

Catchword #175 – Such a flake

Episode description

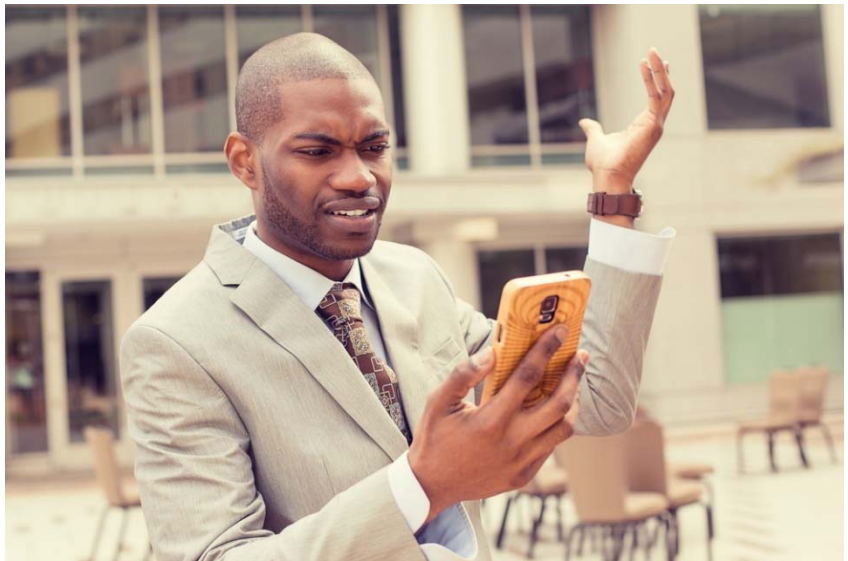
It's always frustrating when plans get cancelled at the last minute. So don't be a flake and bail on this episode, because today we're talking all about breaking plans and the people we trust only to be untrustworthy.

Fun fact

According to the Merriam-Webster dictionary, the first known use of the term *flake* was in 1964, and likely comes from the expression *flake out*.

Expressions included in the learning materials

- A flake
- Harsh
- To bail/to bail on
- To dis/a dis
- FOMO



Transcript

Note: The words and expressions that appear in **bold text** within the transcript are discussed in more detail in the Detailed Explanations section that follows the transcript.

Andrew: Hey, everybody, I'm Andrew.

Morag: And I'm Morag.

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

Announcer: If you want to learn English for everyday use, you've come to the right place. At Culips, we help make English understandable. By listening to our podcast, you can learn natural expressions and conversational structure. If you're interested in learning more about Culips and what we do, check us out of Facebook or our website, Culips.com. That's C-U-L-I-P-S.com. Thanks for listening. We hope you enjoy this episode.

Morag: In today's episode, we are going to talk about two casual expressions you can use when you cancel a plan, or when somebody else cancels a plan on you.

Andrew: That is exactly right. Today, we're doing a Catchword episode all about cancelling plans, something that I love and hate at the same time.

Morag: It's necessary sometimes, but real annoying.

Andrew: Definitely. Well, before we start, Morag, I'm going to ask you, what's up? How are you doing?

Morag: Oh, right, yeah. Um, I'm doing pretty well, honestly. Ah, it was just my birthday a couple days ago.

Andrew: No way, I didn't know that. Happy birthday!

Morag: Yeah. Oh, thank you. I'm 27.

Andrew: Yay!

Morag: Woo!

Andrew: You're so young. I'm jealous.

Morag: For some reason, I feel like I'm in my late 20s now and it's a different feeling, I don't know why.

Andrew: So it stung a little bit?

Morag: Ah, I don't mind. It's not bad, but it's just, it feels like a next phase.

Andrew: Ah, OK. Well, that's a good feeling, though.

Morag: Yeah.

Andrew: So what did you do to celebrate?

Morag: Oh, not terribly much. Mostly just got together with some buddies, had a picnic, went for a little hike, hung out.

Andrew: That sounds so good. See, my birthday is in May, and a spring birthday is OK, but a summer birthday—come on, that's the best.

Morag: Yeah, but in school I never got the happy birthday pencils or anything. I'm going to be sore about that till the end of time.

Andrew: You should have just failed your class so you could have gone to summer school.

Morag: Oh, no. That's two things fighting: My need to do well in school and my love of stationary and ...

Andrew: Well, you can't always win.

Morag: I know, right. Oh, dear.

Andrew: Anyway, let's start with today's episode. And we are—like you said—looking at two expressions that we use when talking about someone who cancels plans. And so our first expression is **a flake**.

Morag: I know some **flakes** and have been on occasion—OK, maybe more than on occasion, reasonably regularly—a **flake** myself.

Andrew: Yeah, I think everybody, at some point, is **a flake**.

Morag: Kind of flakey, yeah. Well, what it means is an unreliable person, somebody who you can't trust to keep the plans that you have made with them. So sometimes that just means they're really busy, or stressed, or something, but sometimes they're just flakey to the core.

- Andrew: Yeah, so, like you said, this expression, **a flake**, it's actually a noun and it's a name that we call somebody who cancels plans at the last minute, and usually does so regularly. If you cancel a plan just once, maybe it's a little strange to call you **a flake**, but if you make a habit of regularly cancelling your plans that you've made with somebody, well, then we're going to call you **a flake**.
- Morag: My best friend is a total **flake**.
- Andrew: Oh, yeah?
- Morag: Yeah. She's the worst, definitely someone who, when you're, like, yeah we're totally going to do that on Friday—never, nope. It's just her personality, you know?
- Andrew: Mmm, yeah. I think sometimes I am **a flake**, too. I really try not to be, but, yeah, it does happen from time to time, I have to be honest.
- Morag: Mhmm, but maybe, you know, like we said, to be **a flake** you need to reliably be unreliable, if that makes any sense.
- Andrew: Yeah, I like that: Be reliably unreliable. Yeah, so if you consistently cancel plans that you've made with somebody, like if you make a plan to meet your friend for dinner, and then you cancel that plan, and then next week, you make a plan with that friend to see a movie, but then you cancel that plan, well, you're acting like **a flake**. That's something **a flake** would do.
- Morag: Should we hop into a couple of examples about **a flake**?
- Andrew: Yeah, let's do that.

- Andrew: Hey, where are you? I've been waiting outside the theatre for 15 minutes.
- Morag: Oh, sorry. Hey, listen, I know I'm the biggest **flake** in the world, and I really hate to do this to you, but I won't be able to meet you tonight.
- Andrew: Are you serious? Couldn't you have told me earlier or something? Like, I came all the way downtown.
- Morag: I know, I know, I'm so sorry, something really important came up. I promise I'll tell you all about it when I see you next time. Anyways, I've gotta go. OK, bye.

Andrew: In that example, we heard a phone call between two friends, and one of the friends described herself as the biggest **flake** in the world when she cancelled the plan to see a movie with her friend at the very last moment. In fact, her friend was waiting outside the movie theatre and had been there for 15 minutes when she decided to call him and let it be known that she was cancelling the plans. So here we heard the expression—**a flake**—used to describe someone who cancelled a plan.

Morag: Mmhmm.

Andrew: OK. Should we do one more example, Morag?

Morag: That sounds good. Let's go!

Andrew: Who should we invite to our dinner party?

Morag: Well, definitely Beth and Jerry. They're so much fun.

Andrew: Oh, yeah, totally. Hmm, what do you think about Tom? How about Tom, too?

Morag: Tom? No way. Don't even bother.

Andrew: Why not? I like Tom.

Morag: Yeah, he's nice, but he's a total **flake**. Inviting him will be a waste of an invitation and your time.

Andrew: Hmm, yeah, you're right. OK, so no Tom. How about Rhonda?

Morag: Yeah! Totally. Let's invite Rhonda.

Morag: In this example, we had the expression **a flake** being used to describe someone's friend, Tom, in the context that they're not even going to invite him to something because he is so much of **a flake**, so regularly and consistently someone who says he'll do something but then doesn't in the end, that this pair of people decide that he's not going to get an invite to their dinner party, because he probably won't even show up in the end.

Andrew: Yeah, exactly. Tom is **a flake** and his friends know it, so they don't even invite him to the party. He just gets **dissed**.

Morag: **Harsh!**

Andrew: Yeah. It is a little **harsh**, I think.

Morag: Yeah.

- Andrew: You know, if you are **a flake** all the time, then I think this is a natural reaction, people just get frustrated and they ...
- Morag: Mmhmm.
- Andrew: You know, part of friendship is being dependable, so ...
- Morag: Just showing up sometimes. I know I definitely, I get some **FOMO** sometimes, like an extra **FOMO** if you just sort of don't show up to something or have to cancel plans a couple of times, because you're scared that people are going to stop inviting you. So you're not even, like, you're not even, like, scared that you're going to miss out on something you have to cancel, but then you're, like, oh no, I'm getting into the **flake** territory! They're going to stop inviting me entirely. That's, ugh.
- Andrew: Yeah, and as we saw in this example, that's exactly what happened to Tom, so ...
- Morag: It can happen to you, too!
- Andrew: It can happen to you, too. Next time you feel like being **a flake**, just think twice.
- Morag: Should we move on to our next expression?
- Andrew: I think we should. And our second expression for today is a verb this time, and it is **to bail**.
- Morag: Mmhmm. This verb, **to bail**, means to cancel a plan at the last minute.
- Andrew: Exactly, to cancel a plan at the last minute. So if you **bail on** something, you cancel that plan. For example, you could **bail on** a friend, and if you **bailed on** a friend, then you cancelled your plan to hang out with that friend.
- Morag: I have an example from a little while ago.
- Andrew: OK.
- Morag: Just going up to a cottage with some friends. I thought there were going to be, I don't know, six people. There were only four people in total. I asked what happened, and my friend said that everybody **bailed**.
- Andrew: Everybody **bailed**.
- Morag: Everybody **bailed**. So we were on the way, driving up, I got into the car and I was, like, oh, surprise, not so many people. So there you go, that's bailing at the last minute.

- Andrew: And it just occurred to me, while we were speaking here, that this expression can take a couple of different forms. Like you used the form *everyone **bailed***, and I used a phrasal verb, ***to bail on*** a plan.
- Morag: Yes.
- Andrew: So there are different ways that we can use this, and we will explain all of the different ways in the learning materials for this episode. So if you are a Culips member, check those out and you will see all the different ways we can use this expression. But for now we're going to focus more on the way that you used the expression, Morag, in a more straightforward way.
- Morag: Mmhmm. Just somebody **bailed**. It happens, it happens.
- Andrew: Yeah, it happens all the time. And, yeah, it's understandable. And at the top of this episode, I said that, you know, talking about cancelling plans as something I love and something I hate, because, you know, actually sometimes it can be relieving when someone **bails**. And you know, you might have an appointment, maybe you have a very busy day, and you're, like, ah, you know, if I could have it my way I just wouldn't go to this meeting. And then your colleague **bails on** you and you're, like, oh, yeah, sweet, now I have some free time.
- You know what? I have to say that when a friend cancels a plan, when a friend **bails**, sometimes it can be disappointing, but anything usually related to school, or business, or work, if one of those activities gets cancelled and someone **bails**, then I'm pretty happy, usually, because it means I have some extra free time during my day.
- Morag: It feels like special free time, you know?
- Andrew: Yeah.
- Morag: Like it's gifted time.
- Andrew: Bonus time.
- Morag: Bonus time! That's what I was looking for, yeah.
- Andrew: Totally.
- Morag: Yeah.
- Andrew: Cool. Well, let's get into some of the examples with this expression, the verb ***to bail***.

Morag: Hey, are you doing anything tonight?

Andrew: Well, I was going to hang out with my friend Sarah, but she just **bailed**. So no, I have no plans.

Morag: Well, I'm heading to the park to play Frisbee with some friends. Do you wanna come?

Andrew: Sounds fun! What time?

Morag: Like an hour or so?

Andrew: Oh, sweet! OK, yeah, let's do that. I'll see you there.

Andrew: We just heard an example about a person who **bailed**. Her name was Sarah and she cancelled a plan that she had with her friend at the last minute, so that friend made a different plan to go play Frisbee in the park. So his original plan was cancelled by his friend Sarah—she **bailed**—and so he made another plan, and he decided to go play Frisbee in the park.

Morag: Which is such a good plan, I mean he can't be too upset about it.

Andrew: Yeah. OK, let's check out another example with this expression.

Morag: Oh, wow, the lineup this year for the Montreal Jazz Festival is so good. Should we get tickets?

Andrew: Yeah, let's go. I was looking at the line-up last night. It looks amazing!

Morag: Oh, yeah, I know, it's great. OK, so I'm going to go buy some tickets tonight after work.

Andrew: OK, perfect.

Morag: Right, but look, don't **bail**, OK? This stuff isn't cheap; these tickets are expensive.

Andrew: Yeah, yeah. No problem. Don't worry—I'll be there.

Morag: OK.

Morag: So in this example, someone was afraid that their friend might **bail**. So this one, instead of having somebody already have cancelled a plan, we saw someone double-check with their friend that they don't **bail on** this one, because it's important because the tickets for Montreal Jazz Festival—and this is true—are rather expensive.

- Andrew: A very similar thing happened to me this week. I actually went to see a baseball game and my friend bought the tickets, and she told me, hey, make sure you don't **bail**, I bought the tickets, like, you have to come now. And I did, I went.
- Morag: OK, good. There you go.
- Andrew: I didn't **bail**. I wasn't **a flake**. I was a perfect little human and a good friend.
- Morag: Well, that's great. I mean, at least once in a while, right, like it works out.
- Andrew: Pat myself on the back for that one.
- Morag: Yes.
- Andrew: That brings us to the end of this Catchword episode. Again, today we looked at two casual expressions that you can use when you cancel plans. These are expressions that we use in informal speech so it's probably best to avoid them when you are in a professional situation. But could you just recap the expressions that we looked at?
- Morag: Sure. So the first expression that we saw was the noun **a flake**, which means an unreliable person, somebody who cancels a lot of plans. And the second expression is **to bail**, which means to cancel a plan at about the last minute or around there.
- Andrew: Excellent. OK, well, before we let you go, I'm going to remind you to visit our website, Culips.com. It's the place where you can listen to all of our back catalogue and also learn more about becoming a Culips member, and really taking your English studies to that next level. If you're ready to commit to some serious studying, becoming a Culips member is for you.
- OK, Morag, talk to you next time. Bye.
- Morag: Bye!

Detailed Explanations

A flake

The first keyword from this episode is the noun **a flake**. **A flake** is a person who is unreliable, particularly when they have made plans with other people. In other words, **a flake** is a person who can't be trusted to keep plans they make with others. You can refer to someone as **a flake** if they consistently cancel plans, or if they almost never follow through with the things they say they will do. You can also use **flake** as an adjective: *flakey*. If you know someone who is **a flake**, you can say they are a flakey person.

Here's one more example with **a flake**:

Sally:	Who's bringing dessert to the potluck tomorrow?
Paul:	Mary said she would bake a cake for us.
Sally:	Oh dear. We should probably buy a dessert, just in case.
Paul:	Why?
Sally:	Mary is a great girl, but she's such a flake . I wouldn't count on her to show up, let alone actually make and bring a cake!

Harsh

In this episode, there is an example of someone who is such a flake that their friends no longer invited them to events. Morag reacts by saying, "**Harsh!**" **Harsh** is an adjective that means unkind, cruel, or needlessly severe.

You can use **harsh** as an interjection, like Morag did. An interjection is a word that stands on its own and is used to express an emotion or feeling. *Wow* and *yeah* are examples of other interjections. So, if you hear something you think is mean or cruel, you can simply say, "**Harsh!**"

Here's one more example with **harsh**:

Wesley:	How did your test go yesterday?
Nicole:	It was awful! I woke up late and rushed to get there on time, but I arrived 10 minutes late. My professor wouldn't let me write the test! She said that she doesn't accept students who come to class late, even if it's a test day.
Wesley:	Harsh!

To bail/to bail on

The second key term from this episode is the verb **to bail**. As Morag and Andrew discussed in this episode, **to bail** is to cancel a plan at the last minute. For example, if your friend told you that they weren't keeping their plans with you 10 minutes before you were supposed to meet, you could say that they **bailed**.

As Andrew mentioned in this episode, this verb also has a phrasal verb form: **to bail on**. If you want to specify the plan someone did not show up for or the person they cancelled on, you must use the phrasal form. So, you can simply say, "They **bailed**," but if you want to add more information, you have to say, "They **bailed on me**" or "They **bailed on** our dinner plans."

Here are a couple more examples with **to bail/to bail on**:

Warren:	How was your camping trip?
Sarah:	It was awesome! Andrew and I went swimming every morning. It's such a great way to start your day. We also went hiking one day and found these waterfalls that were only accessible by going through a cave. We roasted hot dogs and marshmallows. It was just the best time!
Warren:	I'm glad you had so much fun! Wait—it was just you and Andrew?
Sarah:	Yeah.
Warren:	I thought you were going with a whole group of people.
Sarah:	There were supposed to be six of us, but everyone else bailed .
Warren:	That sucks!
Sarah:	It was such a good time, I don't even mind. They all missed out!

Keith:	Hey, Angela, I have some bad news.
Angela:	What's that?
Keith:	I'm going to have to bail on our lunch plans today. I have way too much work to get done before tomorrow.
Angela:	That's a shame, but I understand.

To dis/a dis

As a verb, **to dis** is to treat someone with disrespect or to insult them. In this episode, Andrew discusses a flakey person who gets dissed by not being invited to a party. In this example, the person was disrespected because not inviting the person was essentially labelling them as a flake. The simplest way to understand **to dis** is to understand that it is the same as *to be rude to someone*.

As a noun, **a dis** is the insult or disrespectful behaviour itself. You can think of **a dis** as any moment of disrespect, any speech, or any behaviour that is insulting.

Here are a couple more examples with **to dis/a dis**:

Evan:	How was your date last night?
Deborah:	It was awful! I'm never going to go out with that guy again.
Evan:	Why not?
Deborah:	For starters, he was really boring, but he seemed nice enough. I wasn't really interested at all. I thought I would be nice and at least see the date out to the end. At the end of the night, though, he totally dissed me! He asked if I wanted to see him again and I politely said no. He then got all mad and said my hair was ugly and that I'm terrible at making conversation.
Evan:	That's horrible!
Deborah:	You're telling me!

Jonas:	Hey, can I come to dinner with you guys?
Kerry:	I don't think you'd like where we're eating.
Jonas:	Why not? I like all kinds of food.
Kerry:	Well, it's just that I don't think it's your kind of place. It's a pretty overpriced restaurant, and it has a dress code.
Jonas:	Was that a dis ? You don't think I dress well enough to come eat with you?
Kerry:	I didn't mean to insult you, but you have to wear a jacket to eat at this restaurant. You're wearing a t-shirt that has visible holes in it.
Jonas:	OK, fair point.

FOMO

FOMO is a noun that is an abbreviation of “fear of missing out.” In general terms, **FOMO** is the worry or anxiety that something fun and exciting might be happening elsewhere. It is a very young, informal term and is only used in casual settings.

People most often talk about having **FOMO** in relation to parties or events they can’t or don’t want to attend for whatever reason. Imagine that you have a very important appointment early tomorrow morning, but you have also been invited to a party tonight. You probably won’t, and shouldn’t, go to the party. However, you might want to go anyways because you’re worried that something amazing and memorable might happen. This fear, that you will end up regretting your decision not to go to the party, is **FOMO**.

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

Lynn:	Hey, Tyrone, are you coming to Pat’s party tomorrow?
Tyrone:	No. Well, probably not.
Lynn:	What, do you have some better party to go to?
Tyrone:	No, I have a meeting with my boss first thing the next morning. I probably shouldn’t go.
Lynn:	That sounds sensible.
Tyrone:	I mean, maybe I could come and just stay for an hour?
Lynn:	Sounds like you’re feeling some FOMO . Don’t give in to it! There will be other parties.

Katherine:	Did you guys have fun at dinner last night? I heard you were planning to go to a show or something afterwards.
Andre:	Dinner was OK, but way overpriced. We didn’t end up going to that show. Everyone was really tired, so we all went home.
Katherine:	That’s great!
Andre:	That’s a weird reaction to have—what do you mean?
Katherine:	Well, it’s not great for you guys, but I feel better. I had a bad case of FOMO last night. I’m just glad I didn’t miss out on a good time!

Quiz

1. What does FOMO stand for?

- a) friends of many oddballs
- b) fear of missing out
- c) fable of mostly octopuses
- d) faster or move over

2. When you use *harsh* as an interjection, you think what you heard was:

- a) cruel
- b) cool
- c) important
- d) boring

3. If you get dissed, you were:

- a) complimented
- b) insulted
- c) cheated
- d) surprised

4. A flake is someone who:

- a) is really busy
- b) is rude to others
- c) has a habit of cancelling plans
- d) can always be relied on

5. Which of these is the correct phrasal verb form of *to bail*:

- a) to bail in
- b) to bail with
- c) to bail on
- d) to bail over

Quiz Answers

1. b 2. a 3. b 4. c 5. c

Episode credits

Hosts: Andrew Bates and Morag St. Clair
Episode preparation/research: Andrew Bates
Audio editor: Andrew Bates
Transcription: Transcript Heroes Transcription Services
Learning materials writer: Morag St. Clair
English editor: Stephanie MacLean
Webmaster: Hussain Mohammed
Business manager: Tsuyoshi Kaneshima
Project manager: Jessica Cox