academic institution.

What's interesting to note is that you can also describe things as **second-rate**. If you think about the idea of first place and second place in competitions, it's natural to assume that **second-rate** would mean fairly good or pretty good. However, **second-rate** is actually used to describe something that is of bad or poor quality. For example, if you said a movie had **second-rate** special effects, you're saying it looked fake and visually uninteresting. If you said that an airline had **second-rate** customer service, you're saying they were rude and unhelpful to you.

Finally, there is one more level, **third-rate**. As you can guess, this means extremely low quality. A **third-rate** hotel is probably infested with mice and cockroaches. A **third-rate** bottle of liquor probably burns terribly when you swallow it and tastes awful.

Here are a couple more examples with **first-rate**, **second-rate**, and **third-rate**:

Oliver: I heard there's a new superhero movie coming out. Let's watch it this weekend!

Bella: Sounds good! I've heard it has a **first-rate** cast and amazing special effects.

Oliver: Awesome! I'm excited. We could also watch that romantic comedy that came out last week.

Bella: Actually, I heard that rom-com had a pretty **second-rate** storyline. Let's skip that one.

Renee: How was the concert?

Samuel: Unfortunately, the venue was **third-rate**. The floors were disgusting, it smelled awful in there, and the acoustics were some of the worst I've ever heard.

Renee: Oh no, that's terrible!

Samuel: I'll never see live music there again.

Politically incorrect Adjective

Andrew explains the origin of the term poster child: about 100 years ago, it was common for charities to solicit donations through posters with images of their clients on them. They would often feature pictures of patients, especially children, in need of help. This is where the term “poster child” came from. When looking up examples of these posters online, Andrew says he thought it was interesting to see some pretty **politically incorrect** language on them that you would never see today.

Politically incorrect is an adjective phrase used to describe language, behaviour, or humour that goes against accepted social norms. It often involves expressing opinions or making jokes that are considered offensive, insensitive, or inappropriate by mainstream standards. It is the opposite of **politically correct**, which is often abbreviated as **PC**.

An example of being **politically incorrect** is making a mean-spirited joke about someone’s race. Even terminology can be **politically incorrect**. What used to be acceptable can change and become **politically incorrect** over time. For example, the adjective “Oriental” used to be a common way to describe people of East Asian descent. These days, it is considered **politically incorrect** and very offensive.

The adjectives **politically correct** and **politically incorrect** were big buzzwords during the 2000s and early 2010s and are still very common, but recently the adjective “woke” has become an even more popular replacement for **politically correct**.

Here are a couple more examples with **politically incorrect**:

Grace: What are you doing?

Nathan: Watching a stand-up comedy special on Netflix.

Grace: Oh, is it any good?

Nathan: Not really. I don’t think the comedian knows how to actually be funny—he’s just relying on **politically incorrect** jokes to shock his audience.

Logan: Hey, do you think it’s **politically incorrect** to mimic someone’s accent?

Eliza: Definitely.

Logan: That’s what I think, too. I got an Instagram ad for a card game that was entirely based on saying things in different accents. I thought it was a little offensive.

Quiz

1. Your coworker says she has a doctor's appointment tomorrow afternoon and wants to know if you can cover for her. What does she mean by this?

- a) she wants you to help do her work while she's gone
- b) she wants you to go with her to the appointment
- c) she wants you to help her write an email to your boss
- d) she wants you to reschedule her appointment

2. What's another way of saying a "stacked lineup"?

- a) a boring lineup
- b) an unusual lineup
- c) an impressive lineup
- d) a rare lineup

3. True or false? "Poster child" always refers to something good.

- a) true
- b) false

4. Which of the following is the best example of the "cream of the crop"?

- a) a student who consistently gets Bs and Cs on their exams
- b) an athlete who has gotten second place in several competitions
- c) a musician who is widely recognized as the most influential in their field
- d) an amateur baker whose family enjoys their cakes and cookies

5. Which of the following is a good example of something that is "second-rate"?

- a) a luxurious ski resort with warm, comfortable rooms
- b) a critically acclaimed movie with exceptional performances
- c) a bestselling novel that has received positive reviews from readers and critics
- d) a smartphone model that breaks easily and has an average-quality camera lens

Writing and Discussion Questions

1. Who would you consider to be the cream of the crop in your field? Why?
2. When is the last time you asked someone to cover for you at work? Please describe.
3. Do you have any role models? Who would you say is the poster child for success?
4. Describe your dream vacation. Would you stay at a first-rate hotel? Would you go to a stacked music festival with your friends?
5. Are you a competitive person? Do you always strive to be the cream of the crop in your endeavours? Or do you tend to prioritize other things besides status and achievements? Please explain your personal philosophy.

Quiz Answers

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

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