

## Catch Word #70 – To butter someone up

### Transcript

Maura: Hello everyone.

Harp: Hi, this is Harp.

Maura: And Maura.

Harp: At Culips.

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

Harp: And we're here bringing you our Catch Word podcast.

Maura: Yes. And in our Catch Word podcast, we look at different expressions, idioms, slang in English, and we give you different examples and explanations.

Harp: Exactly, and with every episode, if you go to the website, you can find the Lipservice, which is a learning guide. So you can find the transcript, a detailed explanation, and even a quiz.

Maura: Right, so go to the website and check it out. Now, let's get to today's episode. The first expression is **to butter someone up**.

Harp: **To butter someone up.**

Maura: Yeah, when we say it slowly, you hear us pronounce the *T* in **butter**, but when we speak quickly we say it fast and it sounds like **to budder someone up**.

Harp: Yeah, **to butter someone up**.

Maura: So the *T* in **butter** sounds like a *D*: **to butter someone up**.

Harp: Maura, what does this expression mean?

Maura: Well, this expression means that one person is saying really, really nice things to another person because they want that person to do something nice for them.

Harp: OK, so if I was really nice to you because I wanted a cup of tea, then I would be **buttering you up**?

Maura: Right. So maybe you give me a lot of compliments, say really nice things, do

really nice things; that is **buttering someone up**.

Harp: OK.

Maura: So it's like you're preparing that person, getting that person ready, so that when you ask them for something, they're feeling good and they're more likely to say yes.

Harp: OK, that's a good point, yes. **To butter someone up** is when you say nice things so they're feeling good and they'll do something for you.

Maura: Yeah. So Harp, have you ever **buttered someone up**?

Harp: Yes, definitely. The example I think of is when I was younger, I would always **butter up** my mom in the morning **in the hopes that** she would give me a ride to work.

Maura: I see, right. Yeah, we often **butter up** our parents when we're younger, right? We say, "Oh, mom, dad, I love you, you're so great, you're the best." And then you ask them, "Could I have a ride?" or "Can I have the keys to the car?" and you hope they'll say yes because you **buttered them up**.

Harp: Exactly. They're feeling all good and happy, and they're more likely to give you a ride or to let you use the car.

Maura: Right. So let's give an example of someone **buttering up** another person. So we won't use the expression, we won't say the expression, but we're going to give an example of someone doing that.

Harp: OK, sounds good.

Maura: Hi boss.

Harp: Hi Julie. How are you?

Maura: **I'm good, I'm good**. Wow, I really like your jacket. It's so nice.

Harp: Oh thanks! It's new.

Maura: It really **brings out the colour in your eyes**.

Harp: Oh thanks!

Maura: So, um, I just wanted to say that I think you're a really excellent boss.

Harp: Oh excellent! I think you're a great employee.

Maura: Thank you! And that's what I wanted to talk to you about. Do you think I could have **a raise**?

Harp: Oh, maybe. We could talk about it.

Maura: OK, good. So in that example, Harp was my boss and I was **buttering her up** because I wanted **a raise** at work. I wanted more money.

Harp: Yeah, it sounded successful. You were **about to get a raise** from me.

Maura: Right. So, you say really nice things to someone and you hope that they will do something nice for you **in return**.

Harp: Exactly.

Maura: So, let's give another example now. This time let's use the expression **to butter someone up**.

Harp: OK, sounds good. Maura, this is a delicious meal!

Maura: Oh, thanks. I tried a new **recipe**.

Harp: The chicken is so moist, the rice is so flavourful. It's delicious!

Maura: Oh, thanks! Are you trying to **butter me up**, Harp?

Harp: No, not at all. Um, but I was wondering if maybe you could bring a snack tomorrow to my party?

Maura: Ha ha. Yes, I'll bring a snack but you *were* buttering me up!

Harp: No, but it *is* delicious. OK, maybe a bit.

Maura: Yeah, I'll bring something. No problem.

Harp: Thanks.

Maura: So in that example, you were **buttering me up**, but I knew it.

Harp: Exactly.

Maura: OK, so **to butter someone up** is **to flatter** someone, and **to flatter** someone is to

give a lot of **compliments** to that person .But when you're **buttering them up**, you **flatter** them. Sometimes you **mean** what you're saying and other times, you don't **mean** it at all. So, some people lie when they're **buttering people up**.

Harp: Yeah, so for example, if I was **buttering someone up**. I might say that I really like their new hair cut, but really maybe I just think it's OK.

Maura: Yeah, exactly. So sometimes, when you're **buttering someone up**, you're not telling the truth.

Harp: Exactly.

Maura: OK, so now let's look at another expression that's similar to **to butter someone up**.

Harp: OK. The next expression is **to sweet talk someone**.

Maura: Yeah, **to sweet talk**. So you can imagine that the talk is sweet; the talk is good. So again, someone is saying very nice things.

Harp: Exactly, it's very similar. You say nice things so that they feel good and that they do something for you.

Maura: Yeah, there's even a name for this kind of person, a person who does this often.

Harp: Yeah, a **sweet talker**.

Maura: Yeah, do you know any **sweet talkers**?

Harp: I think I can be a pretty good **sweet talker** sometimes.

Maura: Oh really? Yep, I know some people who can **sweet talk** their way into really interesting situations.

Harp: Can you give me an example?

Maura: Well, I had a friend, when I was in university, and he was really friendly and talkative. Sometimes he would not hand in his assignments on time (or hand them in late), but he would always **sweet talk** the professors so that they still gave him a good mark.

Harp: OK, so he's always telling his teachers that they're great and they're the best teachers and then they let him **get away with** being late.

Maura: Exactly.

Harp: He **was** a sweet talker.

Maura: OK, so let's give another example with **sweet talk**. So Harp, I've been meaning to ask you if you'd be interested in going on a date with one of my friends.

Harp: Maybe...

Maura: But I'm sure he would love you. You have such a great personality! You're so fun to be around. I'm sure he would love you.

Harp: Are you trying to **sweet talk** me into going on a date with your friend?

Maura: No Harp, I really think you're great!

Harp: Oh, OK, maybe I'll go on a date with him.

Maura: Yes! OK, good. So in my case I was **sweet talking** you a little bit.

Harp: So, you don't think I'm a great person?

Maura: No, I do, I do.

Harp: I'm just joking.

Maura: OK.

Harp: Maura, what's the next expression?

Maura: Well the next expression is **to kiss someone's butt**.

Harp: That one sounds funny.

Maura: It does.

Harp: **To kiss someone's butt**.

Maura: Right. So this one has the same meaning as **to butter someone up** or **to sweet talk someone**. You're doing or saying really nice things so that person will do what you want them to do. One little difference with this expression is that there is another reason that a person would kiss another person's butt and that is that they've already done something bad and they're trying to get **on good terms** with the person again.

Harp: OK, so if, for example, I was really late, forgot that we were meeting, didn't show up, and you were very upset with me, I could try to be really nice and maybe bring you cookies. I could cook you a dinner. I'm being extra nice, because I know I did something bad.

Maura: Right. So in that case, I could say that you're **kissing my butt** because you were late.

Harp: Exactly.

Maura: Good. So should we do one more example with **to kiss someone's butt**?

Harp: Yeah, sure. Hey how are you?

Maura: Oh good. How are you?

Harp: Good, good. How's work?

Maura: Oh, it's good, but it's busy, you know? This guy at work, he's always telling me how great my work is, **kissing my butt** all the time, but he just wants me to do his work and he's always giving me more work to do.

Harp: That is not nice. So you're extra busy?

Maura: Yeah, yeah.

Harp: OK. So in that example, Maura's colleague is **kissing her butt**, so she'll do more work.

Maura: Yeah, not a good situation.

Harp: No.

Maura: OK. That's about it for today's episode, but if you're still wondering what **butt** means, check out our Lipservice, and we'll give you the explanation of what body part that is there.

Harp: Yeah, check out the Lipservice for that.

Maura: OK so let's recap our expressions one more time.

Harp: OK, so we started with **to butter someone up**, which is to say nice things to a person, so they feel good and will do something for you.

Maura: Right, and a similar expression is ***to sweet talk someone***, and you can also call a person who does that a **sweet talker**.

Harp: Exactly, and we finished with ***to kiss someone's butt***.

Maura: Good. So that's it for today. Thanks for listening and don't forget to check out our website. What is it Harp?

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

Maura: Thanks, and we'll talk to you next time. Bye!

Harp: Bye everyone!

## Detailed Explanation

### To butter someone up

**To butter someone up** means to say nice things to them, or to flatter them, so that they agree to something for you when you ask them later. When you **butter someone up**, you make the person feel good by saying nice things about them.

To visualize this expression, you can imagine putting butter on bread. And just as the bread is covered in butter, the person is “covered” with nice comments from you. There’s also a related expression that we didn’t mention in this episode: *to lay it on thick*. *To lay it on thick* means to exaggerate when saying nice things to someone. You can also imagine putting the butter on thick on the bread!

In this episode, Harp and Maura say the expression slowly and clearly for you first, but also mention that when native English speakers (at least North Americans) speak, *butter* often sounds more like *budder* (although this is never an accepted way to write it). This happens with a lot of words. The *T* sound in words often sounds more like a *d* when pronounced quickly by North Americans. This isn’t the case in some other places though. For instance, most British native English speakers would pronounce the *T* sound in *butter* very clearly as a *T*.

In our examples, **buttering up another person** was always seen as playful and nice. But as we also mention, sometimes a person will **butter someone up** even if they don’t really think that what they’re saying is true. People may be insulted or offended if they feel they’re being **battered up** just so someone else can get what they want.

Here’s an example showing someone who was **battered up** and was insulted by it:

First, Sarah **butters Lucy up**:

Sarah: Your work is so great! You’re really an amazing artist. I loved what you did last week with the poster. Do you think you could finish my project for me?

Lucy: I’m not sure if I have time.

Later on:

Lucy: Sarah was trying to get me to finish her work for her!

Jason: That’s strange. She should do her own work.

Lucy: I know! She was trying to **butter me up** first, too. It was so annoying.

There’s also a chance that someone could get **battered up**, agree to do what the person asks, and not even realize that they had been **battered up**!



In the hopes that/In the hope that

This is an expression that means someone is hoping for something. Harp says in this episode that she used to butter her mom up in the morning, **in the hopes that** she would get a ride to school. Sometimes people leave the s off and say **in the hope that**. **In the hope(s) that** means *I hope* or *she hopes*, but is used in a different way. Compare these examples:

**In the hope(s) that** she would catch her train, Cindy ran to the station.

Cindy hoped that she would catch her train, so she ran to the station.

Hoping that she would catch her train, Cindy ran to the station.

I'm good. I'm good/good good

As people do in many languages, sometimes we repeat a word or phrase when speaking. Sometimes we do this to emphasize something we say, and other times it has no meaning. In this episode, Harp repeats some words or phrases a couple of times. There's no specific reason for this, it's just her own personal style of speaking.

Brings out the colour in your eyes

This expression is a nice thing you can say to someone about the clothes they are wearing. When a piece of clothing or jewellery **brings out the colour in someone's eyes**, it means that it makes their eyes more noticeable, more colourful, and very nice to look at. For example, if someone with blue eyes wears a blue shirt, it may **bring out the colour in their eyes**, or maybe a yellow jacket makes someone's brown eyes look beautiful.

This is always a nice thing to say to someone!

A raise

In one of our examples, someone is asking for **a raise**. **A raise** is an increase in the amount of money someone is paid for their work. *To raise something* is to take it higher, and **a raise** is a higher salary or rate of pay.

About to

If someone is **about to** do something, it means that they are going to start doing it very soon. If someone is **about to** do something, it is the moment before they start the action. For example, John takes out a broom and a dustpan from the closet, and Dawn asks, "Are you sweeping?" John can answer, "I was just **about to**." This means that he hadn't started sweeping yet, but he was just going to start.

Here are a couple more examples with **about to**:

Henry: Hey! I thought you were going to call me at 6:00. It's 6:30 now.

Sonia: Sorry. I was **about to** call you, but then someone knocked on my door. It was my friend so I got distracted.

Becky: Do you know if she has started on the report yet?

Kyle: I think she was just **about to** get started when I saw her this morning.

Mom: Honey, did you clean your room yet?

Billy: I was just **about to**, Mom.

Sometimes saying you are just **about to** do something can be useful when you were supposed to have already done something—like cleaning your room!

In return

To do something **in return** for something is like a trade or exchange. Someone does something for a friend, and then the friend does something **in return**. In this episode, we use this expression to explain that when someone butters up another person, this is because they are hoping for something **in return**.

Here are a couple more examples with **in return**:

Fred: **In return** for helping me move, I'm going to buy you all pizza.

Catherine: Thanks!

Ted: Thanks so much for the ride home. If there's anything I can do for you **in return**, let me know.

Ingrid: Don't worry about it.

To flatter/a compliment

The verb **to flatter** means to say nice things to someone, and usually it means that the things you say are excessive or not genuine. Nice things you say about a person are called compliments. Compliments may be genuine (the truth) or they may be flattery (not genuine).

Here are some examples with **to flatter**:

Sheila: You are such an amazing friend!

Hannah: Don't **flatter** me!

Denise: I think that Doug might like you. He's always **flattering** you.

Kendra: I don't know. Do you really think so?

A recipe

This is a word that is often mispronounced by people learning to speak English, because the pronunciation of the word **recipe** is quite unusual compared to the way it's spelled. The **e** on the end of **recipe** is pronounced just as the name of the letter—E! This means that the word has three syllables: **Re-ci-pe**. In most English words that end with an E, the E is silent, so the spelling of **recipe** makes it seem like the word should only have two syllables, like **re-cipe**, and this is why the word is often mispronounced.

Of course, to get a better idea of how to pronounce the word **recipe**, just listen to the episode and check out the transcript. Maura says it in the example when Harp is complimenting her on her cooking.

It is delicious./He was a sweet talker.

These sentences are easy enough to understand! What we're looking at with these sentences is the emphasis that's put on certain words while they're being spoken in this episode.

Harp responds, "**It is delicious.**" when Maura says that Harp is only **buttering her up** and is giving her too many compliments on her cooking. Harp wants to emphasize that she's being honest, and truly thinks that Maura's cooking is good. This is when Harp stresses the **is** when she speaks.

Harp also says, "**He was a sweet talker.**" after Maura talks about her friend. Harp stressed the **was** in the sentence to show that she agreed that her friend really was a sweet talker

To mean it

**Mean** is a word with very different uses and explanations. In this episode, it's used to talk about **buttering someone up** and whether the person **means it**. **To mean something** in this way is to tell the truth and believe in what you are saying.

Here are some examples using **to mean (something)** in this way:

Jean: He said that my work was really bad.

Pete: I'm sure he didn't **mean it**. He was probably just jealous.

Carl: I **mean what I say**. Please do your homework.

Brent: All right. I know you always **mean it**.

Susan: Sometimes when I'm angry, I say things that I don't **mean**.

Esther: Everyone makes mistakes sometimes.

To sweet talk

**To sweet talk (someone)** has the same meaning as **to butter someone up**. When you sweet talk someone, you usually give them compliments and flatter them, just like you do when you butter someone up. **Sweet talking** can also include giving the person additional reasons why they should do something, or promising them something **in return** later.

Here's another example with **to sweet talk** and a **sweet talker**:

Greg: I can't believe Adam always gets into the busiest restaurants!

Vicky: I know! He's such a **sweet talker**.

Brenda: He always **sweet talks** me into doing the craziest stuff.

George: What did he talk you into doing now?

Brenda: Skydiving!

To get away with something

**To get away with something** means that you don't get in trouble for it and you don't experience the negative consequences of your actions. For example, if someone steals something from a store and they don't get caught, we can say that they **got away with it**. This means that stealing didn't have any consequences like getting arrested or going to jail.

Maura's friend handed in homework late and the usual consequence for that is to lose marks. But because he **sweet talked** the professor, he **got away with it**; he didn't experience the regular negative consequences of handing homework in late.

Here are a couple more examples:

Lisa: I think Adrian **got away with** cheating on his test.

Meredith: Really? I thought the teacher saw him.

Sean: I didn't do anything at work today.

Nathan: How did you **get away with it**?

Sean: I just worked really hard on other days.

### To kiss someone's butt

Just like the first two expressions, one person often **kisses another person's butt** when they want something. But you could also **kiss someone's butt** to try to get on good terms with them. **Kissing someone's butt** could involve flattering them, and it could also involve doing really nice things for that person. For example, my friend is **kissing my butt** by making me dinner tonight.

So what is a butt? I bet some of you already know. *Butt* is short for buttocks. Buttocks are the two bumps of flesh just below the human back. In English, and surely in many languages, there are lots of slang terms for this body part.

Here's another example with this expression:

Dean: How did you get such good marks in school?

Ted: I **kissed the teacher's butt** all year!

Chris: What are you doing tonight?

Mel: **Kissing my boyfriend's butt** to make him forgive me for forgetting his birthday yesterday!

### To be on good terms with someone

**To be on good terms with someone** means to have a good relationship with them. People can also be on bad terms with each other, and this means that they do not have a good relationship, they don't like each other, or they won't talk to each other.

In the example, Harp says that if you're not **on good terms with someone**, you might try to kiss their butt so that they like you again, or forgive you for something bad you did.

Here's another example with **to be on good terms with someone**:

Gavin: Do you think that you could call Jon and see if he could get me a job at his office?

Oscar: I'm not **on good terms with him** right now, so I can't.

**Quiz**

1. **To *butter* someone up** often sounds like what when spoken by native English speakers?
  - a) To *budder* someone up
  - b) To *buter* someone up
  - c) To *butter* something up
  - d) To *butter* it down
  
2. **What does it mean when Jill says to Ben, “That jacket really brings out the colour in your eyes”?**
  - a) Ben’s eyes are blue.
  - b) Ben’s eyes look nice.
  - c) Ben has a new jacket.
  - d) Ben wears glasses.
  
3. **What is a raise?**
  - a) a party
  - b) a meeting at work
  - c) a pay increase
  - d) a car race
  
4. **If you were about to watch TV, which statement would be true?**
  - a) You just turned off the TV.
  - b) You are going to watch TV very soon.
  - c) Your TV is broken.
  - d) You don’t have a TV.

5. Cate: Thanks for driving me home last night. I'll do something \_\_\_\_\_ some day.

Scott: That's OK. You don't need to do anything for me.

Please fill in the blank.

- a) for myself
  - b) crazy
  - c) in return
  - d) for your friend
6. What is someone who sweet talks often called?
- a) a talkie
  - b) a sweeter
  - c) a sweetie
  - d) a sweet talker
7. If Cathy gets away with borrowing her sister's shirt without asking, what does this mean?
- a) Her sister knows she borrowed the shirt.
  - b) Her sister never knows she borrowed it.
  - c) Her sister was going to give the shirt away.
  - d) Her sister was going to give it to Cathy as a present.
8. What expression has a similar meaning to *to butter someone up* and *to sweet talk someone*?
- a) to eat sweet tea with buttered toast
  - b) to mean it
  - c) to be on good terms with
  - d) to kiss someone's butt

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