

## Catch Word #102 – Starting from scratch

### Transcript

Harp: Hello everyone! This is Harp.

Maura: And Maura.

Harp: And we're here at Culips.com, bringing you another fantastic English learning podcast.

Maura: Don't forget to visit our website, Culips.com, that's C-U-L-I-P-S.com. And when you go to our website, you can become a member. And when you become a member, you have access to our learning materials. And Harp, what's in our learning materials at Culips?

Harp: You get a detailed explanation, a transcript, and even a quiz.

Maura: So, there's lot of extra stuff to help you with your understanding of this podcast. And if you're on Facebook, you can like us there. And that's the best way to interact with us. We can answer your questions there, chat with you.

Harp: Yeah. We put pictures up, we ask questions. It's lots of fun.

Maura: And we like to hear what you think of us, so go to Facebook. Now, today's episode is a Catchword episode.

Harp: What is a Catchword episode, Maura?

Maura: Well, it's where we look at different expressions, idioms, slang, and we define them, of course, we give you lots of explanations and examples of how you can use them.

Harp: Perfect. And today we're looking at expressions that have the word **scratch** in them.

Maura: Yeah. There are so many expressions with the word **scratch**.

Harp: Yeah. And the word **scratch** is often connected to starting something new or making something from nothing.

Maura: Yeah. So, all the expressions that we're gonna look at in this episode have the word **scratch** in them and they're all connected to starting something new or making something from nothing, really at the beginning part of a process. First, we're going to tell you about the meaning of **scratch**, just in case you're not sure.

- Harp: Yeah. So **to scratch** means when you can use your fingers to touch your body and it's usually when you're itchy or you can **scratch** something else.
- Maura: Yeah. And often you use your nails and you go up and down and back and forth and that's really a **scratch**. You could **scratch**, like you said Harp, your body, but you could also **scratch** a table or, really, anything.
- Harp: Exactly.
- Maura: You could also use another tool, like a sharp object, that could help you **scratch** as well.
- Harp: Yes. All right, let's get started, Maura.
- Maura: OK. Now, the first expression is **to start from scratch**.
- Harp: **To start from scratch**.
- Maura: Yes. And **to start from scratch** is to begin with almost nothing and just take the first steps to making or building something. So you imagine you don't have anything but you want to make something, so you begin.
- Harp: Yes, **to start from scratch**. So if you start a project but you don't know anything about how to do it, you're **starting from scratch**.
- Maura: Right. So you don't have any knowledge or you don't have a lot of preparation beforehand; you're starting from really the basic point. And one possible origin is when people used to race, they would draw a line in the sand, and that was the starting line, but it was also called the **scratch** because you **scratched** a line in the ground and that's where you started from. So it's the beginning point of something.
- Harp: That makes sense.
- Maura: So what kind of things can you **start from scratch** to make?
- Harp: You could knit a sweater **from scratch**. So I would be **starting from scratch**, I wouldn't have the materials, I didn't have my knitting needles or the yarn. And I would **start from scratch**, buy the materials, learn how to do it, and then make a sweater.

Maura: Yeah. Pretty much anything that you don't have prior knowledge of or preparation, you could **start from scratch** to do. I could also **start from scratch** to build a doghouse, because I've never built a doghouse before and I don't have the materials so I would have to go and buy them. I don't have a frame. I don't have a place to make a doghouse. I would really have to learn everything for the first time. And so, then I could say I was **starting from scratch**.

Harp: Definitely. But you don't have a dog, so you might not want to do that.

Maura: Well maybe I could make a cat house.

Harp: You could do that.

Maura: OK. So, let's give some dialogue examples with **to start from scratch**.

Harp: Let's do it.

Maura: Hello?

Harp: Hi Janice.

Maura: Hey, what's up?

Harp: I got some bad news.

Maura: Oh, what?

Harp: I can't go to the movie tonight.

Maura: Oh, why not?

Harp: Well, my computer completely **crashed** on me.

Maura: Oh no!

Harp: Yeah. I lost the big assignment I've been working on for the last two weeks.

Maura: No. You didn't lose everything, did you?

Harp: I lost everything. I have **to start from scratch**.

Maura: Oh, that's the worst. I hate that; it's so frustrating!

Harp: I feel like crying right now, but I'm just going to focus on getting my project done because it's due in two days.

Maura: Well, good luck. Maybe your teacher will give you an extension or something.

Harp: Yeah, I wrote her an email already, but I don't know.

Maura: OK, good luck **starting from scratch**.

Harp: Thanks.

Maura: So there's an example where someone had to start again with nothing, with no work done.

Harp: Yeah. In the example, I lost my whole project. I lost all of the work I had done on it, so I had **to start from scratch**. I had to start the project again.

Maura: So in this case, the person did have some knowledge because they'd written it before, but they were still starting from nothing, so we can say that they were **starting from scratch**.

Harp: Yes.

Maura: OK. Let's give another example with **to start from scratch**.

Maura: Hey, did you hear about Tim?

Harp: No. What?

Maura: Well, he's decided **to take up guitar playing**.

Harp: What? Really?

Maura: I know. He doesn't seem like the type, and he told me he's never taken guitar lessons in his life but it was his 40th birthday last week and he always wanted to do it, so he just decided he's gonna **start from scratch** and start learning how to play the guitar.

Harp: Wow. Does he know how to read music or anything?

Maura: Nope, nothing.

Harp: Oh, he's really **starting from scratch**. Good for him.

Maura: Yeah. He seems to love it, though.

Harp: Great.

Maura: So, there's an example with Tim **starting from scratch**. And in this case, he really did have no knowledge or experience at all about the guitar.

Harp: Yeah, he was **starting from scratch**. He was starting from the very beginning of how to read music before he could even learn how to play it.

- Maura: Yeah. OK, so that was **to start from scratch**. Now we're going to look at the next expression.
- Harp: Yes. And the next expression is **to scratch the surface**.
- Maura: Yes. **To scratch the surface**. So, **to scratch the surface** is to find out just a small amount about something. You could also use this expression at the beginning of some project when you're just learning a little bit about it. So you really have just a small amount of information about something.
- Harp: Yeah. And if you imagine the surface of a rock that is **scratched**, it's only the surface, it's only the top that is **scratched**. You haven't got to the actual rock or to the inside yet.
- Maura: Right. So the same idea is true of, let's say, a project you're working on. You just got an outside, a small idea of what's happening, you didn't get to the actual project yet, or like you said, the rock, right? You're just on the outside.
- Harp: Yes, exactly.
- Maura: OK. So **to scratch the surface** is to find out a small amount of information about something, which usually happens at the beginning.
- Harp: Yeah, exactly. If you have a big homework assignment, **scratch the surface**, and you start to learn just a little bit and then you learn more and more.
- Maura: Exactly. Or if you have some kind of problem you're trying to solve. If you only **scratch the surface**, you're very far from solving it, because you only have a little bit of information so you need to work harder to try to solve the problem.
- Harp: Yup. Very good point.
- Maura: OK. Now we'll give you some dialogue examples with **to scratch the surface**.
- Harp: Let's do it.

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|--------|---------------------------------------------------------|
| Harp:  | Hi Linda. Do you have a sec?                            |
| Maura: | Yeah, sure.                                             |
| Harp:  | We just need to talk about the report you just sent me. |
| Maura: | Yeah?                                                   |

Harp: You're gonna have to re-do it.

Maura: Oh. What was the problem?

Harp: Well, you're just **scratching the surface**. I need a lot more information.

Maura: Oh, OK. I'll do more research and I'll find out more about the clientele and maybe I'll speak to some of their previous customers. Will that be a more comprehensive report?

Harp: Yeah, that sounds good. Let's just get a little bit more information in there.

Maura: OK.

Harp: Thanks Linda.

Maura: So in that example, I had only **scratched the surface** on my report, so I had only gotten a little bit of information; I didn't go in depth enough into the subject.

Harp: OK. Let's do one more example with **to scratch the surface**.

Harp: Did you hear about my new business idea?

Maura: No, what is it?

Harp: Well, I'm gonna **flip houses**.

Maura: OK, so **hold on**. You've never bought a house before, but you're going to buy a house and then sell it to make money off of it, not long after you just bought it?

Harp: Well, I'm gonna fix it, I'm gonna renovate it, and then I'm gonna sell it for a lot more money.

Maura: OK. So, have you done much research about the real-estate market and all that kind of stuff?

Harp: Yeah, I looked into it a little bit. I've seen some TV shows. I think I can do it.

Maura: Whoa. Well, I think you better do more than just **scratch the surface** before you get involved in real estate. It could be risky.

Harp: Yeah. You're right. It is a lot of money. OK, I'll do some more research.

Maura: Yeah, I think you definitely should.

- Maura: So there's an example where someone was just **scratching the surface**. So, Harp, you were just getting to know the real estate market, you didn't do a lot of research, and you didn't have a lot of knowledge about it.
- Harp: Yeah. I was just in the beginning and thinking I could **flip houses** and make a lot of money.
- Maura: Yeah. You gotta do research for that stuff.
- Harp: Definitely.
- Maura: OK. So we had **to start from scratch** and then **to scratch the surface** and now the third one we're going to do is **to make something from scratch**.
- Harp: Yes. **To make something from scratch**.
- Maura: This one is definitely my favourite: **to make something from scratch**.
- Harp: Yes, I agree with you. So **to make something from scratch** is when you make something from nothing.
- Maura: Right. You don't make it with any parts or ingredients that were made by someone else or ready to be cooked. You make everything yourself.
- Harp: Yeah. So it's something that's homemade.
- Maura: Right. Most of the time, this expression is used for cooking. It could be used for some other things too, but when I think of this expression **my stomach starts grumbling**, 'cause I think about food.
- Harp: Yeah, definitely. When I think of **making something from scratch**, I'm thinking of a nice soup or something good that's homemade.
- Maura: Yeah, something delicious.
- Harp: Mmhmm.
- Maura: Food **made from scratch** is just so much better than pre-made stuff that you can buy in stores.
- Harp: I know. Stuff you buy in stores that's already made before, it's faster, but food definitely tastes better when it's homemade, when it's **made from scratch**.
- Maura: Oh, yeah. What's the last thing that you **made from scratch**, Harp?
- Harp: You know, I actually made chicken stock this weekend **from scratch**.

- Maura: And what did you make with the chicken stock?
- Harp: Then I made butternut squash soup.
- Maura: Wow, I bet it was good.
- Harp: It was delicious. I'm eating it every day for lunch and it's so good.
- Maura: **Man**, I'm hungry now. OK, so let's give you some examples with **to make something from scratch**.
- Harp: Let's do it.

- Maura: Do you wanna come over for pizza tonight?
- Harp: I don't really like delivery pizza
- Maura: It's actually not delivery. It's kinda my speciality. I make pizza **from scratch**.
- Harp: You make pizza **from scratch**?
- Maura: Yeah.
- Harp: Wow, maybe I will come over. Yeah, that sounds great.
- Maura: Yeah, it's pretty good. You'll love it.
- Harp: You make everything, the dough and everything, **from scratch**?
- Maura: Yup.
- Harp: Wow, I'm excited.

- Maura: So there's an example where someone was making some food **from scratch**, which means that they didn't use any pre-made ingredients; they only used natural ingredients and they made it all themselves.
- Harp: Yes. But I do have to say that sometimes you can **make some things from scratch** and some of the ingredients are already made. Like, if I make pizza at home, I don't make the dough but I make everything else, so I still think I'm **making it from scratch**.
- Maura: Yeah. Just recently, I made, like, a Thai coconut milk soup. It was so good. I had to buy all these special ingredients that you can't normally find in any grocery store in Montreal. But I didn't make chicken stock like you did, Harp. I used chicken stock that was already made. But I would still say I **made it from scratch**.



Harp: Well, I'm just more **hardcore** than you are. But, yes, I agree. You did **make it from scratch**, I would say.

Maura: Well, now you've given me a challenge. I can aspire to be like you. OK, so **to make something from scratch** is delicious. Let's do one more example.

Harp: Hi everyone!

Maura: Hey, come on in.

Harp: Thanks.

Maura: We're just about to eat.

Harp: Perfect. Here's my dish.

Maura: Oh, wow. It looks delicious.

Harp: Well, I have to make a confession.

Maura: What?

Harp: I didn't make it. I bought it at the store.

Maura: Oh well, I'm sure it'll be good.

Harp: It will be, but if I had **made it from scratch** it would be much better, I'm sure. But it should be OK.

Maura: It looks good. I'm sure it'll be wonderful.

Maura: So, there's another example where, in this case, someone didn't **make it from scratch**, which means it wasn't homemade and it was bought at a store.

Harp: I would just like to say that that was an example, and I would never take something to a **potluck** that I didn't make.

Maura: Well, sometimes people are busy.

Harp: No, I know. But if it's a **potluck** and everyone else is cooking, I think that I should make the effort to cook.

Maura: No, I agree, I agree. You're right. All right. Now, let's go over the expressions we looked at one more time.

Harp: All right. We started with **to start from scratch**.

Maura: And then we looked at ***to scratch the surface.***

Harp: And then ***to make something from scratch.***

Maura: Now I feel all itchy all over. I gotta **scratch.**

Harp: Not that kind of **scratch**, Maura.

Maura: OK. So, don't forget to go to our website, Culips.com. That's C-U-L-I-P-S.com. And check us out on Facebook too. We'll talk to you soon. Bye!

Harp: Bye everyone!

## Detailed Explanation

### Scratch

Expressions with the word **scratch** are the focus of this episode. First, let's explain what the word means. **To scratch** is to use something sharp, often your fingernails, and move back and forth across a surface. A **scratch** can be very light, like when you're **scratching** your arm, or it can be deep, like when a cat **scratches** your arm and it bleeds.

We can also **scratch** stuff other than people! We can **scratch** just about anything. We can **scratch** paint off of a car or we can **scratch** a piece of furniture, but for this kind of **scratching**, you'll probably need something sharper than finger nails.

The word **scratch** is in a bunch of different expressions, but in this episode we focus on the **scratch** expressions that are connected with starting something or the beginning of something.

### To start from scratch

When someone **starts from scratch**, it means they start from the beginning with nothing. This expression can be used when a person begins something and has no prior knowledge of how to do it. For example, if someone has never built a doghouse and they want to, we can say that they are **starting from scratch**.

**To start from scratch** is also often used when someone has to do something they have already done from the beginning again. In this episode, we use an example of starting over on a school assignment when the computer crashes and does not save all the work.

One possible origin of this expression comes from the past, when people raced and the starting line was represented by a scratch in the ground.

### To crash (a computer)

When a computer **crashes**, it stops working. To say that a computer **crashed** is not specific to what exactly the problem is. This is a very common expression to describe general computer problems when the computer becomes unusable.

This expression is said with *computer* as the subject: **the computer crashed**. Most often, we don't know exactly why computers stop working, so we blame it on the computer! It could also be said that a person **crashed** the computer by doing some kind of complicated operation that shuts down important computer functions.

Here's an example with a computer that **crashes**:

Kathleen: Did you talk to Steve last night over Skype?

Dawn: No, I couldn't. My computer **crashed** the day before and now it won't start. I feel so disconnected.

To take up something

**To take up something** means to start learning something new, often a new skill or hobby. When a person **takes up** learning something new, this means that they are taking a course or are going to be dedicating time towards this skill. For example, if someone **takes up** knitting, this means that they have never knitted before and now they are taking a course or practicing knitting on a regular basis.

In this episode, Tim **takes up** playing the guitar. He has never played the guitar before, and now he is taking courses and practicing in order to improve.

Here's one more example with **to take up something**:

Jennifer: Why are you always busy on Wednesday night?

Cleo: I'm **taking up** swimming. It's something I've always wanted to do. The lessons are on Wednesdays after work.

To scratch the surface

If a person has **scratched the surface**, it means they have only limited knowledge of something, or have not yet done enough work in a certain area.

In this episode, we give the example of a rock. If you scratch a rock, you don't go very deep. In order to really see what the rock is made of, you must drill much deeper!

This expression is often used when more work or knowledge is needed. It can have a negative connotation, like the person does not have enough knowledge or has not done enough work.

In both examples for **to scratch the surface** in this episode, the person is asked to do more research and more work because just **scratching the surface** is not enough.

Here's one more example, when **to scratch the surface** is not negative:

Ned: I'd like to see a report on the most popular toys. Can you have something for me by the end of the day?

Andrea: Sure, but that's not much time. I'll only be able **to scratch the surface**.

Ned: No problem. I just need some basic info.

To flip a house

This expression is used when people talk about real estate—the market of buying and selling houses. **To flip a house** means to buy a house, fix it up and make some improvements to increase its value, and then resell the house in a relatively short time to make money.

You can **flip** other items as well, but these items are always large expensive items, like cars or boats. Because **flipping** items involves a lot of money, it's not something that most people do. In the example in this episode, the friend recommends doing more research before **flipping houses**, because it can be risky.

### To hold on

**To hold on** is just like *to wait a second*—one person wants another person to stop and wait. It can be used literally to interrupt someone talking in order to do something else, and then resume a short time later. This can be done face to face, but is also often done on the phone.

Here's an example over the phone:

Jasmine: Hello?

Chuck: Hi, is Sam there?

Jasmine: Yep. Just **hold on** a sec and I'll get him.

In this episode, **to hold on** is used in a slightly different way. **Hold on** is said to interrupt someone, in order to ask for clarification about information that they have just shared. Usually, this information is surprising or confusing, and needs to be clarified right away.

During the conversation in this episode, one person says **hold on** to the other person in order to clarify that one person wants to flip a house, but has not done much research. The second friend wants to warn the first friend that she should do more research before doing that.

Here's an example using **to hold on** in a situation where someone says something surprising:

Pete: So what are the details of your new job?

Oscar: It looks like it's gonna be awesome. I start in one month, the pay and benefits are great, and I get to move to Hawaii.

Peter: **Hold on!** You're moving to Hawaii? That's amazing!

### To make something from scratch

**To make something from scratch** is to make something from nothing, to begin making it with no part already made. As we say in this episode, this expression is almost always used for food. When a meal is **made from scratch**, this means that no part was already made or bought in a store. We could also say that a meal **made from scratch** is homemade.

It's less common, but this expression could also be used to talk about making something that is not food. Here's an example not talking about food:

Felix: I made this shelf **from scratch**. I even did the design myself.

Catherine: Wow! Nice job. It looks great.

### Stomach grumbling

When a stomach **grumbles**, it means the person is hungry. **To grumble** actually means to make a low sound, just like the sound your stomach makes when you're hungry. A stomach can be said to **grumble**, **rumble**, or **growl** when a person is hungry.

### Man as slang

Oh **man**, this is a common slang word! In English, for the last few decades, saying **man** at the beginning or end of a sentence is a very casual way to speak. **Man** should not be written, and only used with friends. Males tend to use this more often than females, but it is acceptable from both genders. Maura uses it in this episode.

Maura says, "**Man**, I'm hungry now." As you can see, using **man** as a slang word does not change the meaning of the sentence. It is used in a casual way, and can be used to give emphasis.

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

Brian: Hey, how's it going, **man**?

Michael: Not too bad. What's up with you?

Jenna: **Man**, that party last night was so fun!

Frank: I know what you mean. **Man**, I hope Chris has another party again soon.

### To be hardcore

If someone is described as **hardcore**, it means that they are very dedicated to something. Someone who likes to exercise at the gym often could be called **hardcore**. A person who is obsessed with her boyfriend and calls him every hour could also be called **hardcore**.

Harp jokes that she is more **hardcore** than Maura because she made everything in her soups from scratch, while Maura used a soup stock that was already made. Harp would be more **hardcore** because she is more dedicated to making everything from scratch than Maura is.

Here's another example:

Melanie: Jim got another tattoo this weekend.

Nicholas: Wow, he's pretty **hardcore**. He has, like, 15 now!

**Hardcore** can also be used to describe something that is graphic or explicit. **Hardcore** can also be written **hard core** or **hard-core**.

#### A potluck

A **potluck** is a kind of party that people have where everyone brings some food to share. There are many possible origins to the word **potluck**. One possible origin is that in the past, people would make something out of many different foods that were left, and by the luck of the pot, it would be delicious!

## Quiz

1. If a friend says her computer crashed, what does that likely mean?
  - a) Her computer was in a car and crashed.
  - b) Her computer stopped working properly.
  - c) Her computer physically fell apart.
  - d) She has a new computer.
  
2. Robert just told you that he's taken up bird watching. What does this mean?
  - a) He doesn't like it.
  - b) He loves it.
  - c) He has just started doing it.
  - d) He's been doing it for years, but is quitting.
  
3. Elaine's report on dinosaurs only has limited information about them. It \_\_\_\_\_.

Please fill in the blank.

- a) just scratches the surface
  - b) is made from scratch
  - c) is scratchy
  - d) flips
  
4. Why might someone tell you to hold on?
  - a) because they want you to wait for a moment
  - b) because they want you to clarify some information
  - c) both a) and b)
  - d) none of the above
  
5. The expression *to make something from scratch* is most often used to talk about what?
  - a) houses
  - b) building things
  - c) races
  - d) food



6. If your stomach makes noises because you're hungry, what is your stomach doing?
- a) grumbling or rumbling
  - b) grumbling or grimacing
  - c) rumbling or tumbling
  - d) tumbling or rowling
7. In which part of a sentence is the slang term *man* usually used?
- a) the beginning
  - b) the end
  - c) either the beginning or the end
  - d) in the middle
8. If Helen is described as hardcore about photography, what does that mean?
- a) She loves photography and it always taking pictures.
  - b) She hates photography and refuses to pose in pictures.
  - c) She only likes taking pictures that are hard to see.
  - d) She doesn't know very much about photography.
9. What is a potluck?
- a) a dinner where everyone invited brings food to share
  - b) a lucky pot that grants wishes
  - c) a dinner where everyone invited stirs the pot
  - d) a pre-made dinner sold in most Canadian convenience stores

**Answers:**

1.b    2.c    3.a    4.c    5.d    6.a    7.c    8.a    9.a