

## Catch Word #111 – Fat Chance

### Transcript

Maura: Hello everyone. It's Maura.

Harp: And Harp.

Maura: And we're here with your Culips English Learning Podcast.

Harp: Make sure you go to our website, that's Culips.com, C-U-L-I-P-S.com, because there you can become a member. When you're a member... Maura, what does that give you?

Maura: Well, it gives you access to a whole bunch of good stuff, including transcripts for all our episodes, more detailed explanations of the expressions we use, and a little quiz to test yourself.

Harp: Exactly. Today we're doing a Catch Word episode, and that's where we take some expressions, we explain them, we give you examples.

Maura: That's right. So, today we're going to look at expressions that have to do with luck and chance. We use these expressions to talk about something that is not going to work out. So, we would use these expressions if it's more likely that something is not going to happen.

Harp: Exactly. I think we should get started.

Maura: Let's do it.

Harp: So today, the first expression we have is ***fat chance***.

Maura: Yes. Two little words: ***fat chance***. And this is exactly how this expression is used. We don't use it in a sentence; we use it in response to something else that someone has said. So, someone has talked about the possibility of something happening and then we respond by saying ***fat chance***. And when we say ***fat chance***, what does that mean, Harp?

Harp: It means it's not gonna happen.

Maura: Right. It means that it's impossible or the chance of it happening is very, very small.

Harp: Exactly.

Maura: So this is something that could happen and, really, could be anything. It could be related to getting a job that you want, or it could be related to going

on a trip, or it could be used to talk about someone's love life.

Harp: Anything. It could be about if someone says they're gonna win the lottery, if it's gonna snow in July, anything. It can be used for anything.

Maura: Right. So remember, this expression is used to say that there's not a good chance that something's going to work out, that it's almost impossible.

Harp: OK. Let's give an example.

Harp: Yesterday I watched the new Brad Pitt movie.

Maura: Oh, really? Was it good?

Harp: It's so good. Have you not seen it?

Maura: No, I haven't.

Harp: It was so good. And Brad Pitt is so good looking.

Maura: He is pretty charming.

Harp: I'm gonna marry him one day.

Maura: **Fat chance.** I think you better move to Hollywood.

Harp: I think I might. Just joking.

Maura: So, there is an example where we use the expression **fat chance**. And this means that there is not a good chance of that happening.

Harp: Exactly. There's very little chance that I'm ever gonna marry Brad Pitt.

Maura: **Sorry to break it to you**, Harp, but it's true. There's probably a very small chance and it's almost impossible that you'll marry Brad Pitt.

Harp: I would say it's impossible.

Maura: So, that is how we can use **fat chance**. And like we said, we didn't use **fat chance** in a sentence, we just responded to the idea of marrying Brad Pitt by saying **fat chance**.

Harp: Exactly. Let's give one more example.

Maura: Let's do it.

Harp: So, I just came back from the bank.

Maura: Oh, really? What did you find out? Did you get some good financial advice?

Harp: I did. I talked to my personal advisor and he told me how to save some money for retirement, so I've started saving.

Maura: Wow. You're thinking about retirement already. We're so young. I don't wanna think about retirement yet.

Harp: Well, you have to start thinking about it now.

Maura: **Nah**, I wanna spend my money. I'll start saving for retirement when I'm 50 and then I plan to retire rich.

Harp: **Fat chance**. You need to start saving now.

Maura: I'll think about it...in another 30 years.

Maura: So, there is another example where we could use the expression ***fat chance***.

Harp: Yes. And in this example, Maura wasn't planning on saving until she was close to retirement age, so the chances of her retiring rich were much lower.

Maura: Exactly. So, one important thing to remember, as well, is you wanna be careful when you use this expression, because it could be rude. When you say ***fat chance*** to someone, they could be upset by it in some circumstances. For example, if someone says that they want to be a professional model one day, but you don't think that they are good looking enough, and you say ***fat chance***, that's not very nice and would probably hurt that person's feelings.

Harp: Yeah. It would be very rude. And another thing to note about this expression, ***fat chance***, is that it's quite casual. It's not really used in business or in a very formal setting. Use it with your friends or people you know.

Maura: Yeah, that's a good point. So, now there's another expression we wanna talk about that means exactly the same thing and I find this so funny because this next expression is ***slim chance***.

Harp: ***Slim chance***.

Maura: Right. And *slim* means skinny, which is the opposite of *fat*, but even though they're opposites, ***fat chance*** and ***slim chance*** have the same meaning, that there is not a good chance of something happening.

Harp: Yeah. It is really funny: **fat chance**, **slim chance**. It seems like they should be opposite meanings, but they mean the same thing.

Maura: Yup. There are some strange things in the English language and this is an example of one of them.

Harp: Yeah. So **slim chance** means the same thing as **fat chance**. It means that there is very little chance that something will happen.

Maura: Right. So we're going to give you an example with **slim chance** now, just like the last example we gave you with **fat chance**, to show you that they can really be used in the same way.

Harp: I just came back from the bank.

Maura: Oh, really? Did you get some good financial advice?

Harp: I did. I spoke to my personal advisor and he gave me some tips on how to save for retirement, so I've started saving.

Maura: Wow. You're saving for retirement already. I don't wanna think about that. I'm too young.

Harp: You have to start young.

Maura: Well, not me. I'm gonna spend what I want and maybe when I'm, like, 50 years old, I'll start thinking about saving money, and then I plan to retire rich.

Harp: I think there's a very **slim chance** that you're gonna retire rich if you only start at 50.

Maura: I think I'll be fine. Maybe one day, in the next 30 years, I'll start thinking about saving.

Harp: OK.

Maura: So, there's an example just like we did with **fat chance**, except this time now we used the expression **slim chance**.

Harp: Yeah. And you'll notice that with **slim chance**, we used it in the middle of a sentence. It wasn't like **fat chance**, where we said it just by itself.

Maura: Yeah, so it's a little bit softer. The meaning isn't so strong when you say there's **a slim chance** and you use it in a sentence.

Harp: Yeah. With **slim chance**, it's not quite as rude. It's not really rude at all, actually, so you could use it in business or in a professional setting.

Maura: Exactly. So, they're similar because they have similar meanings, but the difference in how they're used is important, because **fat chance** could be a little bit rude and is more abrupt and **slim chance** is used in a sentence and so you could use it in a more professional way.

Harp: Exactly. Let's give one more example with **slim chance**.

Maura: Let's do it.

Harp: I'm feeling a bit sleepy right now. I need to get another cup of coffee.

Maura: Oh man, I wish I were sleepy. I fell asleep and I didn't study for our test.

Harp: You didn't study at all?

Maura: No. I'm really worried. I hope there's still **a slim chance** that I'll be able to pass the test.

Harp: I don't know. I studied all night. There's a lot of tough material.

Maura: **Wish me luck.**

Harp: Good luck.

Maura: So, there is another example with **slim chance**. Again, it means that there's little possibility or no possibility that I'm going to pass the test.

Harp: OK. Let's move on to our next expression.

Maura: So, the next expression that also means that there is not a good chance or only a small possibility that something's going to happen is **a long shot**.

Harp: Yes. **A long shot**.

Maura: So if we say something is **a long shot**, it means that there is little or no possibility that it's going to happen.

Harp: Yeah. And if we think about this, **a long shot**, if you try shooting at something very far away, either with a gun or a bow and arrow, and you're trying to aim at something, it's more difficult because it's far away. When you're shooting at something that is far, it's a long shot. So the chance of you actually hitting your target is very low.

Maura: Right, exactly. So if you're trying to shoot at something far or a long distance away, you can't see it very well so the chance of hitting it is low or impossible. Just like the meaning of **fat chance** and **slim chance**, **a long shot** is just the same.

Harp: Exactly. Should we give an example with this expression?

Maura: Let's do it.

Harp: All right.

Maura: Wow. I'm so excited right now.

Harp: **What's going on?**

Maura: Well, I just applied for a job as a movie producer.

Harp: Really?

Maura: Yeah. I'm excited. I hope I can get it.

Harp: But you have no experience in this, and you didn't study it in school.

Maura: I know, but I'm really interested in movies, so **I'm crossing my fingers.**

Harp: I think it's **a long shot** that you're gonna get this job.

Maura: I know. It's not that realistic, but it might work out.

Harp: I hope for you.

Maura: And there is an example with **a long shot**. There was not a good chance that I was gonna get that job.

Harp: Exactly. So it was **a long shot**.

Maura: So let's give one more example with **a long shot**.

Harp: Let's do it.

Harp: So I'm trying to get the Jones account.

Maura: Oh, really? I thought they always bought from the same supplier.

Harp: I know. But I think it's worth a try. It's a really big account.

Maura: You have a point, but it sounds like **a long shot** to me.

Harp: It might be.

Maura: Well, good luck with it anyways. Let me know how it goes.

Harp: Thanks. I will.

- Maura: And so there is a second example with something that is **a long shot**, which, again, means that there's a low possibility, only a small chance that something is going to happen.
- Harp: Yes, exactly.
- Maura: So you can use these expressions to talk about other people and you can use them to talk about yourself. But with **fat chance**, remember that's different, because we don't use that one in a sentence, we use it to comment on something that someone else has just said.
- Harp: Yes, exactly.
- Maura: OK. So that's it for today's episode talking about the low possibility of things happening.
- Harp: Yeah. And so today we looked at **fat chance**, **slim chance**, and **a long shot**.
- Maura: So Harp, do you think that there's only **a slim chance** that the sun's gonna shine today?
- Harp: I think so.
- Maura: Man, I can't wait for spring.
- Harp: Me neither. I've had enough of this snow.
- Maura: So don't forget to go to our website, Culips.com, that's C-U-L-I-P-S.com, and you can always check us out on Facebook and Twitter. We love to hear from you, so keep talking to us.
- Harp: Yes. So that's it. Bye everyone.
- Maura: Good bye.

## Detailed Explanation

### Fat Chance

**Fat chance** is an expression that can be used when there is very little possibility that something will happen. It is generally not used within a sentence, but on its own as a response or comment to someone. If someone says something that you think is not going to happen or is not possible, you can say “**Fat chance!**”

The word *chance* means possibility, and even though *fat* means big or large, in this case it is used sarcastically to mean that a possibility is small. For example, if a friend is telling you that maybe your favourite band will come and play a concert at your high school, and you think that there is little or no possibility that it will happen, you can respond with “**Fat chance.**”

This expression is always used in casual conversation, and never in a formal setting, because sometimes it can come across as rude.

### To break something to someone

When you say to someone “**Sorry to break it to you**” or “**I hate to break it to you,**” it means that you feel badly for having to tell someone something.

This expression is used before you tell someone something that may hurt them, but that you feel you have to say. It comes from another English expression, **to break the news**, which means to give new information to people.

So when you say “**Sorry to break it to you,**” you are telling the person that you are sorry that you have to give them some news that may hurt their feelings.

This expression usually comes before you tell them the news. Here’s an example:

Kate: I really wish I had won that competition. I felt like I did really well.

Millie: **I hate to break it to you,** Kate, but you’re not the greatest singer. You are much better at dancing.

### Nah

**Nah** is a very casual way of saying *no*. It is used a little differently than *no*, but it means the same thing. *No* is a very certain and final answer, but **nah** is more casual and not as serious or severe as the word *no*. If you know how the word *yeah* can mean *yes*, then you can understand how **nah** can replace *no*.

In this episode, Maura says “**nah**” to Harp when Harp tells her that she has to start thinking about saving for retirement soon. Maura chooses to say the word **nah** instead of *no* to come across as more casual, and not too serious or disrespectful of Harp’s suggestion.



A slim chance

Like *fat chance*, a *slim chance* is an expression you can use when there is very little possibility that something will happen. But unlike *fat chance*, a *slim chance* is generally used within a sentence, and not on its own. And also unlike *fat chance*, a *slim chance* can be used in more formal conversations. Other than these differences, the two expressions mean the same thing.

For example, if you were speaking to your teacher about how your friend said that maybe your favourite band would come and play at your high school, you could say “I think there is a very slim chance that they will come and play.”

Wish me luck

**Wish me luck** is something you can tell someone when you want them to hope that you do well or succeed in something. It is a prompt for someone to say “good luck” to you. Usually the other person responds with “good luck” or another expression that means that they hope you do well in something.

Here’s an example:

Helen: I have my final exam this afternoon and I’ve hardly studied. **Wish me luck!**

Bob: Good luck. I’m sure you’ll be fine, but I’ll be hoping the best for you.

A long shot

**A long shot** is another expression used to mean that there is very little chance of something happening. It is very similar to *fat chance* or *slim chance*, except that you use it a bit differently. *Fat chance* and *slim chance* usually mean that an event will probably not happen at all, but **a long shot** means that you are attempting an action that may not work, but you are going to try anyways.

This expression comes from the idea that shooting at something that is a long distance away will probably not go well because you cannot see your target very well and it’s so far away from you. So, when you say **a long shot**, you mean that there is only a small chance that a goal will be achieved.

Let’s look at the same example as before about the concert to illustrate the difference:

Bob: I think there’s a very slim chance that my friend was right and that my favourite band will come and play at our school. Our town is so small!

Teacher: Yes, the town is very small. If they do play, it’ll be **a long shot** that they’ll actually be able to draw a crowd.

What’s going on?

Asking **what’s going on** is another way of asking what is happening. Both phrases mean

that you are asking someone what is occurring or what action is taking place. You could substitute *what's happening* for ***what's going on*** most of the time. The only difference is that when you are angrily asking someone what is happening, you generally say "**What's going on?**" and not "What's happening?"

For example, if you came home to find that your roommate had eaten all your food in the fridge, you would probably say "**What's going on** here? I told you to stay away from my food." And not "What's happening? I told you to stay away from my food."

***What's going on*** can be used in a variety of ways, from a casual friendly conversation to an angry one, but *what's happening* is usually only used in a very neutral way and doesn't imply friendliness or anger. It is just a question.

### To cross your fingers

The expression ***to cross your fingers*** has a very interesting and old history, dating back to the 1500s! Back then, people were very afraid of things that they did not understand, such as diseases. Bad things like diseases were considered evil, and most people were very religious. So to protect themselves against these evil things, they would often make the sign of the Christian cross in front of themselves using two fingers for good luck.

After hundreds of years, these little fears and good luck gestures are still around, but they have changed a bit. Now, ***crossing your fingers*** is when you wrap your middle finger around your index finger. It is a sign of good luck or protection. You can ***cross your fingers*** when you would like something to go well for you. This gesture has lost its religious meaning, and is now just a widely used symbol of good luck.

## Quiz

1. Which of the following is NOT an expression relating to luck or chance?
  - a) a bird's-eye chance
  - b) a long shot
  - c) to cross your fingers
  - d) fat chance
  
2. Which of the following is an appropriate response when someone says "Wish me luck"?
  - a) Good happening.
  - b) Slim chance.
  - c) Good luck.
  - d) Sorry to break it to you.
  
3. What superstitious purpose does crossing your fingers have?
  - a) to protect you from sleeping in late
  - b) to bring you good luck
  - c) to exercise your hands
  - d) to make you more powerful
  
4. What does the expression *a long shot* mean?
  - a) an office that is very far away
  - b) a game of golf played with extra-long clubs
  - c) a tall glass of water
  - d) a hopeful attempt
  
5. Which of the following words is NOT another word for *chance*?
  - a) luck
  - b) shot
  - c) arrow
  - d) possibility
  
6. Which of the following is the most likely origin or history of the belief in good luck and chance?
  - a) the 1500s, when people did not understand bad things like disease

- b) the 1800s, when people began to travel around the world
- c) the queens and kings in England and France in the 1900s
- d) circus and carnival history

**7. What expression that means good luck or chance is NOT discussed in this episode?**

- a) a slim chance
- b) break a leg
- c) a long shot
- d) to cross your fingers

**8. Why should the phrase *fat chance* only be used in a casual setting?**

- a) Teachers and older adults do not believe in chance.
- b) People don't like to talk about their weight.
- c) It can be seen as offensive or rude.
- d) It is religious.

**Answers:**

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