

Catch Word #162 – A train wreck

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:

- **gonna**: going to
- **gotta**: got to

Transcript

Harp: Hello everyone. This is Harp.

Andrew: And I'm Andrew and we're back with another Culips episode.

Harp: Yes. Make sure you check out our website, Culips.com. That's C-U-L-I-P-S.com.

Andrew: And while you're on our website, you should sign up and become a member. Membership gets you a lot of great stuff, like access to our learning materials. In our learning materials, you get transcripts to all our episodes, you get explanations, in detail, of all the key expressions that we explore in our episodes, and you get quizzes to test your comprehension.

Harp: Exactly. And also, if you're on Facebook or on Twitter, come on over and say hi. And if you have any suggestions for an episode you'd like us to do, leave it there.

Andrew: So, Harp, I've just noticed something that we have in common.

Harp: Really? What is it?

Andrew: Well, if you look at the table here, and you see our two cellphones, they both have cracked screens.

Harp: Yup. My phone is broken.

Andrew: My phone is broken too. I just recently dropped my phone and it smashed all over the floor and now the glass and the screen is all cracked.

- Harp: I have to admit, this is the second time this year that my screen has been broken. So I'm not fixing it.
- Andrew: I'm not going to fix my phone either. It's a very expensive repair.
- Harp: Yup. And the thing is, my phone still works. I can still use it and I can still make calls and I can still search the Internet and do all the things that I need it for, so if it's broken, it's still usable. I don't want to pay a lot of money to get it fixed.
- Andrew: Yeah, absolutely. Why fix it if you can still use it?
- Harp: Exactly.
- Andrew: Well, I guess, in my case, I'm just going to wait for the new version of my phone to come out, maybe next year, and then I will have a new phone, with a new screen, and I will be more careful.
- Harp: I am gonna wait as well and I'm gonna wait as long as possible because I feel like you have to change your cellphone all the time because then they get slower and I just don't want to do that.
- Andrew: Mmhmm. I hear you.
- Harp: All right, well let's get started with today's episode. Today we're doing a Catch Word episode, and that's where we look at some expressions that are related. We explain them and we give you examples of how to use them.
- Andrew: And today's episode is a very fitting topic for our conversation about broken cellphones because today we are discussing expressions that are used when something goes wrong.
- Harp: Yes. These are expressions all related to when you make a mistake or when someone else makes a mistake.
- Andrew: Yes. These three expressions are all related and they all are used to talk about failure, but they're a little bit different. Each one has **a different shade of meaning**, so we will describe those meanings as they come up. But for now, let's start with the first expression, which is **a train wreck**.
- Harp: **A train wreck.**
- Andrew: Yes. **A train wreck.**
- Harp: Yes. **A train wreck.** And this word might sound a bit weird to you but it's two words. It's a compound noun. It's **train wreck**.
- Andrew: Mmhmm. So two words, *train* and *wreck*, put together and it makes **train**

wreck. And now what a train wreck is literally is a train crash. *Wreck* is another word for crash. So when we talk about something as being **a train wreck**, we mean it's a total failure. It's a total disaster.

Harp: Yeah, so **a train wreck** is when something is a complete failure. Let's say for example if someone is working on a report for school and it's just horrible; it's not written well and it's just not right. It's **a train wreck**.

Andrew: And the reason why we call this type of mistake **a train wreck** is because if you think about two trains on a track, if they're going in opposite directions and they're coming towards each other, they're going to crash. It's gonna be a mistake. The trains cannot slow down **quick** enough to avoid the crash, and so they smash into each other. And this is why we call a mistake **a train wreck**.

Harp: Yes. So it can be a thing. As I said, a report can be **a train wreck**. But it can also be used to describe someone. So when someone is **a train wreck**, they're just making a lot of mistakes, they're really a failure in life.

Andrew: That's right. So, this expression has two different meanings that are pretty closely related. Like you said, a thing that is **a train wreck** is just a big failure, like a project. But if a person is **a train wreck**, it means their life is out of control.

Harp: Exactly. I think we should give some examples with **a train wreck** for a thing and **a train wreck** for a person.

Andrew: Yup. Let's do that.

Harp: Adam, we're never going to meet our deadline.

Andrew: I know! This project is **a complete train wreck**.

Harp: I know. No one's working very hard and the research isn't even done.

Andrew: We better go tell the boss that we're not gonna have it finished in time.

Harp: Yeah. Let's ask for an extension because if we hand it in as is, we're probably gonna get fired.

Andrew: Yeah, you're right. Let's go to the boss now.

Andrew: So, in this example, we heard from two colleagues at work. And they were concerned about a project that they were working on. They didn't have their research finished. They weren't going to make the deadline for the project, and they just felt that it was **a complete train wreck**. It was a total failure.

Harp: Yup, exactly. The project was **a train wreck** and they needed to ask for an extension in order to make it good.

Andrew: That's right. Well, let's move on to our second example.

Andrew: Hey. So do you think that we should throw another birthday party for Cathy this year?

Harp: I am gonna say no. Actually, I'm gonna say a big no. No birthday party for Cathy this year.

Andrew: Why?

Harp: Uh... You don't remember last year when she drank too much and she was **a complete train wreck**?

Andrew: Oh yeah. I forgot about that. You know what? You're right. We should probably not throw her another birthday party this year.

Harp: Nope. Maybe we can take her out for a nice quiet dinner, but definitely not a party.

Andrew: Or maybe some tea?

Harp: Yeah. Let's do a tea party. Good idea!

Harp: So in this example, we had two friends talking about Cathy and whether they should throw her a birthday party. But because last year she was **a train wreck**, they decided not to. And what they mean by her being **a train wreck** at her last birthday party is that she drank too much, she was probably really **sloppy**, and maybe fighting with people. It was just not good. She was a failure. She was just making a lot of big mistakes and out of control.

Andrew: Yup, and sometimes that happens, you know? People can be **train wrecks** too.

Harp: Exactly. Should we move on to the next expression?

Andrew: Sure. And our second expression for today is **cringeworthy**.

Harp: Yes. **Cringeworthy**.

Andrew: And something that is **cringeworthy** is, in your opinion, so bad that it makes you feel embarrassed or awkward just to watch it.

- Harp: Yes. So something is **cringeworthy** when you're watching someone do something and you just feel embarrassed for them or embarrassed for yourself. It's just embarrassing. Like, they're making a big mistake.
- Andrew: Exactly. Maybe you are watching a presentation or a performance and it's just not going very well. And because of that, you feel embarrassed, even though you're not involved with the production or the presentation. But you still feel embarrassed. This is a **cringeworthy** moment.
- Harp: And **cringeworthy** sounds a little bit weird because it's two words put together. **Cringeworthy**.
- Andrew: Exactly. It's just like our first example, **train wreck**, where you had *train* and *wreck* pushed together to make one word. This is the same thing that's happening with **cringeworthy**. You have *cringe* and *worthy* put together.
- Harp: And what is *cringe*? Because I think a lot of our listeners may not have heard of it, Andrew.
- Andrew: Good question. So, a cringe is physical reaction that you have to something that is embarrassing or scary. So when you cringe, you kind of shrivel up and move back. It's really a physical response to an emotion like fear or embarrassment.
- Harp: Yes, and when something is **cringeworthy**, if I'm watching someone do a dance and they're just really bad, I actually physically, kind of, tense up because I just feel embarrassed for them.
- Andrew: Exactly. It's worthy of a cringe, right? It's just really embarrassing, really awkward, and it's **cringeworthy**.
- Harp: Now, the thing that's important with this expression, **cringeworthy**, is that it's subjective. I might feel embarrassed watching something, but the people might not think they're making a mistake, or they're not actually embarrassed. So it really depends on the perception of the person feeling it.
- Andrew: Exactly. Something that is **cringeworthy** isn't a mistake in everyone's view; it's in your view.
- Harp: Exactly. I think we should give some examples with this expression.

Andrew: Did you catch last night's premiere of <i>American Idol</i> ?

Harp:	Well, I watched about half of it but I just couldn't watch the part where they're just making fun of the people who are singing. You know? I feel so embarrassed for them because they're trying to sing their hearts out but it's just cringeworthy because it's so embarrassing. And, but then I feel like we're laughing at them so it's just horrible and I couldn't watch it.
Andrew:	Yeah. I agree. It's pretty difficult to watch. I felt a lot of second-hand embarrassment when I was watching the show because the people really think and believe that they're good singers. But you know what? I have to agree with the judges a lot of times. Those people can't sing at all.
Harp:	Exactly. It's cringeworthy . And I just imagine myself up there singing because in my head I think I'm a really good singer, but I'm not.
Andrew:	Yeah, well, maybe you should stay away from the <i>American Idol</i> auditions then, right?
Harp:	Don't worry. I don't need your advice for that. I would never do that!

Andrew: All right. In this last example, we heard two friends talking about *American Idol*. And they were specifically talking about the premiere episode, where all of the contestants get to sing for the very first time. And in this episode, you see a lot of the participants who can't sing very well. And they were saying that this show is **cringeworthy** because you feel embarrassed when you watch people on TV who think they can sing but in reality can't.

Harp: Yes. It's just horrible and I agree with the example.

Andrew: Yeah. There are a lot of reality TV shows where you can see some **cringeworthy** moments.

Harp: I have a hard time watching shows like that because I feel embarrassed for them and it's just awkward.

Andrew: I agree with you 100%. Let's move on to the second example.

Andrew:	What did you think of Maria's presentation at the staff meeting yesterday?
Harp:	Uh... It was horrible! She didn't prepare at all! It was cringeworthy .
Andrew:	Yeah. But you know the funny thing? After the staff meeting, I was talking to Maria and she was really proud of herself. She thought she did an amazing job.
Harp:	That's even worse. She thought she did a good job? That was a horrible presentation.

Andrew: I know. **I just didn't have the heart to tell** her my true feelings about her presentation. But, yeah, I agree with you. It was really bad and she's oblivious. She doesn't even know that she screwed up.

Harp: Wow. That's just ridiculous.

Harp: So in this example, we had two colleagues discussing Maria's performance at a presentation and how she just did a horrible job and it was embarrassing to watch. It was **cringeworthy**. But Maria didn't even realize she did a bad job.

Andrew: And this happens sometimes, you know? People do something and they're proud of their work without even knowing that other people think it's not very good.

Harp: Yeah. It's not an ideal situation to be in.

Andrew: No. You definitely don't want to find yourself in that situation. But I think this really exemplifies a **cringeworthy** moment.

Harp: Yes.

Andrew: All right. So let's move on to our third expression for today. And that is...

Harp: **Fail.**

Andrew: **Fail.**

Harp: This is a newer expression. It's mainly used by young kids, I feel.

Andrew: Yeah. You know, I teach kids and I hear kids use this expression often. **Fail.**

Harp: Yeah. Kids, teenagers, even young adults. But it's pretty much an expression that's used by a younger demographic.

Andrew: Exactly. And I think it's because of the Internet. There is a website, *FAIL Blog*, and it describes certain types of mistakes. And because of this website, this blog, *FAIL Blog*, it has now become a slang expression and is used all the time. But I guess we should define this expression, right?

Harp: Yes. So people use this expression, **fail**, when they're describing a mistake or an accident with someone. And it usually involves them getting a little bit hurt.

Andrew: Exactly. Most of the time when we use this expression, it involves somebody making a mistake that results in them injuring themselves.

Harp: Yup. And it can be a really small mistake, like just bumping the door or

hurting your foot, or it can be a really big **fail**, like falling down the stairs.

Andrew: Exactly.

Harp: I think we should give some examples with this expression so that people can understand it a little bit more.

Andrew: Sure. Let's do that.

Andrew: Aw. I saw the funniest **fail** video a second ago. I'm going to email it to you right now.

Harp: Really? What is it about?

Andrew: This kid... He's skateboarding and he just eats it! You'll love it. You just gotta watch it.

Harp: I don't think I'll love it but I'll check it out. I hate watching when people get injured.

Andrew: No. But this one's different. It's so funny!

Harp: OK, OK. I'll check it out. Send it to me.

Andrew: OK. In this example, we heard about two friends who were talking about a **fail** video on the Internet. And a **fail** video is a video that films some sort of mistake or injury. And in this video, it was a skateboarder who crashed. He **ate it**. And one friend wanted the other friend to watch the video because he thought it was funny.

Harp: Exactly. And so these **fail** videos are just usually clip after clip of people being injured or embarrassed. And I've seen people watch them for hours and just laugh and keep saying, **fail, fail**. It's kind of funny to see someone watching it, actually, more than watching the video, for me.

OK. So we're going to move on to our second example. And in this example, it's not gonna be about an injury, but it's still gonna be a mistake. So you can still use this expression, **fail**.

Andrew: Did you read the **tweet** the mayor made last night about immigration?

Harp: Yes! Such a social media **fail**. He should know by now that he needs to think about things before he posts them on the Internet.

Andrew: Yeah. His comments were really insensitive. I think that he's gonna have a hard time getting re-elected if he keeps behaving like this.

Harp: Yeah. I don't know if he understands that once he **tweets** it, it's out there and

people are gonna see it and **retweet** it, and **retweet** it, and **retweet** it.

Andrew: Yeah. He's **in hot water** for sure.

Harp: So, in this example, we had two friends talking about a social media **fail** that the mayor did. And basically that means that he made a mistake or he had a failure online where he posted something on Twitter and it was just very insensitive and people reacted negatively to it.

Andrew: And celebrities and politicians do this all the time. I hear these stories in the news all the time. Somebody made **a tweet** and it offended somebody else and it's just **a fail**.

Harp: Yeah. It happens more and more frequently, I find.

Andrew: Well, that about wraps it up for today's episode. In this episode we looked at three expressions all related to something going wrong.

Harp: Yes. We talked about **a train wreck**.

Andrew: And then we talked about things that are **cringeworthy**.

Harp: Yes. And then we finished with talking about **fail**.

Andrew: That's right. So we hope that you can use these expressions in your English conversations that you have. And don't forget to check out our website at Culips.com.

Harp: That's C-U-L-I-P-S.com.

Andrew: Thank you for listening everyone. We will talk to you next time.

Harp: Bye everyone

Detailed Explanation

Different shades of something

In this episode, Andrew says that the episode's three key expressions are all related but have **different shades of meaning**. In this context, a *shade* means a slight difference. So there is a little bit of variation between the meanings of the expressions, but essentially, they all mean the same thing.

So when we talk about **different shades of something**, we are talking about differences or variations among things.

The word *shade* is most often used in this context to describe small differences between colours. This image illustrates this concept. All the jeans in the pile are blue. Some are lighter than others and some are darker than others. They are all **different shades of blue**, but they're all blue.



Here are a couple more examples with this expression:

Marshall: I went to a lecture at the university last night.

Polly: Very cool. What was the topic?

Marshall: It was about universal health care.

Polly: Did you learn a lot?

Marshall: Yeah. It was really interesting. The best part was after the lecture. There was a question-and-answer session and a lively debate. People with **different shades of opinion** contributed and it was fascinating to learn about everyone's viewpoints.

Polly: Great. I'm glad you enjoyed yourself.

Tom: I really think we need to repaint the kitchen. I usually like the colour orange, but I think **the shade of orange** that's on the walls now is just too dark.

Amanda: Yeah, I agree. It's very strong. I think we should just paint it white. It'll feel more open and fresh.

Tom: Great idea. I'll go down to the hardware store tomorrow to pick up some paint.

A train wreck

When something is **a train wreck**, it means that something has gone terribly wrong with it, resulting in that thing being a failure and a disaster. Things like reports and presentations can be **train wrecks** if instead of being successes they are failures.

When a person is a **train wreck**, that person's life is out of control and they continue to make mistakes and bad decisions. In one of the dialogue examples in this episode, Harp and Andrew talk about a woman who was a **train wreck** because she embarrassed herself by drinking too much at a party.

Here's one more example with this expression:

Kim: How was your blind date last week?

Jamie: It was a total **train wreck**!

Kim: Oh no! What happened?

Jamie: Everything that could have gone wrong went wrong. I'll spare you the details and just say that I won't be seeing that guy again.

Kim: Ouch!

Compound nouns

Compound nouns are nouns made up of two or more words. They can take several forms: sometimes they are single words, sometimes they are multiple-word units, and sometimes they are connected with a hyphen.

Compound nouns can be made up of two nouns (for example, *car door*, *gift card*, and *snowshoe*), an adjective and a noun (for example, *whiteboard*, *high school*, and *half-moon*), or a verb and a noun (for example, *skating rink*, *drawing board*, and *measuring cup*).

One of the expressions from this episode, *a train wreck*, is also a **compound noun**.

Quick

In this episode, Andrew says, "The trains cannot slow down **quick** enough to avoid the crash." Traditionally, using **quick** in this way, as an adverb, would be considered an error. Some people would insist that Andrew should have said *quickly* here instead.

But these days, both **quick** and *quickly* can be considered to be correct. English constantly changes and one of the current trends is for native speakers to drop the *-ly* ending from adverbs.

Anatoly Liberman, an etymologist (a person who studies words and their origins) at Oxford Dictionaries recently wrote that "the adverb is an endangered species in Modern English."

A word of warning: Although some native speakers drop the *-ly* ending from some adverbs, like Andrew did by using **quick** instead of *quickly*, they do not do this with all adverbs, only certain ones (for example, *quickly*, *slowly*, and *badly*). Also, dropping the *-ly* ending is casual. It should be avoided in formal situations, and some people may consider it to be an error in any situation.

If you're interested in reading more about this topic, you can read the article by Liberman, titled *Do it Real Quick, or The Death of the Adverb*, here:
<http://blog.oup.com/2007/08/adverb/>.

Here are a couple of examples with adverbs used without the *-ly* ending:

Sharon: Hey, I'm going to go skiing next week with Trevor and Curtis. Would you like to come along too?

Tina: Oh yeah, I heard about this. Trevor already asked me if I'd like to go. I want to come really bad, but I have to work.

Sharon: OK. Next time then.

Tina: Yeah, for sure.

Reggie: I'm sorry I'm late.

Mallory: That's OK, but what took you so long to get here?

Reggie: There was a major accident on the highway that really blocked things up. Traffic was moving so slow I thought I'd never get here.

Mallory: Oh no. OK, well next time could you at least call me to let me know you'll be late? I've been waiting for you for almost an hour.

Reggie: Sure. Sorry about that.

Sloppy

In one of the dialogue examples in this episode, two friends talk about a woman who got **sloppy** at her birthday party. There are several different definitions for the adjective **sloppy**. The most common definitions are *careless* and *dirty*. However, there is also a slang usage, and this is what is used in this episode. When we use **sloppy** to describe a person who has consumed a lot of alcohol, it means that the person is very drunk and is out of control.

So, when a person is **sloppy**, it means that they are very intoxicated and have problems acting normal. A **sloppy** person slurs their speech, may have problems standing or walking, and might even throw up.

Here are a couple more examples with this expression:

Sunny: What did you do yesterday?

Sean: Not much really. I was super hung-over so I just stayed in bed all day.

Sunny: Oh no.

Sean: Yeah. Unfortunately I got really **sloppy** at the party on Friday night.

Sunny: Yup. You don't have to tell me. I witnessed the whole thing.

Sean: That wasn't my finest moment.

Sunny: You're right about that. Anyway, do you feel better now?

Sean: Yeah. I'm back to normal.

George: If you notice that I appear a little **sloppy** at this party, do me a favour and let me know, OK?

Erin: Sure. I can do that.

George: Last year at my company party I got a bit too drunk and I really don't want to repeat that mistake again.

Erin: OK. I'll keep an eye on you.

George: Thanks. I appreciate it.

Cringeworthy

A **cringeworthy** thing is so bad that it makes you feel embarrassed when you see or hear it. As Andrew and Harp mention in this episode, whether or not something is **cringeworthy** is subjective. Not everyone will always agree that something in particular is **cringeworthy**.

When you see or hear something that is **cringeworthy**, it causes you to feel embarrassed or uncomfortable.

Here's one more example with this expression:

Pat: I've decided that I'm going to go back to college.

Mike: Good for you.

Pat: At first, the idea of going back to school was **cringeworthy**. But after giving it some thought, I feel like it'll work out in the end.

Mike: For sure. Even though it will be difficult, you will learn a lot and you will be able to find a better job once you graduate.

To sing your heart out

When you **sing your heart out**, you sing passionately and enthusiastically. In one of the dialogue examples in this episode, Harp and Andrew talk about the reality TV show *American Idol*. On this program, the contestants **sing their hearts out** in order to try to win the contest and become the next American Idol.

A related expression is *to cry your heart out*. This means to cry intensely and uncontrollably.

When you **sing your heart out** or cry your heart out, all of your passion and emotions are released through your song or your tears.

Here are a couple more examples with these expressions:

Danica: How was the concert last night?

Jamie: So awesome!

Danica: Yeah? I'm really sad I missed it.

Jamie: The choir **sang their hearts out**. It was really beautiful.

Danica: Next time they have a concert, I'll make it for sure.

David: Hey, what's wrong? Why are you crying?

Matthew: My girlfriend just dumped me.

David: Oh no. I'm sorry to hear that.

Matthew: Yeah. I'm just so sad.

David: Well, you should stop crying your heart out. Tears won't make you feel any better.

Not to have the heart to do something

When you **don't have the heart to do something**, you are unable to do it because you know that if you do that thing, it will make someone else sad or upset.

One of the dialogue examples in this episode includes a man who **didn't have the heart to tell** his coworker that her presentation was bad. In other words, he didn't want to tell her that she did a bad job because he was afraid of hurting her feelings.

When you can't do something or don't want to do something because you are afraid that doing that thing will upset another person or make them feel sad, then you **don't have the heart to do that thing**.

Here are a couple more examples with this expression:

Gwen: I found out some bad news today at work.

Brandon: Oh no. What's up?

Gwen: Well, we just signed a new client and we're going to be super busy for the next little while. My boss asked me to delay my vacation until October.

Brandon: But weren't you supposed to leave with your family for Disneyland next week?

Gwen: Yes. Now I'm going to have to cancel those plans. I don't know how I'm going to tell my kids. They're going to be so upset. Can you break the news to them? I **don't have the heart to do it**.

Brandon: Nice try, but that's your job.

Gwen: I know, I know. Wish me luck.

Brandon: Good luck!

Peter: I'm surprised to see you here. I thought you were going to stay home tonight.

Shane: Yeah. I thought about not coming to this party, but I know Betty and Tom have been planning it for a long time and I just **didn't have the heart to cancel**.

Peter: Fair enough. It's true; they did put a lot of time and effort into this party.

Shane: Yup. Well, since I'm here, we might as well have some fun. Let's dance!

To eat it

To eat it means to fall on your face. It is a slang expression that is used often by skateboarders and BMX bike riders. If a skateboarder falls off his board and falls on the ground, **he eats it**.

The *it* in this expression stands for the ground. You can imagine that someone who has fallen on their face is eating the ground.

One of the dialogue examples in this episode is about a fail video where a skateboarder **eats it**. In other words, it's a video that shows a skateboarder's crash.

Here are a couple more examples with **to eat it**:

Logan: Hey man. What happened to your mouth? Did you get into a fight or something?

Travis: No. I crashed my bike while riding home after school. I got cut off by a car and then just **ate it**.

Logan: Ouch!

Travis: Yeah. It was a good thing I was wearing my helmet. It could've been a lot worse.

Mary: I really need to buy new boots.

Ben: Didn't you just buy new boots a month ago?

Mary: I did but they're not very good. They have no grip. When I was walking to work this morning, I slipped on some ice and **ate it**. A couple of my coworkers saw me fall and it was really embarrassing.

Ben: Oh no. Well yes, we should go look for new boots for you right away.

A tweet

A tweet is a short (140 characters or fewer) message that Twitter users post on the social media website Twitter. The word can also be used as a verb (**to tweet**), which means to post a message on Twitter.

One of the dialogue examples in this episode is about a politician who foolishly posted a controversial **tweet**. When people saw what he had **tweeted**, they were upset.

Here are a couple more examples with these expressions:

Billy: Woohoo! I just won free tickets to the movies tonight!

Heather: Really? How?

Billy: The movie theatre downtown **tweeted** a trivia question. I answered it correctly and won two free tickets to tonight's show. Want to go with me?

Heather: Yeah. Sounds fun!

Nick: Oh wow. Looks like Main Street will be closed tomorrow for repairs.

Tina: How do you know that?

Nick: I just read **a tweet** about it that the city posted.

Tina: Good to know. I'll have to take a different route to work tomorrow.

Nick: Yeah, me too. I imagine downtown traffic will be a nightmare.

To be in hot water

When someone **is in hot water**, they are in trouble or in a very difficult situation. One of the dialogue examples in this episode is about a mayor who tweeted a controversial message on Twitter. Because of his tweet, the mayor found himself **in hot water**. In other words, he got into trouble after posting this tweet because it upset the citizens of his city.

This is an old expression and has been used by English speakers since the 1500s. However, researchers are not clear about how this expression evolved to mean to be in trouble.

One possibility is that if you're cooking and you spill hot water on yourself, you will be in trouble because you will burn yourself. A second possibility is that in the days before electricity, boiling a big pot of water was a difficult and troublesome task, so **being in hot water** was like being in a troublesome situation.

Unfortunately, we may never find out the exact origins of this expression. What is most important, however, is to know how the expression is used today. When we describe someone as **being in hot water**, it means they are in trouble or in a difficult and troublesome situation.

Here are a couple more examples with **to be in hot water**:

Sean: I'm really stressed out.

Ian: Why? What's happening?

Sean: I borrowed my dad's car and got into an accident. He's going to kill me when he finds out.

Ian: Oh no! Yeah. **You're in hot water**.

Sean: What should I do?

Ian: It's probably best just to tell him the truth. Delaying the news won't solve anything.

Renee: Have I ever told you that I used to get into a lot of trouble at school?

Sara: Really? I can't believe that.

Renee: Yeah. I was a pretty bad student. I was always finding myself **in hot water**.

Sara: What did you do?

Renee: Oh, all sorts of stuff. Skipped class, smoked cigarettes, bullied other students. I was really bad.

Sara: What happened? You've definitely changed. You're such a nice person now.

Renee: I'm not sure, really. I guess I just matured as I got older.

Fail/a fail

Fail can be used as an exclamation that is said after someone sees something bad happen. In this episode, Harp says that she has witnessed people watching videos on the Internet where mistakes happen (people fall down, cars crash, etc.). After every mistake, the people watching the video said, **Fail!**

The second way to use this expression is as a noun. One of the dialogue examples in this episode is about a social media **fail**. This refers to a specific kind of mistake that happens on the Internet.

Here are a couple more examples with these expressions:

Ruby: Wow! Did you see that kid over there? He just tripped while walking down the sidewalk.

Chester: Yeah! **Fail!**

Peter: When I was younger, my parents let me walk to school by myself.

Lisa: Times sure have changed. Today that would be considered a major parenting **fail**.

Peter: You're absolutely right about that.

Quiz

1. **What is a post made on the social media platform Twitter called?**
 - a) a tween
 - b) a twine
 - c) a twit
 - d) a tweet

2. **If someone is sloppy, what are they?**
 - a) very angry
 - b) very tired
 - c) very happy
 - d) very drunk

3. **What does *it* stand for in the expression *to eat it*?**
 - a) the hamburger
 - b) the sky
 - c) the ground
 - d) the steak

4. **What expression can we use when we want to describe someone who is singing passionately?**
 - a) to sing your soul out
 - b) to sing yourself crazy
 - c) to sing your heart out
 - d) to sing softly to yourself

5. **What are you in if you are in hot water?**
 - a) love
 - b) trouble
 - c) the bath tub
 - d) a good situation

6. Fill in the blank to complete the dialogue:

Jessica: I want to stop taking guitar lessons but I just _____ to tell my instructor I'm going to quit.

Tom: Don't worry about it. He's a professional. He probably has students quit all the time. He'll understand.

- a) don't have the heart
- b) don't have the head
- c) don't have the humour
- d) don't have the humility

7. Which of the following is an example of a compound noun?

- a) a snowboard
- b) skis
- c) a toboggan
- d) a sled

8. True or false? Some native English speakers drop the -ly ending from adverbs in casual speech.

- a) true
- b) false

9. Imagine you go to a comedy club to watch a stand-up comedian perform. But instead of finding the performance funny, you feel totally embarrassed at the comedian's act. In your opinion, the performance isn't funny and you feel bad and uncomfortable just watching the comedian perform. Which of the following expressions CANNOT be used to describe this performance?

- a) a fail
- b) cringeworthy
- c) a train wreck
- d) a homerun

Answers:

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