

Catch Word #152 – Hanging by a thread

*The words and expressions that appear in **bold blue** text throughout this document are discussed in more detail in the Detailed Explanation section that follows the transcript.*

Transcript

Harp: Hello everyone. This is Harp.

Andrew: Hi. I'm Andrew.

Harp: And we're here at Culips bringing you another exciting episode.

Andrew: That's right. Make sure to check out our website, Culips.com. That's C-U-L-I-P-S.com. Culips.com. Because there you can become a member.

Harp: Yes. And when you're a member you have access to the learning materials. for each episode. In the learning materials, you get a complete transcript, detailed explanations, and even a quiz.

Andrew: Yup. And we're on Facebook and Twitter too, so check us out there.

Harp: Yeah. Come say hi, leave us a comment or if you have a topic that you'd like to hear us talk about leave it for us there.

Andrew: Yeah. We'd love to hear from you. So Harp, how are you doing?

Harp: I'm pretty good. I'm actually feeling very proud of myself.

Andrew: Yeah? Why's that?

Harp: Well, I was **super** productive today and I fixed a lot of my clothes that I just needed to fix. Little things. So I got out my sewing set, got my needle ready, and I fixed a button. I hemmed a pair of pants. And I actually fixed a pair of socks. They had a little hole in them.

Andrew: You darned them?

Harp: Yeah. I did darn them.

Andrew: Wow. That's an amazing. That's a great skill to have.

Harp: I'll be honest, it's not very pretty looking, if you look in the back of all the seams and stuff. But the buttons on and it's gonna hold. The sock is wearable again, and the pants are the right length.

- Andrew: You got the job done.
- Harp: Exactly.
- Andrew: Great
- Harp: All right. Let's get started with today's episode. Today we're gonna do a Catch Word episode, and that's where we look at some expressions, and we explain them, and we give you some examples.
- Andrew: That's right. And today we have three expressions that you can use to talk about things that are old and almost broken.
- Harp: Yes. So these are all expressions relating to things that are old and almost broken.
- Andrew: Hmm. You know technology moves so fast today that even, you know, things are breaking all the time. So these are great expressions to know when you want to talk about things are just falling behind.
- Harp: Yup. Exactly. And before I feel like we used to fix things. We used to fix engines in cars, and we used to fix our phones, and now we just buy new things.
- Andrew: We don't even fix our socks.
- Harp: It's true! And now it's an unusual thing to do.
- Andrew: That's right.
- Harp: All right. Well, let's get started with today's episode and our first expression.
- Andrew: OK. So our first expression is **to be hanging by a thread**.
- Harp: Yes. **To be hanging by a thread**.
- Andrew: And **to be hanging by a thread** is used to talk about anything that is falling apart, or it's old, it's broken, and it's really just ready to be replaced.
- Harp: Yes. So this expression again is **hanging by a thread**. And it just means when something is almost broken, and it's just not gonna last very much longer.
- Andrew: Right. And when I hear this expression, **to be hanging by a thread**, I really think of a piece of clothing that is falling apart and that has some thread sticking out, and is just ready to unravel at any moment.

- Harp: Yeah. I agree. I have the same image in my head when I think of something that is hanging on by a thread. It's almost about to break. It could even be a button falling off a shirt. Something, I see it very visual. But it could be for anything that's about to break.
- Andrew: And, actually, this expression, **to be hanging by a thread**, has an interesting origin in Greek mythology, but the story's kind of long and complicated so we'll save that for the learning materials.
- Harp: Yes. So if you're interested sign up, become a member, and check out the learning materials.
- Andrew: Yeah. So Harp, should we give an example with **to be hanging by a thread**?
- Harp: I think we should.

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|---------|---|
| Andrew: | Hey. Do you mind if I borrow your phone for a second? |
| Harp: | Yeah. No problem. Here you go . |
| Andrew: | Yeah. Great. Thanks a lot. It's just that mine, for now, it's just not working correctly. I can receive calls, but I can't make them. I don't know what's going on. It's just hanging on by a thread . |
| Harp: | I think it's time for you to start looking at a new phone. |
| Andrew: | Yeah. I think so. Well, thanks for letting me borrow yours. |
| Harp: | No problem. |

- Harp: So in this example, we had two friends, and one friend needed to borrow the other one's cell phone because his own phone was broken, and it was just **hanging by a thread**, which meant it was almost **dead**. He could still use the phone, but it was not gonna last much longer.
- Andrew: That's right. He could receive phone calls, but he couldn't make them because his phone was almost broken. It was just **hanging on by a thread**.
- Harp: Yes. Exactly. I think we should give one more example with this expression.
- Andrew: Yeah. Let's do it.

Andrew: Do you need a ride to the birthday party tonight?

Harp: **Aw**. That would be awesome.

Andrew: Hey, by the way, what did you buy Dave for his Birthday?

Harp: You know, actually, I bought him a new wallet. I bought him this one at a leather store in downtown, and its **super** pretty. Because we went shopping last weekend, and he pulled out his wallet to pay, and it was a disaster. It was falling apart. All his credit cards and debit cards just fell on the counter. It was embarrassing. It was barely **hanging on by a thread**.

Andrew: Yeah. That's a great idea.

Harp: I think he's really gonna like it. It's not too big.

Andrew: Yeah. Now you're going to **make me look bad**. I didn't get him anything cool like that.

Harp: What did you get him?

Andrew: I just got him a book.

Harp: Oh OK. I'm sure he'll like that too.

Andrew: So in this example we heard from two friends who were talking about a birthday party they were going to go to for their friend Dave. And one of the friends bought Dave a new wallet for his birthday because his old wallet was rattered and tattered and broken. It was just barely **hanging on by a thread**. In fact, it wouldn't even hold the debit and credit cards inside of it anymore, so she decided to buy him a brand new wallet for his birthday.

Harp: I feel this is a very true story that happens all the time. For some reason men have this really emotional attachments to their wallets and don't like to get rid of them, even when they're **hanging by a thread**.

Andrew: It's true. I dunno. It's something that we carry with us almost all the time every day. So we get attached to them.

Harp: Yes. So in this example it was **hanging by a thread**, which meant that the wallet was almost broken completely and was barely usable.

Andrew: That's right. So I'm sure Dave will appreciate his brand new wallet.

Harp: I'm sure he will. All right. Let's move on to our next expression.

- Andrew: Our second expression for today is **to be on its last legs**.
- Harp: Yes. **To be on its last legs**.
- Andrew: Mhmm. So to be on its last legs means to be broken and almost completely useless.
- Harp: Yes. And I'm gonna say this expression a little bit slowly 'cause it sounds a little bit complicated. **To be on it's last legs**.
- Andrew: Yeah. It's kind of a strange expression because when we're talking about something being broken, well things don't usually have legs.
- Harp: Yeah. Exactly. If your fridge is **on its last legs** it means that it's almost broken, that it's barely working. But a fridge doesn't really have legs.
- Andrew: That's right. This expression can also be used to talk about people that are not doing so well. So it really comes from that expression. But we also apply it to things that are broken too.
- Harp: Yeah. Actually all of the expressions that we are going to explain today can be used to talk about people, but we're explaining them only about how to use them when we're talking about things. If you're interested about learning how to use them in regards to people you'll have to sign up, become a member.
- Andrew: That's right. So, if we're talking about a thing that's **on its last legs**, it means it's almost totally useless, and it's broken.
- Harp: Yes. That means that it's still working a little bit, but really not very well or only a little bit. Or only one function of it is working. So maybe for our fridge, just the fridge works but the freezer doesn't work anymore. That's how you use this.
- Andrew: Right. So a part of it is broken, and you have the sense that it is going to completely break really soon. And then it is **on it's last legs**.
- Harp: Yes. Let's give an example with this expression.
- Andrew: Sure.

- Andrew: Do you want to watch a movie together this weekend?
- Harp: Sure. Do you want to watch it at your place or my place or go to the theatre?
- Andrew: Actually maybe we should go to the theatre or your house at least because my DVD player is **on its last legs**. It **skips** all the time. It's not very reliable

Harp: OK. Well we can watch it at my place.
Andrew: OK. How about Saturday at 9:00?
Harp: OK. What do you feel like watching now?
Andrew: Let's watch an action movie.
Harp: I was hoping you were gonna say comedy, but OK.
Andrew: All right. I'll see you on Saturday.
Harp: Bye.

Harp: So in this example we have two friends talking about watching a movie, and one friend said that they couldn't watch a movie at his place 'cause his DVD player was **on its last legs**. Which meant that it was almost broken. It was just not working very well.

Andrew: That's right. He could still play a movie on his DVD player but it would **skip** and the picture would be interrupted. It just wasn't working like it should, so he said **it's on its last legs**.

Harp: Yes. Exactly. Let's give one more example with this expression.

Andrew: I **almost killed myself** coming up your stairs. Your handrail is just awful. You really should replace it.
Harp: I know. I'm sorry. I've been meaning to replace it for weeks.
Andrew: Yeah. It's like really **on its last legs**. It's getting to the point where it's **super** dangerous to just come to your house.
Harp: I'm sorry about that. I'll fix it this weekend, I promise.
Andrew: OK. Thanks!

Andrew: So in this example we heard about a very dangerous situation where a handrail was totally **on its last legs**. It was loose, and when the person tried to climb the stairs, he almost injured himself.

Harp: Yes. And that's a very true example from Montreal because the stairs can be **super** icy, and you really need that handrail for support in the winter.

Andrew: That's right. And in Montreal, a lot of apartment buildings have outside stairs, so it's really important when it's icy in the winter to use the handrail.

- Harp: Yup. So in this example the handrail was **on its last legs**, which means that it was almost completely broken. So the handrail was still standing and upright but barely supporting the weight of the person.
- Andrew: Mmhm. A very dangerous situation. So should we move on to our third expression for today?
- Harp: OK. So our third expression today is **to have one foot in the grave**.
- Andrew: That's right. **To have one foot in the grave**.
- Harp: Yes. **To have one foot in the grave**.
- Andrew: And this is kind of an ominous expression, **to have one foot in the grave**. Of course, a grave is a place where you bury somebody that has passed away.
- Harp: Yes. So you bury someone who is dead in a grave. So this expression, **to have one foot in the grave**, means that the thing is almost **dead**.
- Andrew: That's right. So we can use this expression to talk about things that are old or are almost broken, and we just know that they are going to completely lose their functionality very soon.
- Harp: Yup.
- Andrew: OK. So should we give an example using this expression?
- Harp: We definitely should.

- Harp: Why'd you take a taxi here?
- Andrew: Well, I got in my car this morning, started it up, and it just didn't sound right. I didn't feel safe, so I took a taxi.
- Harp: It's that bad now?
- Andrew: Yeah, well you know my car. It's got **one foot in the grave**, and I really just need to get a new one.
- Harp: Well, if you want to go shopping for a new car this weekend, I would be totally up for that,
- Andrew: Will you pay for the car too?
- Harp: I wish I had the money for that. But, no, I'll accompany you to look for one.
- Andrew: OK. Let's do it.

Harp: So in this example we had two friends talking about the one friend's car. And the car just didn't sound right. It was probably making a lot of noise and didn't sound the way that a car normally does, so the friend thought that it was too dangerous to drive because the car basically has **one foot in the grave**.

Andrew: That's right. The car was old and it just didn't work anymore. So, although it would start up, it wasn't safe to **run** and drive in, so it had **one foot in the grave**.

Harp: Yup. It was almost **dead**.

Andrew: So, should we move onto one final example using this expression, Harp?

Harp: I think we should.

Andrew: **Is that a new computer that you've got there?**

Harp: I wish, but no. My computer is not working very well, so IT department gave me this one to just borrow. But they're trying to fix my computer again.

Andrew: Really? They think they can fix that thing? It has **one foot in the grave**.

Harp: I know, it's pretty much **dead**. But they insist that they think they can fix it.

Andrew: Well, good luck to them.

Harp: Yeah. This company is so cheap sometimes. Why don't they just buy me a new computer?

Andrew: I know. That would be great, eh?

Harp: Yeah.

Andrew: Oh well.

Andrew: So in this example we heard from somebody who was complaining about his or her computer. Because it was old, it had **one foot in the grave**, it wasn't really working well. So her company's IT department decided to try to fix the computer.

Harp: Yes. Exactly. So the computer was not working well, it was not functioning the way it was supposed to, it had **one foot in the grave**.

Andrew: That's right. One thing that you may have noticed in this episode is that we're talking about things that are almost **dead**, and that is an interesting way to talk about things that are broken. In English we say that they are **dead**.

- Harp: Yeah exactly. It's weird because, for example, a computer is an inanimate object, it's not alive, but when it's broken we say that the computer is **dead**.
- Andrew: That's right. Likewise, if your car breaks down and it won't start you can say my car **died**.
- Harp: And, for example, you can say my pen is **dead**. Which means that there is no more ink in my pen. You can use this for a lot of different objects.
- Andrew: Yeah. So even though, like you said, these things aren't alive, they don't have a life, we still think of them as being **dead** when they break.
- Harp: Exactly. All right. Let's do a quick recap for today's episode. We started with **to be hanging by a thread**.
- Andrew: That's right. And then our second expression was **to be on its last legs**.
- Harp: Yes. And then our last expression was to have **one foot in the grave**.
- Andrew: Mm hmm. To have one foot in the grave. So those are our three expressions for today. Make sure you check us out on Culips.com. Sign up to become a member because that helps us to bring quality episodes to you. And check us out on Facebook and Twitter while you're at it.
- Harp: Yes. Exactly. And you can always just leave us a rating on iTunes or on Stitcher Radio.
- Andrew: Totally. Well thanks for listening, and we'll talk to you next time.
- Harp: Bye everyone.

Detailed Explanation

Informal Contractions in this Episode

Informal contractions are unofficial short forms of other words, and they're usually only used in casual conversation. For example, when a native English speaker talks casually, they might say *gonna* instead of *going to*, or *whaddya* instead of *what do you*. Even though informal contractions are usually only used in spoken English, we include them in the Culips written transcripts to help you get used to how they're used and what they sound like.

These are the informal contractions used in today's episode, along with their meanings:

- **'cause**: because
- **dunno**: don't know
- **gonna**: going to

Super

In this episode, both Andrew and Harp frequently use the word **super** as an intensifier that is used to add emphasis to their speech. For example, Harp tells us that she was **super productive today**. When **super** is used to modify an adjective or adverb in this way, it makes it stronger. So, we can think of **super** as meaning the same thing and working the same way as *very*. It strengthens and adds emphasis to the adjective or adverb that it modifies.

Super is used as an intensifier in casual speech very often but it is best to avoid using it when speaking or writing in a formal environment.

Here some example sentences using **super**:

Jordan: I'm **super** excited for the World Cup this summer.

Molly: Me too! I can't wait.

Rene: The new express bus that goes downtown is **super** fast. It only took me 15 minutes to get to work today.

Theresa: Wow, that's amazing. That will cut your commute in half!

To be hanging by a thread

When something is **hanging by a thread** it is very close to breaking, falling apart, or failing. In this episode, we heard an example about a phone that is **hanging by a thread**. This phone is almost totally broken. It's in such bad shape that the owner had to borrow someone else's phone to make a call.

So, whenever something is almost totally useless because it's breaking, falling apart, or failing, we can say it's **hanging by a thread**.

This expression may have originated from the Greek legend of Damocles. In this story, Damocles works in the court of the king, Dionysius. One day, Damocles complained to king Dionysius about the life of a regular person. King Dionysius offered to switch places with Damocles, so he could experience what it's like to be king. Damocles accepted the offer and was happy to be king, but when he sat on the throne, he noticed something hanging above his head. Dionysius had tied a sword by a single horse hair above the throne. This was a symbolic gesture that was meant to help Damocles understand that while being a king may be great, it still is stressful. There is always someone who wants to dethrone the king and take his power.

Since the sword in the Damocles story was hanging only by a horse hair, it was very close to breaking and falling on the head of Damocles. In other words, the sword was only **hanging by a thread**.

Sometimes we say something is **hanging on by a thread**. This expression means exactly the same thing as **hanging by a thread**.

Here are a few examples that use this expression:

Martha: I feel like our relationship is just **hanging on by a thread**. I think we should go see a therapist for some counselling.

Tim: I think that's a good idea. Let's book an appointment.

Alex: It looks like we are going to have another election sometime soon.

Rich: Yeah, after this latest scandal the president's future is **hanging by a thread**.

Here you go

We can use the expression **here you go** whenever we give something to somebody, especially when we give someone something that they have asked for. In this episode, we hear **here you go** used when a lady lends her phone to her friend.

So, whenever someone asks for something, and then you give them that thing, you can use **here you go** as a polite way to signal that you have fulfilled their request. We can also use **here you go** to end a business transaction such as paying a taxi driver or tipping a hair stylist.

We use the expressions **here you go** and **there you go** interchangeably. They mean the same thing and are used in the same way. Whenever you give something to someone, you can use **here/there you go**.

Here are a few examples that use this expression:

Brent: Can you pass me the salt please?

Chelsea: Sure, **here you go**.

Store clerk: Ok, so your total comes to \$55.25. Cash or credit?

Customer: Credit please, **here you go**.

To be dead

When a machine, piece of equipment, tool, or object no longer works, we can say that **is dead**. In this episode, we heard lots of examples of **dead** items like a phone, a computer, and a pen. Because these objects no longer work, we can say that they're **dead**.

We often use **dead** to describe things that are temporarily not working because they don't have enough battery power. For example, it is very common for people to say that their phones are **dead**. In most cases, however, this means their phone *battery* is dead and just needs to be recharged. The phone isn't actually broken; it just will not be able to function until the battery gets charged.

So, if something is **dead** it means it no longer works. Here are a few examples that use **dead**:

Elsa: Can I borrow a pen? Mine just **died**.

Jonathan: Sure, no problem. Here you go.

Tina: The batteries in the remote control are totally **dead**. Can you pick up some new ones when you go to the store?

Jean: Ok, I'll do that.

Aw

Aw is a sound that speakers make when someone does something kind for him or her. It is not a real word and can't be used in formal writing, but it is common to see it used on the Internet and in text messages. In this episode, we hear **aw** used in the example where a man offered his friend a ride to a birthday party. His friend expressed her sympathy toward the kind gesture of offering a ride by saying **aw**.

This expression is used by all genders; however, it is slightly more common among females. So, **aw** is a cute sound that people can make to show their appreciation of something kind being done for them.

This is not the only way that **aw** can be used. Here is a short list of some of the other scenarios where you might hear **aw**:

When expressing frustration. Example: A person stuck in a traffic jam might say, **aw come on hurry up! I don't have all day!**

In reaction to seeing something cute. Example: A person walking down the street who sees a puppy might say, **"Aw look at that puppy! He's so cute!"**

When disappointed. Example: A kid on Christmas might say, **"Aw Santa brought me a skateboard, but I really wanted a bike."**

Here are a few more examples that use **aw** in reaction to kindness:

Pat: Hey, I bought you a coffee on my way to work.

Jim: **Aw**, thanks buddy.

Suzanne: Hey would you like to come over for dinner this weekend?

Ross: **Aw**, that would be great. Thanks!

To make someone look bad

When you **make someone look bad**, you do something so well that other people's accomplishments look small in comparison. In this episode, we hear an example where two friends discuss the birthday gifts they bought for their friend. One friend is worried that he is going to **look bad** because he only bought a book. In comparison, the other friend, who bought a wallet for a gift, will look good. This is because their friend who is having the birthday really, really needs a new wallet.

So, whenever you do something much better than everyone else, and as a result that makes you look really smart or like a hard worker, then you have **made the others look bad**.

This expression is usually used as a joke. You can say it when you want complement someone's hard work or good idea and make fun of them at the same time.

Here are two examples that use **to make someone look bad**:

Linda: This is the last week to collect donations for the orphanage. Have you been able to raise any money yet?

Steven: Yup. So far I've got my friends and family to contribute over \$500.

Linda: Wow! That's amazing. I've only managed to raise \$100. **You're really making me look bad.**

Steven: Not at all. That's fantastic. Every penny helps!

Rico: Did you finish your essay for History class yet?

Wendy: Yes, last week. I already handed it in to the professor.

Rico: What? Oh man, **you're making me look bad.** I haven't even started it yet.

Wendy: That's ok, you still have a week left before it's due.

To run

When a machine **runs**, it works or operates. We can use this expression to describe any mechanical objects (computers, cars, household appliances, industrial equipment, etc.) that function properly.

In this episode, we hear about a car that isn't **running**. This means that the car *no longer* works. So, whenever a machine **runs** it works correctly.

Here are a couple examples that use **to run**:

Brenda: I'm going to finally get around to doing some spring-cleaning in my yard this weekend.

Sara: What will you do?

Brenda: I'm going to chop down the dying tree in my backyard. It's quite the eyesore.

Sara: How will you do that?

Brenda: I rented a chainsaw.

Sara: Be careful! When a chainsaw is **running**, it can be really dangerous.

Brenda: Ya, don't worry. I know what I'm doing. I've cut down plenty of trees before.

Fela: I finally fixed my computer. It's up and **running** smoothly now.

Sammy: How did you do that?

Fela: Turns out the hard drive crashed. I just needed to replace it. Everything's fixed now.

Sammy: That's awesome, nice work.

To be on its last legs

Something that is **on its last legs** is very close to breaking, collapsing, or falling apart. When something is **on its last legs**, it is a bad condition and will no longer work soon.

This expression is usually used to describe objects but it can also be used to talk about people. If someone is **on their last legs**, it means they are close to becoming exhausted or dying.

In this episode, we heard examples about a DVD player and a handrail that were both **on their last legs**. This means that they still work to some extent but are unreliable and will be totally broken and useless very soon.

So, whenever something is **on its last legs**, it doesn't operate correctly and will stop working completely very soon.

Here are a couple examples for you to check out that use this expression:

Dave: I'm exhausted after that run. I feel like I'm **on my last legs**.

Tina: Yeah, you really gave it your all. You should probably sit down and take a break. Can I bring you some water?

Dave: Yeah, that would be nice. Thanks.

Quinton: Do you want to go shopping tomorrow with me?

Stella: Sure, what do you need to buy?

Quinton: I need to get a new iPod. Mine is **on its last legs**. It keeps freezing up.

Stella: Ok. Let's meet at the mall tomorrow at 3. Sound good?

Quinton: Sure, see you then.

To skip

When a DVD or CD **skips**, it moves forward during playback in an unwanted way. **A scratched or dirty disc or a broken player usually causes skipping**. In this episode, we hear an example about a DVD player that **skips** all the time. This makes it useless for playing movies.

So, whenever a DVD or CD **skips**, playback is disrupted and this makes it impossible to either watch a movie or listen to music.

Here are a couple examples that use **to skip**:

Christine: Can you put on some music?

Lorna: Sure. What do you want to listen to?

Christine: Why don't you put on your Fleetwood Mac CD? I love that one.

Lorna: I would but it's messed up. Whenever I play it, it **skips**.

Christine: That's disappointing. Ok, just play The Beatles, then.

Lorna: Sure.

Rick: I think my TV is broken. I tried to play a DVD the other day and it didn't play correctly. The picture was all weird.

Gina: Are you sure it wasn't your DVD? It could be dirty and that could cause it to **skip**.

The player's laser has a hard time reading information off the disc when they are dirty. Try wiping down your disc and see if that fixes it.

Rick: Oh yeah, I never thought of that. I'll give it a try and let you know how it works out.

To almost kill yourself

The expression **to almost kill yourself** is an exaggeration that is said often when people experience a dangerous situation and come close to hurting themselves.

For example, in this episode, we hear about a man who says ***I almost killed myself*** after he trips on a set of stairs. In reality, he didn't come close to death or even hurting himself. However, the experience was surprising, traumatic, and had the potential to cause serious injury.

In cases like this, we can say **to almost kill yourself** to describe the potential danger of the situation. It does NOT mean that the speaker is suicidal, but rather that the speaker found himself in a dangerous scenario.

Here are a few examples that use the expression **to almost kill yourself**:

Bill: I **almost killed** myself yesterday at work!

Stan: Yikes, what happened?

Bill: A pallet of cargo fell off a truck and almost hit me.

Stan: But you're ok though?

Bill: Oh yeah, I'm totally fine but it could have been really bad if I was standing closer to the truck!

Cindy: Did you hear about Minnie?

Helen: No what happened?

Cindy: She was out for a hike last weekend and she slipped and ripped her jeans.

Helen: Is she ok? She didn't hurt herself did she?

Cindy: No, she's fine. She said **she almost killed herself** but Minnie loves to exaggerate.

Helen: That's true. Well, I'm sad to hear her pants are toast but I'm glad she's ok.

To have one foot in the grave

When someone is so old or sick that they are close to dying, then that person has **one foot in the grave**. This expression is informal and humorous, but since it deals with a serious subject matter, you should be careful when using it. This expression could be offensive in certain circumstances.

For example, let's pretend that you visit someone's grandmother in the hospital and that friend is very worried about his grandmother's health. If you said, "Wow your grandmother doesn't look too good, **she's got one foot in the grave**," it would not go over well. You would offend your friend because in this circumstance the comment would be insensitive.

So, when someone **has one foot in the grave**, they are so sick or so old that it won't be long before they pass away. As we mentioned in this episode, this expression can also be used to talk about objects.

Here are some examples that use **to have one foot in the grave**. They demonstrate appropriate usage:

Li: Wow I'm so tired that I feel like I have **one foot in the grave**. I slept horribly last night. Do you want to go grab a coffee?

Morris: Yeah, sure. Let's go to the café down the street.

Omar: I'm so glad to hear that your uncle is feeling better.

Roy: Yeah, I thought he **had one foot in the grave** for sure, but he's a fighter and is doing much better. Everyone is so happy.

Is that a ... you've got there?

Is that ... you've got there? Is a fixed expression that people often use as a conversation starter. It can also be used when you want to inquire about an object you are curious about. In this episode, we hear it used in a way that satisfies both of these situations.

A man starts a conversation with his friend by asking, "**Is that a new computer you've got there?**" He is able to do two things at once with this statement: start a conversation and find out more information about the computer.

So, next time you want to start a conversation with someone, why don't you try using this expression?

Here are some examples that show you how it can be used:

Gus: Hey Lisa, **is that a new backpack you've got there?**

Lisa: Nope, I've had this old thing for years. Why, do you like it?

Gus: Yeah it looks very practical. Where did you buy it?

Lisa: At the mall.

Gus: Cool, thanks!

Will: **Is that a mountain bike you've got there?**

Reshma: Yeah it is! What do you think?

Will: It looks great!

Reshma: Thanks a bunch! Want to go for a bike ride with me sometime?

Will: Sure, sounds good.

Quiz

1. **What does a dirty or scratched DVD do when you try to play it?**
 - a) tumble
 - b) hop
 - c) skip
 - d) wobble

2. **When you work a lot harder than other people you run the risk of what?**
 - a) making the others look bad
 - b) making the others fall over
 - c) making the most of it
 - d) making it up as you go along

3. **Which fixed expression can be used to start a conversation?**
 - a) It's a.... you have.
 - b) What's it you have here?
 - c) Is that a... you've got there?
 - d) It is what it is.

4. **Which expression is used as an exaggeration?**
 - a) to be on its last legs
 - b) super
 - c) to have one foot in the grave
 - d) to almost kill yourself

5. **When a pen runs out of ink and no longer works, what is it?**
 - a) failed
 - b) discharged
 - c) out of breath
 - d) dead

6. Don't stand near the machine when it's _____. It's dangerous.

Fill in the blank.

- a) running
- b) walking
- c) jumping
- d) swimming

7. When can we NOT make the sound aw?

- a) in reaction to kindness
- b) when you want to ask someone a question
- c) in reaction to seeing something cute
- d) when you are frustrated

8. What can we say when we give someone something they've asked for?

- a) here/there you go
- b) finally
- c) super
- d) it's here/there

9. Which expression means to NOT be close to breaking or dying?

- a) to be hanging by a thread
- b) to be on its last legs
- c) to be busted
- d) to have one foot in the grave

Answers:

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