

Catch Word #76 – Dibs

Transcript

Maura: Hello everyone. This is Maura!

Harp: And Harp!

Maura: And we're here with your free Culips ESL podcast.

Harp: Make sure you go to our website, Culips.com, that's C-U-L-I-P-S.com. At the website, you'll have access to the Lipservice. In the Lipservice, you have complete transcript, detailed explanations, and even a quiz.

Maura: And on our website, we have tons of episodes from Culips over the past few years that are all accessible and free.

Harp: And exciting and interesting, don't forget that.

Maura: So, today's episode is a Catch Word episode, where we look at an expression or a theme and we give you lots of examples of idioms and different ways that you can use them.

Harp: Exactly. What is our theme today, Maura?

Maura: Well, today on Catch Word, we're going to look at an expression that you can use to say that something is yours. So, to make a claim that something or some activity belongs to you.

Harp: So the first expression we're going to look at is **to call dibs**.

Maura: Yes, **to call dibs**, and we can say **to call dibs on something**.

Harp: **To call dibs** means that you're going to have something for yourself only or that you're going to use it first.

Maura: Right. So if you imagine that you're with a small group of people and there are some options or some items available, one person could **call dibs on something**. Now, it's a funny little word and it's really only used in this expression, **dibs**, **to call dibs**.

Harp: Yes, exactly.

Maura: And let's give maybe some examples of something that you might **call dibs on**.

- Harp: OK.
- Maura: So, maybe you arrive at your friend's house and there's some food spread out on the table and there's only one piece of cake **left**, so you say that you **call dibs on the piece of cake**. So, by saying **I call dibs on the cake**, it means that that is your piece of cake. So you're really making a quick claim to something that something is yours.
- Harp: Yeah, or if you're playing a game, you can **call dibs on**, being the first person to go.
- Maura: Yeah, so you could also **call dibs on an action or an activity**. It doesn't have to be an item; it could be that you want to be the first person to do something. One thing we should mention is that when you use this expression and you make a claim to something, you want to do it with good friends, family, people that you know really well.
- Harp: Exactly. Never in a professional environment, and don't do it with people you've just met.
- Maura: Right.
- Harp: If you go to a party and you don't know the people, and you're just meeting them for the first time, don't **call dibs on the piece of cake**.
- Maura: Yeah, it would be considered rude and the people who just met you would find you, maybe, selfish.
- Harp: Yeah.
- Maura: Yeah, because really, **to call dibs on something** is a selfish thing. You're saying that you want something for yourself. But with friends, it can be fun or **no big deal**. Now, what are some other things—other than food—that you could **call dibs on**?
- Harp: For example, you could **call dibs on an activity**. So if there is a list of things that need to be done, you could **call dibs on one specific activity**.
- Maura: Right. So maybe, for example, Harp, you and I are organizing a party and we have a list of things that we need to do, like buy the decorations and make the food and select the kind of music we want to play.
- Harp: Yeah, and I could **call dibs on making the food** because I like cooking.

- Maura: Right exactly. So then I know you're going to take care of that, and I could **call dibs on selecting the music**.
- Harp: Exactly.
- Maura: So we know what each person is going to be responsible for. OK, good. So, we can say **to call dibs on something**, but sometimes people simply say the word **dibs**.
- Harp: Exactly. You could just say **dibs** and that means that you get it first, or it's only yours.
- Maura: Exactly. And this one is a little bit complicated to explain by podcast, because most of the time people are touching the item they want or pointing to the thing they want to do, and because you can't see us out there right now, we're only going to be able to give you an explanation of the situations where someone would say this.
- Harp: You know, I used dibs often when I was living in South Korea, because I would go shopping with my best friend and we would go to these cool shops. There would only be one shirt of a specific style and colour, so I would **call dibs on it**.
- Maura: Mmhmm. Right. And actually, I got the idea for this episode when I was watching television. I was watching a television show and the characters in the show were using this expression. They were saying **dibs**. And the situation was that there were two guy friends and there was a beautiful girl who came in and they were saying that she was really pretty and maybe they wanted to talk to her and then one of the friends suddenly said **dibs**.
- Harp: Ah, so that meant that the other friend couldn't talk to the pretty girl.
- Maura: Exactly. So, the guy who called **dibs**, he was the one who could go talk to her and try to get to know her, and the other guy couldn't do anything.
- Harp: OK, I see.
- Maura: So, we can **call dibs**, we can say just **dibs** by itself, or we can also say **to have first dibs**.
- Harp: Yes, we can say **to have first dibs**, and that means that you would get to go first for an activity.
- Maura: Right. So, in this case you probably wouldn't have it exclusively; other people

would use something or do something after you, but you would be the first one.

Harp: OK.

Maura: Do you want to try a dialogue example for this one?

Harp: I think we should.

Maura: OK, good. Hey everyone, check out this new video game I got. It's supposed to be the latest version.

Harp: Wow, that's so exciting! I can't wait to play it!

Maura: Yeah, yeah, it'll be fun. But I **have first dibs**; you'll have to wait.

Harp: OK, I'll wait until you try it.

Maura: So in that example, I **had first dibs on the video game** but you were going to get a chance later.

Harp: Yeah, exactly. Now, just to be clear about the expression **to have first dibs**, there is no second or third dibs.

Maura: Right. You can't call second dibs or fifth dibs.

Harp: No. Only first.

Maura: Right. After that, maybe people would just say, *I'm going to use it second, I'm going to do it third*, but no more dibs.

Harp: Exactly. And just note that **dibs** is always plural.

Maura: Right. You can't have one dib; you always say **dibs** on something.

Harp: Exactly.

Maura: Now, there's another kind of way that people can call out for something and make a claim to something but it's very specific to driving in a car.

Harp: Ah! You're talking about **shotgun**.

Maura: Exactly. **Shotgun** is what people call out when they want to ride in the passenger seat in the front of the car.

- Harp: OK. So if there's a group of people going towards a car and there's the driver (that person we know) but someone wants to sit in the front with the driver and there's a group, you could say **shotgun**. That means you're going to sit in the front passenger seat.
- Maura: Yeah. And I suppose the reason people do this is because a lot of people like to sit in the front passenger seat.
- Harp: Yup.
- Maura: I remember—especially when I was a teenager—going out with a group of friends, people were always trying to be the first to say **shotgun**.
- Harp: Yeah, when I was in high school, we had all these **rules**; you had to be able to see the car before you could call **shotgun**.
- Maura: Yes, yes, I remember that. It was like that in my high school too. You had a group of people walking towards a car, everyone going in the same car, and you had to wait until everyone could see the car before you could call **shotgun**. And so sometimes you had three people saying **shotgun** at almost the same time, or exactly the same time.
- Harp: Yeah.
- Maura: And something really interesting about this expression is its origin.
- Harp: OK, what is the origin?
- Maura: Well, the expression **shotgun** is strange when you think of it. What does driving in a car have to do with **a shotgun**? But in the past, in **the Wild West**, when people were driving wagons and stagecoaches, the person who sat in the passenger seat in the front carried **a shotgun** with them, because there might be trouble along the way. Someone might try to rob them; they didn't know what was going to happen, so the person who sat in the front, in the passenger side, carried **a shotgun** with them.
- Harp: That is so interesting! I never thought about where the expression came from.
- Maura: Yeah, it's an interesting history.
- Harp: Yes.
- Maura: Often, when we talk about the origin of words at Culips, sometimes there is

no known source, or there are many different theories as to where it came from, but this one seems pretty sure that this is where it came from.

Harp: Yes.

Maura: So, we started off talking about **dibs** and **to call dibs**, or to simply say **dibs**, or **to have first dibs**.

Harp: Yes. And then we finished with **shotgun**.

Maura: Great. So remember, again, these expressions are only to be used with good friends and family. If you use them with people you don't know, or like you said, Harp, in a professional way, it's considered rude and not in good form.

Harp: No, don't use it with people you don't know.

Maura: But have fun using them with people you do!

Harp: Exactly.

Maura: OK, great. Now, don't forget to go our website, Culips.com. Listen to some of our old podcasts; **oldies but goodies**.

Harp: I was just gonna say that.

Maura: And become a member, check out our Lipservice to help you understand our episodes even more.

Harp: Yes, awesome podcasts are on Culips.com.

Maura: Thanks again for listening and we'll talk to you next time. Bye!

Harp: Bye everyone!

Detailed Explanation

To call dibs

To call dibs is to make a claim to something. If the item or activity that people want is obvious, then someone can simply say "I call dibs." If they are the first one to do this, then they get what they want.

Here are a couple more examples of **calling dibs**:

Ivan: Let's get ready to go tobogganing. Who wants the crazy carpet*?

Matthew: I **call dibs**.

*A crazy carpet is a kind of sled we use in Canada to go sliding down a hill.

Sue: That last piece of pizza looks so good. I **call dibs**.

Mindy: No, you can't. Jon already called it.

To call dibs on something

You can **call dibs** if everyone knows what you are claiming, but you can also **call dibs on something specific**. If you say what you are claiming, the expression is always used with **on**: **to call dibs on something**.

Here are a couple more examples with this variation of the expression:

Justin: I'm going to eat that piece of cake now.

Kylie: You can't. I **called dibs on it**.

Carl: What does everyone want to play? I have a piano, drums, guitar, and a tambourine.

Luke: I **call dibs on the piano**.

Dibs

The difference with only saying **dibs** is that what you are claiming must already be established. Here are some examples with **dibs** where it is clear what the person wants because there is only one option.

Henry: OK, so let's play mini-golf.

Jasmine: Who wants to use the red ball?

Henry: **Dibs!**

Jasmine: OK, Henry you can have the red ball.

Henry: OK, so let's play mini-golf.

Jasmine: Who wants which ball?

Henry (touching the red ball): **Dibs!**

Jasmine: OK, Henry you can have the red ball.

To have first dibs

When someone **has first dibs**, it means that they will have the item or do the activity first, but that someone else will also get it second, and maybe third, and so on. You can also **call first dibs**.

Here are a couple of examples with **to have first dibs**:

Brian: I **have first dibs on trying out the snowmobile**.

Alison: All right! But I'm next.

Maria: Does anyone want to try my new bike?

Jordan: I **call first dibs**!

Dibs time

In searching the Internet for more information about **calling dibs**, we came across an interesting question posted. This person (we'll call him Joe) was saying that a friend **called dibs on a girl they knew**, just like in the example we give in this episode from the television show. Now, Joe's friend had **called dibs on a girl**, but the friend wasn't trying to ask her out.

So Joe was wondering if there was a time limit for **dibs**. It's generally expected that after you **call dibs** you're going to use or do whatever you have **called dibs** on pretty soon. When you **call dibs**, you should do something about it soon afterwards, but there is no set time limit. If you're not sure, you have to ask.

Here's one examples of this:

John: Can I have that pizza? I know you **called dibs**, but you still haven't eaten it and I'm hungry.

Dan: Go ahead.

When calling dibs is rude

To call dibs, you really should be with friends or family. **Dibs** is often called out loudly or while interrupting the person who is offering things. **Dibs** is used by and with younger people more often.

When you are meeting new people or in a more formal situation, it's not a good idea **to call dibs**. The best advice is to wait and be polite, accepting whatever is offered specifically to you.

To be left

When people read **left**, they often think about the opposite of *right* or the past tense of *to leave*. In this episode, it is used in yet another way. When something is **left**, it means that it remains. Maura says that there is one piece of cake **left**, which means that there was more cake before, but one piece is all that remains.

Here are a couple more examples with **to be left** meaning *to remain*:

Becky: Do you have any of the black T-shirts **left**?

Kevin: No, sorry. We only have the red ones **left**.

Olivia: I only have five minutes **left** before I have to go.

Tonisha: OK. I'll quickly tell you then story then...

No big deal

This is a common expression in English, and it comes up in our episodes a lot! There are many different variations of this expression too. **No big deal** means that something is not important or not something out of the ordinary.

In this episode, Maura says that calling dibs with friends and family is **no big deal**. This means that **calling dibs** with friends and family is normal or is an unremarkable thing to do.

This is in comparison to **calling dibs** with people you don't know. If you **call dibs** with people you don't know, it will likely be noticed and considered rude. In this way, **calling dibs** with people you don't know is a big deal.

Shotgun

This is a specific expression used to call dibs on the passenger seat of the car. A person simply needs to say "**shotgun**" for everyone to hear to claim the seat up front.

This expression is mostly used by young people, especially teenagers. Older people are often more polite and do not yell out that they would like to sit in the front. In more mature cases, the people discuss which person will ride in the front passenger seat. In the examples Maura and Harp talk about in this episode, they speak about young people using **shotgun** and tell stories of when they were teenagers.

Harp also talks about rules for **shotgun**. Because calling **shotgun** can be seen as a fun way to decide who rides in the front seat, there are often rules associated with it. These rules are not fixed, but are established by the people who are going to the car. Harp says that one rule was that all the people going in the car had to see the car before they could call **shotgun**. Another kind of rule might be the amount of time before you will go in the car. For example, you can't call **shotgun** hours in advance of getting in the car.

People simply say “**shotgun**” to make their claim, and when spoken about in a sentence the expression is **to call shotgun**.

Here is an example with **to call shotgun**:

Sasha: **Shotgun!**

Billy: You can't **call shotgun**, I already did.

The Wild West

The Wild West or Old West refers to a period of time in the western United States at the end of the 19th century. At this time, there were stagecoaches and wagons, as we say in this episode. It was a time with cowboys, outlaws, and thieves. It was a dangerous time when people needed to travel with shotguns!

And it was the carrying of a shotgun by the front passenger that is the origin of the modern expression **shotgun**.

Oldies but goodies

When something is called **an oldie but a goodie**, it means that it is old but still good. Often older things are seen not to be good anymore, but this expression explains that for some things this is not true, like our older Culips episodes.

Oldie is a cutesy term for something that is old and was popular at one time. And **goodie** is a cutesy term for something that is good.

Here is another example with the expression **an oldie but a goodie**:

Percy: I love this song!

Mike: It's **an oldie but a goodie**.

Ben: Oh, look what movie's on tonight!

Jeanne: That's **an oldie**...

Ben: **But a goodie**.

Quiz**1. When do people call dibs on something?**

- a) when they want to claim something for themselves
- b) with strangers and people they've just met
- c) when they want to give something to others
- d) in a professional environment

2. To call dibs ____ something.

Please fill in the blank.

- a) in
- b) on
- c) of
- d) off

3. Which of the following is correct?

- a) to have fourth dibs
- b) to have third dibs
- c) to have second dibs
- d) to have first dibs

4. When is it rude to call dibs?

- a) with people you've just met
- b) with friends
- c) with family
- d) in a casual environment

5. Camille: Can I have a bottle of orange juice?

Peter: You're lucky. There is only one _____.

Please fill in the blank.

- a) right
- b) left
- c) on
- d) straight

6. Hank: Sorry I'm late.

Genevieve: No problem. It's _____.

Please fill in the blank with the expression that means something is not important.

- a) dibs
- b) a big deal
- c) no big deal
- d) shotgun

7. When someone calls shotgun, what are they claiming?

- a) the driver's seat
- b) the passenger seat
- c) the back seat
- d) the trunk

8. Which expression means that something from the past is still good?

- a. a goodie but an oldie
- b. an oldie but a goodie
- c. old and good
- d. goodie goodie gumdrops

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