

**Catch Word #123 – Never look a gift horse in the mouth****Transcript**

- Harp: Hello everyone. This is Harp.
- Maura: And your pal Maura.
- Harp: And we're here with your Culips English Learning Podcast.
- Maura: Do not forget to go to our website, Culips.com. That's C-U-L-I-P-S.com. Because it's only on this website where you can become a Culips member.
- Harp: And being a member is awesome for you because when you're a member, you have access to the learning materials. Let me tell you my friends, the learning materials, they're great. In each one, you get a complete transcript so you can listen. And then you can follow to make sure that everything you heard you understood. And you also get detailed explanations and even a quiz.
- Maura: So, don't forget to become a member, because you also help support us here at Culips, which allows us to keep making these great episodes for you.
- Harp: Exactly. And also we're on Facebook, so come say hi, and if you have any questions, ask us there.
- Maura: Yes. And we're still trying to be on Twitter, right?
- Harp: We are.
- Maura: We're trying.
- Harp: We're pretty bad. We're sorry.
- Maura: OK. Now, today we're going to do a Catch Word episode, and that is where we look at different expressions, we give you explanations of how to use them, and we also give you examples.
- Harp: Exactly. So let's get started. So today, we're looking at expressions that talk about appreciating what is offered to you.
- Maura: Right. So, some people don't always appreciate when something is given to them. And so we might use these expressions to remind people that you should just be happy that someone gave you something or offered you something for free.

- Harp: Yeah, exactly. You should be thankful and happy when someone offers you something and when someone gives you something.
- Maura: Right. The first expression we're going to look at today is long.
- Harp: Yes. The expression is ***never look a gift horse in the mouth***.
- Maura: Yes. I'm gonna say that one more time and then maybe you should say it again too, 'cause it's so long. ***To never look a gift horse in the mouth***.
- Harp: Yeah. ***Never look a gift horse in the mouth***.
- Maura: This might be one of the more complicated expressions we've talked about, because it's long and strange.
- Harp: Exactly. So, let me say it one more time slowly for you. ***Never look a gift horse in the mouth***.
- Maura: So, this expression means that a person should always appreciate what is given to them. It's usually not very polite to be critical of something that is given to you, like a gift. So whatever the gift is, even if the person doesn't like it, it should be appreciated.
- Harp: Definitely. I agree with that. You know, this expression is actually a proverb, which means that it expresses some general truth. Because, really, if you receive a gift, you should appreciate it. You shouldn't be critical, you should just say thank you.
- Maura: Right. I'm sure we've all gotten a gift at some time and we didn't really like it. But you should still say thank you and show the person that you appreciate it. This expression might be used when a person does not do that. Right? When a person gets a gift and they start looking at it closely and thinking maybe it doesn't suit them or they don't really like it, one person might say ***to not look a gift horse in the mouth***, to just appreciate the gift no matter what.
- Harp: Yes, for sure. And the origin of this expression is really interesting. Because in the past, horses were given as a gift and you can tell how old a horse is by looking at their teeth, so if you give a horse as a gift and the person looks at the teeth, they're trying to see if it's a young horse and more valuable or if it's an old horse. So that's where the origin of this comes from.
- Maura: Right. So at that time, when a person looked their gift horse in the mouth, they were checking it to see if it was a good gift. And that's not really a nice thing to do. You know, imagine you give someone a gift and they're just evaluating it to see if it's a very good gift. That's not really nice.

Harp: Yeah. They're trying to see how expensive it is or if there's a price tag on it.

Maura: Yeah. Nowadays, it would be like giving someone a shirt and that person would then try to check the name brand to see if it was really expensive or not.

Harp: Yeah. It's just not very polite. You should appreciate the gift that you're given.

Maura: I agree. So, let's give an example with this proverb, ***to never look a gift horse in the mouth.***

Harp: OK.

Maura: So, Jim got a little birthday present **the other day** for his seventh birthday.

Harp: Oh really. What did he get?

Maura: Well, he got an action figure from his Aunt Sally. And it wasn't the one that he wanted. You know, he wanted Superman but it wasn't a Superman, and so he didn't look very happy with it.

Harp: Oh no.

Maura: I know. It was embarrassing. So I told **him**, "**Never look a gift horse in the mouth.**"

Harp: Yeah. He should appreciate the gifts that he gets.

Maura: Well, I hope as he grows up he learns some better manners.

Harp: I'm sure he will.

Maura: So there was an example when a child wasn't appreciating a gift that was given to **him** because it wasn't exactly what he wanted. And the mother in this case used the expression ***to never look a gift horse in the mouth***, just to let her child know that he should appreciate when gifts are given.

Harp: Yes. Let's do one more example.

Maura: All right.

Harp: I am just **fed up**.

Maura: Whoa. What's going on?

Harp: Well, I just got **a bonus**.

Maura: That sounds like good news. Isn't it?

Harp: Well, it would be good news, but my boss only gave me a 50-dollar **bonus**. And I know for sure that he gave other people 150.

Maura: Well, it still sounds pretty good to me. Don't you think?

Harp: It's OK.

Maura: Well, you didn't have 50 dollars before. You know, you should **never look a gift horse in the mouth**.

Harp: That's true.

Maura: Just buy something nice with your 50 dollars.

Harp: OK. Let's go to the mall at lunch.

Maura: In that example, someone was given a **bonus** at work, but they would have liked more money. And so they weren't happy with 50 dollars.

Harp: Exactly. And so they wanted a bigger **bonus**, because they weren't expecting it, but other people got a higher **bonus** and they just wanted more.

Maura: Right. This person didn't appreciate the 50 dollars. All they could think about was that they wanted more money.

Harp: Mmhmm.

Maura: So that's something interesting to note about this expression, as well. We can use it to talk about a gift, like a birthday present or a wedding anniversary present, but we can also use this expression for anything that is given.

Harp: Yes, exactly. And you know what I find interesting now? That it seems like when you give a present, you're often giving a **gift receipt** with it, in case the person doesn't like it.

Maura: Right. Now when you buy a present at a store, they can give you a **gift receipt**, which is just like a receipt, except it doesn't have the exact amount on it. so I guess it's a little bit nicer.

- Harp: Yeah, because then it's not... They don't see how much money you've spent on them. They can just exchange it for something else in the store.
- Maura: And this is because, maybe, two things. One, that when people give gifts they really want the person to like it. And so they give the receipt because if the person doesn't like it, they have the opportunity to exchange it. But I also think it's because so many people aren't really following the advice of this proverb. And they only want a gift that they really like and suits them, so they want to exchange it just because it's not exactly what they wanted.
- Harp: I know. I guess it's actually **a delicate balance** of being grateful for getting something but then also wanting to maybe exchange it for something they'll actually use.
- Maura: I agree. I think it's **a very delicate balance**.
- Harp: Yes. So, I don't know what the answer is, but appreciate the gifts you get.
- Maura: I think that's what it is. **When in doubt**, just appreciate it and say thank you and be grateful.
- Harp: All right. Let's move on to our next expression.
- Maura: All right. The next related expression is ***beggars can't be choosers***.
- Harp: ***Beggars can't be choosers***.
- Maura: Mmhmm. ***Beggars can't be choosers***.
- Harp: So this expression basically means that you should accept whatever you're given if it's not exactly what you wanted.
- Maura: Right. It's like saying people who beg, or ask for something, should just be happy with whatever they get. Because they were asking and begging that they wanted something, they should just be happy that they got it and not be particular about if it was exactly what they wanted.
- Harp: Yes, exactly. Basically, if we think about this, ***beggars can't be choosers***, if someone is begging on the street for money or food and let's say someone walks by and gives them a sandwich they can't really say, "Ugh, no I wanted a piece of pizza." They take what they can get.
- Maura: So this expression is used when a person should accept what they are given. And they could be reminded of this by someone around them if they are **being picky** about what they've been given.

Harp: Yes. And it's important to note that this is not talking about gifts. This is just when you're given something. It's not usually related to a present.

Maura: That's true. This is also a proverb, like **to never look a gift horse in the mouth**, and they're both really old expressions. They were included in a book of idioms from the 1500s. So these ones have been around a while. And they're still pretty popular today.

Harp: Yes. They're really old.

Maura: They are. So let's give a couple examples now with **beggars can't be choosers**.

Maura: So, how's your new place turning out?

Harp: It's pretty good. You know, the walls are all painted and it's starting to look better. The only thing is, I don't really like my furniture.

Maura: Oh really? Well, why did you buy it then?

Harp: **That's the thing**. I didn't buy it. My friend gave it to me.

Maura: Oh, I see, I see. Well, it's pretty cool to get free furniture. **Beggars can't be choosers**.

Harp: I know. I'm trying to just appreciate it and maybe cover it up a little bit with a tablecloth for the table and a cover for the couch. I'm trying to appreciate it.

Maura: Yeah. I think you're lucky on all the money you saved.

Harp: Definitely.

Maura: So there's an example where we used **beggars can't be choosers**. And like we said, we weren't talking about a gift. It was just something that was given. In this case, it was furniture that someone didn't need anymore, so they gave it to another person.

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

Maura: Oh man, I really need some time off.

Harp: I know. Aren't you excited? We're having a three-day weekend soon.

Maura: Well, I am looking forward to it, but it's just not long enough. I need more time off.

Harp: Well, **beggars can't be choosers**.

Maura: I guess you're right. I'll just have to wait till next year until I can take some more vacation time.

Harp: Exactly.

Maura: In this example, a person was not happy with a three-day weekend. Even though that's pretty nice, they wanted more time off.

Harp: Yep. And they didn't have any vacation time, so they had to take what they got, which was a three-day weekend.

Maura: Right. They had to take it. All right, now, we have one more related expression for you. And this one is pretty easy, because it has a literal meaning, which means that it's easy to understand and it means exactly what it says. It's not confusing, as some idioms might be.

Harp: *To take what you can get.*

Maura: Right. *To take what you can get.* So that means: whatever you can get, you should take, because that is what is offered to you. If it's easily and freely given to you, you should accept it.

Harp: Yeah, exactly. If they're giving you one thing, you should take that one thing.

Maura: This expression is also like ***beggars can't be choosers***, in that we don't use it to talk about gifts. So *to take what you can get* is used for things that are offered to you or given to you freely, but not for a formal gift.

Harp: Exactly. This one's pretty easy, so should we go straight into an example?

Maura: I think everyone's ready for that.

Harp: All right. Let's do it.

Maura: So, I heard there are pastries in the cafeteria for us.

Harp: Oh, exciting. Let's go get something.

Maura: Yes, let's go. I can't wait to have my doughnut. Uh, oh no, there's only muffins left.

Harp: Were you so **set on** a doughnut? Just take a muffin.

Maura: Well, I really wanted a doughnut.

Harp: Take what you can get.



Maura: All right. I guess a muffin's still good.

Harp: **It's better than nothing.**

Maura: All right, so in this example, a person was disappointed because they couldn't have exactly what they wanted. They couldn't have a doughnut. But the expression was used, *to take what you can get*, because the person was able to get a muffin.

Harp: Exactly. They got something when they didn't expect it. It might not have been the exact thing they wanted, but they still got a muffin.

Maura: You know what, Harp? I really like this example because I love when there's free food at work. It's very exciting. And if you go to pick up something and there's none left, it can be disappointing, can't it? But it's true; you should just take what you can get.

Harp: Exactly.

Maura: OK. Let's use this expression in one more example.

Harp: Let's do it.

Maura: So how's the job search going?

Harp: Not so great.

Maura: You haven't found anything recently? You haven't been on any job interviews?

Harp: Well, I actually got a job offer, I'm just thinking about it right now.

Maura: I'd say you gotta take what you can get in this economy.

Harp: I know. I have been looking for a job for almost 12 months, so I think I should take it, but it's just not what I wanted to do.

Maura: I'd say you take it and then just keep looking. Who knows?

Maura: So there's an example where we used the expression *to take what you can get*. And in this case, we were talking about a job.

Harp: Exactly. Because when it's a tough economy, sometimes you just have to take whatever job's offered to you. You can't **be picky**.



- Maura: Unfortunately, that's true, and it kinda sounds like the job market today. I don't know about the places where people are listening from, but in Canada, the job market is pretty tough lately. All right, now, let's review the expressions we looked at today one more time.
- Harp: All right. Well, we started with ***never look a gift horse in the mouth.***
- Maura: And then we also talked about ***beggars can't be choosers.***
- Harp: And we finished it off with *to take what you can get.*
- Maura: So, do not forget to visit our website, Culips.com. That's C-U-L-I-P-S.com. And if you wanna know more information about this episode, you can become a member and see all the additional materials that can help you understand it better.
- Harp: Yeah, do it. Become a member. It's awesome.
- Maura: And if you're on Facebook, say hi, because Harp and I are often online.
- Harp: Exactly. So that's it for us today. Thanks everyone. Have a good day.
- Maura: Bye.

## Detailed Explanation

### Never look a gift horse in the mouth

***Never look a gift horse in the mouth*** is a reminder to always appreciate what is given to you. The meaning of this expression is that a person should never be critical of what another person has given. This can be used to talk about a gift that is given for a birthday or another special occasion, but it can also be used for something anything that is given.

We mention in this episode that this expression is quite old. In the past, people sometimes gave horses as gifts. If a person who received a horse looked in its mouth to check its teeth in order to see its value, this was considered impolite behaviour. This expression was created as a warning against this behaviour.

This proverb is used to give advice and it is almost always used in the negative. You may hear someone warn, “**Don’t look a gift horse in the mouth,**” or “You should **never look a gift horse in the mouth.**” You don’t usually hear this expression in a positive phrase, for example, saying that someone looked a gift horse in the mouth.

Here’s one more example with ***never look a gift horse in the mouth:***

Blair: I asked for the receipt when Nicholas gave me my birthday present and now I feel like he’s mad at me.

Serena: You should **never look a gift horse in the mouth.** Maybe by asking for the receipt you made Nicholas feel like you didn’t appreciated the present.

### The other day

When someone says that something happened **the other day**, this means that it happened in the recent past, usually within the last week. When a person uses **the other day**, the exact day on which the story happened is not important.

In one of the dialogue examples in this episode, Maura says that a boy named Jack got a present **the other day**. This means that Jack recently got a present, which likely happened sometime in the past week. The day he got the present is not important to the story, so there is no need to talk about it.

Here’s another example with ***the other day:***

Antonia: **The other day** I was walking downtown and I ran into Sean from high school!

Kevin: That’s crazy! What day did you see him? I ran into him recently too.

You can also be specific to the general time of day, as in *the other morning* or *the other night*.

Him or 'im

Sometimes when native English speakers talk, they don't pronounce the beginning of the word **him**. The *h* is not pronounced and it sounds more like the person is saying **'im**. This happens a few times in this episode. Did you hear it?

This can also happen with **them**. It sounds like a native English speaker has just said **'em**.

The slang pronunciations of **'em** and **'im** sound very similar. In a specific context, it is usually clear whether the speaker is talking about one male person or a group of people. In a case where it is not clear, misunderstandings can happen, even with native English speakers.

To be fed up

**To be fed up** is a very common expression. It means that a person has experienced a lot of something unpleasant and cannot tolerate any more. When a person uses this expression, it means they are feeling angry or frustrated with something that they tried to ignore or tolerate in the past. It is as if a person has been fed a lot of food and cannot eat any more food.

But this expression is not usually used to talk about food. It is commonly used to talk about anything in your life that has been bothering you.

In one of the dialogue examples in this episode, Harp says that she **is fed up**. She **is fed up** with not being treated fairly at work. Her colleagues received a bonus of \$150 but she only received a bonus of \$50. Because Harp uses this expression, we know that she has been treated unfairly at work before and now she is upset.

Here are a couple more examples with **to be fed up**:

Brad: I'm really **fed up** with my sister just using me for money.  
Hakim: Well, you shouldn't lend her any more.

Luke: I can't stand how disorganized my school is! I can't get into the classes that I wanted.

Ned: It was like that last year too. I got so **fed up** with it.

A bonus

**A bonus** is something extra, which is almost always positive. In this episode, **bonus** is used to talk about work. When people talk about **a bonus** at work, it usually means extra money. Employees might get **a bonus** at the end of the year or maybe a Christmas **bonus**.

Here's an example with **a bonus**:

Fred: Do you think we're going to get **bonuses** this year?

Victoria: I sure hope so, but I'm not sure. We didn't do as well as expected.

#### A gift receipt

As we explain in this episode, **a gift receipt** is just like a regular receipt, except it doesn't include the price. When one person gives another a gift, they can also include **a gift receipt** so that if the person want to, they can return the item to the store where it was bought. The buyer needs to request **a gift receipt** at the time of purchase.

**Gift receipts** have only become available over the past several years. It is also acceptable to provide a regular receipt when giving a gift, but many people don't like the gift recipient to know how much their gift cost.

People generally don't talk about the cost of a gift to the person they are giving the gift to. When someone gives a gift, it is customary to make sure that the price tag is removed from the gift. Of course, even if a person has **a gift receipt** and does not know the price when they receive the gift, they will know the price if they return it.

#### A delicate balance

The expression **a delicate balance** is used to describe a situation with two or more sides. In order to keep the situation from going bad or having problems, all sides need to be considered. It is as if all the sides need to be balanced, but the situation is delicate or sensitive, and so one side can easily negatively affect another.

In this episode, Harp says there is **a delicate balance** when accepting a gift. One side is to be sure that you appreciate the gift and thank the person appropriately. The other possible side concerns asking for the receipt if, for example, the size of the gift is too small for you. If a person does not seem to appreciate a gift and asks for the receipt, this may be seen as rude. It is **a delicate balance** to ask for the receipt for a gift and still seem appreciative.

We could also say that a person's life is **a delicate balance** of work, chores, and free time. There needs to be time given to all three of these parts of life. If we work too much, then we can't keep up with our chores, or we don't have time to relax. Another situation might be where a person does not work enough and so cannot afford basic necessities.

The current environmental situation has also been described as **a delicate balance**; we need to eat and use the land, but we must also take care of it and be sure not to overuse it.

**A Delicate Balance** is also the name of a famous play and its film version.

Here's one more example with **a delicate balance**:

Bob: I'm going to go to the gym again. It's addictive!

Theo: Be careful, you just started going. It's **a delicate balance** between exercising well and overdoing it.

### When in doubt

This expression, **when in doubt**, is always followed by some advice of what to do when you're not sure of something. It's like saying that if you have any doubt, there is one thing that you should do.

In this episode, Maura says, "**When in doubt**, just appreciate it and say thank you and be grateful." She means that if you receive a gift and you don't like it, but you're not sure whether it's appropriate to ask for a receipt, you should just appreciate the gift. In any gift-receiving situation, it is always appropriate to just say thank you.

Another example could be at school. **When in doubt**, bring all your supplies to class with you. If you don't know what you'll be doing in class, it is good advice to bring all your supplies.

Here's one more example for you:

Sophie: I'm meeting with my ex-boyfriend tonight and I don't know what to say.

Benjamin: **When in doubt**, just say how you really feel.

### Beggars can't be choosers

**Beggars can't be choosers** is an old proverb. It has a very similar meaning to *never look a gift horse in the mouth*. To beg is to ask for something sincerely and desperately. This expression is saying that if you beg for something, you should accept whatever you are given, since you do not have a choice.

Just like *never look a gift horse in the mouth*, **beggars can't be choosers** is usually said to advise people that they should appreciate what they have and not question or judge what they have been given.

Here's one more example with **beggars can't be choosers**:

Tyler: I was dying to get a bike since my old one got rusted, but the one that my cousin gave me is so ugly!

Jeanie: **Beggars can't be choosers**. Just be thankful that you don't have to walk to school anymore.

To be picky

If a person is described as **picky**, it means that they have a limited taste, that they only like things a certain way. For example, someone who is **picky** about bread won't just eat any bread. It is only a certain kind that this person likes. If a person is **picky** about clothing, they may only shop at some stores or buy particular brand names.

In this episode, Maura says that people cannot always be **picky** about the gifts they receive. This means that even if the gift is not exactly as they like, they should accept it.

Here's one more example with **to be picky**:

Nathan: Today Julia said she doesn't like the colours in my design.

Matthew: Don't worry about. She's always **picky**.

A **picky** person can also be described as particular or choosy.

That's the thing

This is a very casual way to make a point that builds on what another person has just said. You can say **that's the thing** right before you talk about something that is important to the subject you're already talking about. This is a fixed expression and there is no plural form of this expression.

In one of the dialogue examples in this episode, Harp says "**That's the thing**. I didn't buy my furniture." Just before she says this, she also says that she does not like her furniture. Maura is wondering why Harp has furniture that she doesn't like, and she asks Harp why she bought it. Harp then tells her that she didn't buy the furniture, and this is why she has furniture that she doesn't like.

This expression can be used for emphasis in response to a question, like Harp uses it. It can also be used after a sentence, in order to build on the idea that was just mentioned. It cannot be used at the very beginning of a discussion.

Here are a couple more examples with **that's the thing**:

Sabrina: I'm not sure what to do for Jon's going-away party. It's hard to decide.

Anthony: **That's the thing**. We know he wants a party, but we don't know what exactly he wants.

Brian: So, what do you think of Angela? Do you wanna date her?

Ivan: **That's the thing**. I just met her, so I don't know her well enough to say.

A similar expression is *the thing is*. In this episode, Harp also uses the expression *the only thing is*. This expression is used to emphasize that there is only one important point to mention.

To be set on something

When a person is **set on something**, it means that this is their plan and they do not want to change from this plan. For example, if a person is **set on** going to India, then they are determined to go to India, and would not change their travel plans. If a person is **set on** attending a certain university, then they will work to get accepted to this university specifically.

In this episode, in the dialogue example about doughnuts, Harp asks Maura if she was **set on** getting a doughnut and Maura says yes. This means that it was Maura's plan to get a doughnut. When she isn't able to have a doughnut, she is disappointed. This often happens when a person is **set on something** and they can't get it!

Here are a couple more examples with **to be set on something**:

Benjamin: Luke told me that he wants to make pasta for the dinner party this weekend.  
Michael: I guess that's what he's making then. When he gets **set on** an idea, there's no changing his mind.

Zane: I'm really **set on** taking some piano courses this fall!  
Yasmine: That's great! I hope you enjoy it.

It's better than nothing

The expression **it's better than nothing** is used when a person should appreciate what they have because it is better than having nothing at all. If there is an option between having something that is not exactly what you want and having nothing, it is always better to have something!

This expression is just like *never look a gift horse in the mouth, beggars can't be choosers*, and *take what you can get*. It can be used to remind a person to appreciate something they have been given or something they already have.

Here are a couple of examples with **it's better than nothing**:

Christopher: I want to find a new apartment. I hate the apartment I'm living in right now.  
Franklin: **It's better than nothing**. I've been looking for an apartment for two months now and I'm still living at home!

Vincent: My parents gave me a really old computer to use at university next year!  
Lyle: At least you have something to do your assignments with. **It's better than nothing**.



## Quiz

1. Which of the following is the expression from this episode about appreciating any gift you receive?

- a) Always look a gift horse in the mouth.
- b) Never look a gift horse in the mouth.
- c) Never judge a gift horse by its mouth.
- d) Never kiss a gift horse on the mouth.

2. If Steve is fed up, what does this mean?

- a) He just ate a lot of food.
- b) He just fed another person food.
- c) He cannot tolerate any more of something.
- d) He is tired.

3. What is the difference between a regular receipt and a gift receipt?

- a) A gift receipt is to be given as a gift.
- b) A regular receipt has the price on it.
- c) A gift receipt does not show the price.
- d) both b and c

4. Beggars can't be \_\_\_\_\_.

Please fill in the blank to complete the expression.

- a) choosy
- b) choosers
- c) pickers
- d) picky

5. Which of the following is true about the expression *that's the thing*?

- a) It is not grammatically correct.
- b) It is used to begin a conversation at work.
- c) It is used to begin a conversation with a friend.
- d) It is used to mention an important point on a topic people are already talking about.

**6. Hilary is set on painting her bedroom walls green.**

**What does this mean?**

- a) Hilary does not want to paint her bedroom walls green.
- b) Hillary will paint her bedroom walls anything but green.
- c) Hillary wants to paint her bedroom walls green and no other colour.
- d) Someone else painted Hillary's bedroom walls green.

**7. In which situation could a person use the expression *it's better than nothing*?**

- a) when a person asks for a wallet for their birthday, and gets the wallet
- b) when a person does not have a dog, but wants one
- c) when someone is given a handbag bag, but they wanted a backpack
- d) all of the above

**Answers:**

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