

Catch Word #97 – Working like a dog

Transcript

Maura: Hello!

Harp: Hello!

Maura: It's Maura.

Harp: And Harp.

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

Harp: Where we always focus on natural, everyday English.

Maura: Yes. And if you want to know more about any of our episodes, go to our website, Culips.com, that's C-U-L-I-P-S.com, and there you can become a member, where you'll then have access to a transcript, a more detailed explanation of a lot of the vocabulary and slang we talk about, and also a quiz.

Harp: Yes. And you can also like us on Facebook or rate us on iTunes.

Maura: Yeah. And you can always send us a message, an email or on Facebook. We love to hear from you, mostly because people say nice things about us.

Harp: If someone said something mean, I wouldn't like it.

Maura: But it's nice to hear from you, especially if you're enjoying listening to our podcast.

Harp: Yes.

Maura: So, today we're going to do a Catch Word episode, and that's where we look at different expressions and slang, and we give you different explanations and examples of how you can use these words.

Harp: Yes. So today, we're going to be looking at expressions related to working hard.

Maura: Working hard. And at some point in your life, you work hard. It doesn't matter who you are.

Harp: Definitely. And I got the idea for this expression because it's **back-to-school** time.

Maura: And people are working hard.

- Harp: Definitely. All those kids after summer, back at school, having to do homework and studying and preparing. It's a lot of work.
- Maura: And the teachers too. It's a lot of work for the teachers!
- Harp: That's true, Maura. You have a lot of work to do right now, I know.
- Maura: OK. So, let's start off with the first expression, which is **to work like a dog**.
- Harp: **To work like a dog.**
- Maura: **To work like a dog** means to work very hard.
- Harp: Yes. So if you use the expression **to work like a dog**, that means that someone is working very hard, putting in a lot of effort.
- Maura: Whenever we have an idiom with an animal, I always wonder, "Why that animal?"
- Harp: And Maura, why a dog?
- Maura: Well, dogs do work hard. And I'm not talking about the dogs that most people have for pets, but dogs that work, like a seeing-eye dog that helps people who are visually impaired or the dogs that pull sleds, they work pretty hard too.
- Harp: Yeah, and police dogs work really hard too.
- Maura: Right. So a dog that works, works almost all the time.
- Harp: Yes.
- Maura: Now we have the expression **to work like a dog**.
- Harp: Yes, so again, **to work like a dog** means that you work very hard and you put in a lot of effort.
- Maura: So let's give an example with **to work like a dog** now.
- Harp: Let's do it, Maura.

- Maura: How's it going Sue?
- Harp: I'm OK. I'm a little bit tired.
- Maura: Oh yeah? Why are you tired?
- Harp: I was **working like a dog** yesterday.

Maura: Why? What were you doing?
Harp: I had a test today, so I had to study and I also had two assignments due.
Maura: Oh man, I hope it **pays off**.
Harp: Yeah, it's a lot of work going back to school, but I really like it.

Maura: So, in that example, Sue **worked like a dog** on school work.
Harp: Yeah, so that's important to note. This expression, **to work like a dog**, we don't mean work just like a job. It could be school, it could be some sort of activity you do, or it could be your job.
Maura: Right. It can be any kind of thing where you have to exert a lot of energy, and then usually feel tired after.
Harp: Yes, exactly. Should we do another example?
Maura: OK.

Harp: Hey, congratulations. I heard about the promotion.
Maura: Thanks! I'm really happy.
Harp: Yeah, well, you were working really hard.
Maura: To be honest, I was **workin' like a dog** to get it.
Harp: Good job.
Maura: Yeah, I'm really, really glad I got, 'cause like you said, I was working really hard.
Harp: Yeah, your hard work sure **paid off**.

Maura: So, there's another example where **to work like a dog** means to work really hard.
Harp: Yeah, to put in a lot of effort.
Maura: Now, let's move on to the next expression, which is **to work your butt off**.
Harp: Yes, **to work your butt off**.
Maura: **To work your butt off** means to work really hard, **to work like a dog**. They really all can be used in the same way.

Harp: Yeah, so **to work your butt off** means that you're working very hard, you're putting in a lot of effort, you're doing a lot of work.

Maura: Sometimes, we give you an image or a little trick or the origin to help you remember this expression, but in this case, there's no connection. It's really funny when you think about it, **to work your butt off**. But it just means to work hard.

Harp: Yeah. And so if you don't know, *butt* is another word for your bum, which is a body part.

Maura: Right, so it's not that other word, *but*. It's spelled B-U-T-T and it means your bum.

Harp: Exactly. OK, so let's give an example with **to work your butt off**.

Harp: Hey. How are you?

Maura: Oh, I'm pretty good.

Harp: I'm so excited about the party at your place next weekend.

Maura: Yeah, yeah, me too. Except I'm still doing those home renovations I told you about.

Harp: Oh no! I thought they were finished.

Maura: No, you know how those things always go longer. So, I've been **working my butt off** trying to get everything done for the party. I'm sure we'll **pull it off**.

Harp: Do you need some help?

Maura: Yeah, sure. Do you wanna come over?

Harp: Sure. **That'd be fun**.

Maura: Thanks!

Maura: So there's an example where one person was **workin' her butt off**.

Harp: Yup. She was working really hard to finish something.

Maura: In this case, it wasn't school. It wasn't work. It was a home project, something that someone was doing on their own.

Harp: Yup, exactly. She was fixing her house; she was **working her butt off**.

Maura: So, let's look at the last expression which means to work very hard.

- Harp: The last expression is ***to keep your nose to the grindstone***.
- Maura: Yes, ***to keep your nose to the grindstone***. This one's long.
- Harp: Yes. This is a long expression. Let me repeat it one more time: ***to keep your nose to the grindstone***.
- Maura: Now, let's break this one down a little bit, because it's so long. A grindstone is a stone that can be used to do work. And one thing that a grindstone can do is sharpen knives. ***Are you with me*** so far, Harp?
- Harp: I'm with you. Where are we going?
- Maura: So, when the grindstone is turning and people are sharpening their knives on it, they're pressed so closely to the grindstone, when they're working very, very hard to sharpen the knife.
- Harp: OK. So ***to keep your nose to the grindstone*** is to work really hard.
- Maura: Exactly. So in the past, this possibly meant working really hard at sharpening knives, but now it can be anything.
- Harp: Yes.
- Maura: Really, this is just one theory. There are other theories out there too, but this one, I thought, makes the most sense and is the easiest to understand.
- Harp: Yes, but the expression means the same as ***to work your butt off*** or ***to work like a dog***. ***To keep your nose to the grindstone*** means to work really hard.
- Maura: That's it. So, let's do an example now with ***to keep your nose to the grindstone***.
- Harp: Sounds good. Let's do it

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| Harp: | <i>I'm so swamped</i> with work right now. |
| Maura: | Oh no! What are you working on? |
| Harp: | Well, I <i>have the three different projects on the go</i> and they're all due at about the same time. |
| Maura: | Oh, that's rough, but I'm sure you'll get it done. Just <i>keep your nose to the grindstone</i> and you'll be fine. |
| Harp: | Yeah, thanks. That's good advice. |

- Maura: So, there is an example with ***to keep your nose to the grindstone***, which means to work hard.
- Harp: Yup.
- Maura: And in this case, one person gave another person advice, which is *keep working hard*. OK, so let's go over these expressions one more time.
- Harp: OK. So we started with ***to work like a dog***.
- Maura: And then we talked about ***to work your butt off***.
- Harp: And the last one was ***to keep your nose to the grindstone***.
- Maura: You know, Harp, all this talk about work has got me tired.
- Harp: Should we end it here then?
- Maura: I think we should, but don't forget to go to our website, Culips.com, that's C-U-L-I-P-S.com
- Harp: Yeah. And like us on Facebook and rate us on iTunes.
- Maura: And we'll talk to you again soon. Bye!
- Harp: Bye everyone!

Detailed Explanation

Back-to-school

This is a common way to refer to the time when students return to school after a long vacation. In North America, the new school year starts at the end of August or the beginning of September. Stores do a lot of advertising for **back-to-school** and you see a lot of notebooks, pens, and pencils for sale. As we hear in this episode, you can say **back-to-school time**, but if you just say **back-to-school**, people know what you mean too.

Here's an example using **back-to-school**:

Krista: Nice outfit!

Sara: Thanks. I bought it for **back-to-school**.

To work like a dog

As we say in this episode, **to work like a dog** means to work really hard at something. There are dogs who pull sleds, dogs who help visually impaired people, and dogs who help the police. Those dogs work very hard.

Here's another example using **to work like a dog**:

Michelle: I can't believe I said I'd host 20 people for dinner. I hope it goes well!

Nicole: I'm sure it will. You've been **working like a dog** to get all the food ready.

To pay off

As we heard in last week's episode, this expression talks about the reward of hard work. If we work hard at something, and our hard work **pays off**, it means that good things happen because of our hard work.

You can also pay someone off, which means that you are paying them money that you owe them.

Here's an example using **to pay someone off**:

Rob: I don't get my pay cheque until next week, so I won't be able to pay Heather off until then. I owe her \$50.

Kelly: I'm sure she won't mind.

You can also pay off something. Here's an example:

Kate: You seem a little upset. What's wrong?

Lauren: I just can't wait until I've paid off my credit card bill. It's stressing me out!

To pay someone off can also mean to give someone money illegally to get them to do what you want.

Scott: Did you see anything interesting on the news tonight?

Lisa: Well, there was a pair of drug dealers who paid off the police so that they wouldn't go to jail.

Scott: Wow. How did they get caught?

To work your butt off

As we say in this episode, ***to work your butt off*** means to work really hard, to put in a lot of effort. This phrase is used the same way as *to work like a dog*. As we hear in this episode, we don't really know the exact origin, it's just one of those weird expressions!

Here's another example using ***to work your butt off***:

Jeff: If I fail this test, I'll be so mad.

Max: Why would you fail? You've **been working your butt off** studying for it! Don't worry.

We can also say ***to work your ass off***, but *butt* is a little bit more polite than *ass*. *Ass* means the same thing as *butt*, and both forms of the expression mean the same thing.

Slang for buttocks

There are many slang words for *buttocks* in the English language. Here are just a few of them!

- Butt
- Ass (keep in mind that this one is considered a mild swear word)
- Bum
- Buns
- Tush
- Tushy
- Booty
- Behind
- Heiny
- Bottom

To pull it off

This expression means to be successful (in some cases unexpectedly) at something difficult or thought to be impossible.

Here's an example using **to pull it off**.

Colin: I was told at the last minute that I have to speak at the conference. I'm so nervous!

Jeremy: Don't worry. I'm sure you'll **pull it off**. You know the subject really well.

Colin: I hope you're right!

That'd be fun

That'd is a contraction for *that would*. We use this contraction because it's easier to say than *that would*. *That* and *would* are two very different-sounding words, so we have to make two very different shapes with our mouths when we're saying them. People often use **that'd** instead of *that would* when they're speaking.

'd can represent *would* or *had* when it's used in a contraction. You can tell the difference from between the two from the context of the sentence.

Here are two examples to see that difference:

Devon: I'd love to come see you.

CORRECT: I would love to come see you.

INCORRECT: I had love to go see you.

Nathan: She'd been away for so long.

CORRECT: She had been away for so long.

INCORRECT: She would been away for so long.

Dropping the g in ing

In this episode, Maura says that someone was **workin'** her butt off instead of *working* her butt off. This is never used in formal written English, but is often used in spoken English. When we drop the *g*, it means that we don't pronounce it.

Dropping the *g* in a noun, for example the word *wedding*, is done more often in certain dialects of North American English, such as in the southern United States. Most Canadians don't drop the *g* in nouns. We usually only drop the *g* when we use verbs, for example in the words **walkin'** or **dancin'**.

To keep your nose to the grindstone

As we say in this episode, a grindstone is something used for sharpening knives, and to sharpen a knife properly, you have to get really close to the grindstone. Sharpening knives with a grindstone is hard work! If you're sharpening knives, you can't even look up. You have to concentrate on what you're doing.

Here's another example of ***to keep your nose to the grindstone***:

Jennie: I have four books to read by Monday and an exam on Tuesday. I also have three parties to go to this weekend.

Amie: Maybe you should just **keep your nose to the grindstone** and skip the parties.

Jennie: No way! I need to have a little fun!

Are you with me?

This is an expression used to check if the person listening understands what you're saying. It's usually said partway through a long explanation to check if the person has understood everything up to that point. In this episode, Maura checks with Harp in the middle of her long explanation about the expression *keep your nose to the grindstone*.

Here's an example with *Are you with me?*:

Sam: I'll show you how to complete this problem. First you have to add 4 to your sum. Are you with me so far?

Jen: Yep. I understand that part, but it's the next step I'm having trouble with.

To be swamped

The phrase ***to be swamped*** literally means for a boat to be filled with too much water. For example, a boat can get swamped by a big wave that comes over the side. If a boat gets swamped and filled with too much water, it might sink! When you think of having a lot of work, it can also feel like you're sinking, especially if you have a lot of different things to do.

Here's an example using ***to be swamped*** as an idiom:

Marie: I was working on a project that I have to finish by Friday, and then my boss came and told me that I also have to do a presentation on Wednesday. I also have a meeting today and three tomorrow.

Kevin: Wow, it sounds like **you're swamped**. I'm sure you're looking forward to the weekend.

Marie: I sure am.

To have something on the go

When you have a lot of different things to do at the same time, you can say that you have a lot of things **on the go**. You can also say that you **have something on the go** when you've already started one project, so will not be able to do another.

Here's an example using ***to have something on the go***:

Carl: Could you help us with the fundraiser this weekend?

Kent: Unfortunately, I already **have something on the go** this weekend, so I can't. Sorry about that.

Quiz

1. What is the time of year (usually in the fall in North America) when many people return to school called?

- a) return-to-school
- b) go-back-to-school
- c) back-to-school
- d) to-school

2. If Marc owes Peter \$50 and then pays him \$25, has Marc paid Peter off?

- a) Yes, definitely.
- b) No, definitely not.
- c) Maybe. We don't know.
- d) Peter has paid Marc off.

3. *To work your _____ off* means to work really hard.

Please fill in the blank to complete the expression.

- a) hands
- b) butt
- c) legs
- d) head

4. Andrea: Yeah! We got the contract!

Sophie: I'm so happy that we were able to _____!

Please fill in the blank.

- a) put it on
- b) pull it off
- c) pay it off
- d) pay it forward

5. Dorothy: I'd love to see you on Friday. That'd be fun.

What does the 'd' represent in these sentences?

- a) would
- b) could
- c) had
- d) did

6. Which of the following is NOT another slang term for *bum* or *butt*?

- a) heiny
- b) bottom
- c) boots
- d) bootie

7. Tom: I really want to get this work done, so I've been _____.

Please fill in the blank.

- a) grinding my nose
- b) keeping my nose to the grindstone
- c) keeping my nose to the ground
- d) keeping my nose out of it

8. Which of the following expressions can mean *Do you understand me so far?*

- a) Are you on the go?
- b) Are you in it?
- c) Are you behind me?
- d) Are you with me?

9. Which of the following means to be busy and have too much work to do?

- a) to be stilted
- b) to be swamped
- c) to be covered
- d) to be paid off

Answers

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