

Real Talk #017 – Getting clothes altered

Episode description

Do you have an item of clothing that you really like, but it doesn't fit quite right? Luckily for you, that's a problem with a simple solution! In this Real Talk episode, Andrew and Morag walk you through all the vocabulary and expressions you'll need to get an item of clothing altered to fit you perfectly!

Fun fact

Have you ever wondered why some people, especially celebrities, always look good in the clothes they wear? It's because they get their clothing altered by a seamstress or tailor. If you want to look your best, you can even get loose t-shirts altered to fit perfectly!

Expressions included in the learning materials

- A trooper
- A baby step
- To take in/to let out
- Measure twice, cut once
- Hand-me-down



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. My name's Andrew.

Morag: And my name is Morag.

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

Hey, Morag. How are you?

Morag: I'm doin' all right. A little sleepy this morning. How about you, Andrew?

Andrew: I'm doin' well. Hey, Morag, I'm sorry. You know, our schedules are just so opposite of each other that I always have to wake you up early in the morning to record. But you're **a trooper** and you always get up early to record, so thanks for joining us today.

Morag: My pleasure.

Andrew: Well, today, Morag, we are going to do a Real Talk episode. And Real Talk is the series where we take a close look at situations that you need to know how to navigate if you live in an English-speaking country, or even if you're visiting an English-speaking country.

And a reminder that all Culips members can use our learning materials to study with this episode. And our learning materials include a transcript, detailed vocabulary explanations, and examples, as well as quizzes. And if you're not a Culips member, then you visit our website, Culips.com, for all the information you need to learn about becoming a member.

And, of course, a huge thank you to all of our members who are listening now, because we wouldn't exist without your support.

Morag: Absolutely. Thanks so much, guys.

So, Andrew, in this episode we are going to talk about how to get clothes altered in English.

Andrew: Exactly. Getting clothes altered, OK? So this means going to a tailor or a seamstress to get them to adjust your clothes so that they fit better, right?

- Morag: Yup, that's the idea. Alteration can include things like hemming skirts or pants, getting someone to shorten or tighten sleeves, making the waistband of pants smaller, replacing zippers, buttons, or even taking a whole dress down a couple sizes.
- Andrew: I always should take my clothes to the tailor for adjustment because my sewing skills are really terrible. And I also have short legs.
- Morag: Oh ...
- Andrew: So if I buy pants, the legs are always too long. But, you know, Morag, I was really proud of myself the other day because I sewed on a button, back onto my shirt, that had popped off.
- Morag: Oh, that's so sweet! You tried, you did it!
- Andrew: I did it. It's a **baby step** in the right direction.
- Morag: It's not that much harder to do things that sound a lot more impressive. Like the other day, the hem of a pair of pants of mine came down while I was at work and everyone was very impressed that I just sat down, pulled out a sewing kit, and fixed the hem of my pants. But it was very simple, just a couple knots.
- Andrew: Well, even I'm impressed. That sounds pretty amazing, actually.
- Morag: It took 5 minutes! Come on.
- Andrew: You like to sew, right, Morag?
- Morag: Yeah. I always had trouble finding clothes that fit, too, when I was younger.
- Andrew: Mmhmm?
- Morag: So I decided to learn a little bit about how to make clothes from scratch and how to change existing pieces of clothing so that they work for you better. And that's what alteration is all about.
- Andrew: Yeah. So when you wanna get your clothes altered, you can take them to a couple of different people, either a seamstress or a tailor. Now what's the difference between the two?
- Morag: Well, a seamstress is usually what we call someone, a woman almost always, who sews and makes clothes for a living. They're usually women's clothes. A tailor, on the other hand, makes men's clothes, like suits. But both will offer alteration services, and sometimes you can even get your clothes altered at dry cleaners. I had them put a zipper on.

- Andrew: Yeah, it's very convenient. Take your clothes to get cleaned and altered at the same time.
- Morag: It's great.
- Andrew: A two for one.
- Morag: Mmhmm.
- Andrew: So let's get down to business. In today's episode, we're going to listen to a conversation between a woman who wants to get some clothes altered and a tailor. After we listen to the conversation, we'll break it down and discuss the key vocabulary and expressions that you need to know to get your clothes altered using English.
- Morag: Awesome. So let's take a listen to that conversation now. We'll get to it right after this message.
- Announcer: Do you like listening to Culips? If so, please show your support by leaving Culips a five-star rating and a review on iTunes or Stitcher. This helps new listeners find the show. So don't delay, rate and review today.

- Tailor: Hi there. How's your day goin'?
- Customer: Not bad, thanks. How are you?
- Tailor: I'm good. What can I do for you today?
- Customer: I just got a bunch of **hand-me-downs** from my sister, but the problem is they're a bit big for me. So I'm looking to get a couple of adjustments done.
- Tailor: Yeah, sure. No problem.
- Customer: OK, so first I need these pants hemmed. They're a bit long. I've already marked where I want the hem to end, though.
- Tailor: OK, great.
- Customer: OK, I'd also like you **to take in** the waist of this dress. I mean, I love the fabric, but when I wear it I look frumpy. I'd like it to be a bit more fitted.
- Tailor: That's no problem. Would you like to put it on so I can take a measurement? The changing room's just over there.
- Customer: Oh, that's OK, I already measured it at home. I need it to be **taken in** by 4 centimetres.

Tailor: Perfect. OK, well, let's see. I should be able to get these done in just a couple days. If you could write your name down and your phone number, too, just right here. I'll give you a call when they're ready.

Customer: Sounds good. Thank you so much.

Tailor: Hey, no worries. Have a good day.

Morag: We just heard a conversation between a tailor and a customer who wants to get some clothes altered. Now let's take a closer look at the important vocabulary and expressions that we heard.

Andrew OK, Morag, so let's go through that conversation one more time and look at some of the important expressions. The first one I think we should talk about today is **hand-me-downs**, **hand-me-downs**. Let's listen to that part of the conversation just one more time.

Customer: I just got a bunch of **hand-me-downs** from my sister.
I just got a bunch of **hand-me-downs** from my sister.

Andrew: OK, **hand-me-down**. Again, this is h-a-n-d, like what's attached to your arm, me, and then down, the preposition down. And, OK, Morag, what is a **hand-me-down**?

Morag: Well, luckily I am very familiar with **hand-me-downs**.

Andrew: Uh huh?

Morag: I used to get them all the time when I was a kid from cousins, because what a **hand-me-down** is, is it's something that someone else has owned and then it is given to you, usually from family members, older siblings, that kind of thing. So it's used clothing from someone you are close to.

Andrew: Exactly. And we use this expression all the time when we talk about kids' clothing, right?

Morag: Mmhmm.

Andrew: Because it just makes sense that in a family, if you have a couple of kids and they grow really quickly, instead of buying everybody new clothes, you can just hand the clothes down from one child to the next child. And we call these used items of clothing **hand-me-downs**. And in the conversation, the customer just got some **hand-me-downs** from her sister.

- Andrew: So even though I am assuming that the customer is not a child, she's a grown-up, we can still use this expression, **hand-me-downs**, in a cute way to say that she got some clothes from her sister. Maybe her sister was doing some spring cleaning and gave them to her, and so she took them to the tailor for alteration so that they would fit properly.
- Morag: Mmhmm.
- Andrew: I was lucky enough to be the oldest in my family.
- Morag: Ugh.
- Andrew: So all of my clothes were new, but my younger brother definitely had to wear **hand-me-downs**.
- Morag: Yeah. I mean I shouldn't complain too much. I was really an only child but, like I said, I used to get these giant boxes from my grandmother of my cousin's clothes from 4½ thousand kilometres away, from Ottawa. It sounds nuts, right?
- Andrew: It is a little bit extreme but, hey, it's good for the planet, recycling.
- Morag: Exactly! Oh, wow, that brought me back.
- Andrew: What is the next key part of the conversation, Morag?
- Morag: I think that would be where the customer asks for something to be hemmed. So the key word here is hem, or hemming. Let's listen to that part one more time.

Customer:	So first I need these pants hemmed. They're a bit long. So first I need these pants hemmed. They're a bit long.
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- Morag: The hem is any end of a piece of clothing, so the end of your shirt or your pants or pretty much anything, whenever the fabric is rolled over itself and stitched down so that it won't unravel at the end, that's a hem.
- So if you're hemming something, it's usually taking the hem up and making it shorter, although you can let a hem down and make pants or a skirt or a dress longer, depending on how much extra fabric is in there.
- Andrew: Now one time I took my pants to get hemmed and I made a big mistake, which is I didn't specify the colour of thread that I wanted to be used. I had black jeans but the tailor used gold thread, like you would on a regular pair of blue jeans. So it looked a little funny.

- Morag: Sometimes tailors will ... Or seamstresses too, will sort of try to make things a little better.
- Andrew: Mmhmm.
- Morag: Or a little more interesting, or to their tastes. So sometimes finding someone to alter your clothes is very similar to finding someone to cut your hair. You need to agree on what looks good. Because, yeah, that gold thread ...
- Andrew: Didn't look good against the black, I gotta say.
- Morag: No!
- Andrew: So I learned my lesson, and that is always be very specific about the service you want to receive. Be very clear with your instructions. And that would be my tip to all the listeners out there.
- Morag: Mmhmm.
- Andrew: All right, so the next key part of the conversation that I wanna take a quick look at is when the customer asks the tailor **to take in** the waist of a dress, OK? **Take in** the waist of a dress. So we have a nice phrasal verb here, **to take in**. Now let's listen to that part of the conversation again.

Customer:	I'd also like you to take in the waist of this dress. I'd also like you to take in the waist of this dress.
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- Andrew: All right, Morag, so my guess ... And, now, I'm no expert here, but I would like to think that **take in** means to make smaller. Is this true? Is this what this means, **to take in** the waist of the dress, to give it a smaller waist size?
- Morag: You are correct. Woohoo!
- Andrew: Now could we also use this verb, the opposite version, to take out the waist? Would that work, to make something bigger? Could we say to take out?
- Morag: No, you can't do that. The opposite is **to let out**.
- Andrew: Hmm, **to let out**, right.
- Morag: But that applies only if there is fabric there.
- Andrew: Right, because of course tailors aren't magicians. They can't just ...
- Morag: No.

Andrew: Make some extra fabric appear.

Morag: But they can still ... If you say that you need something, you want a, like a waist **let out**, usually they'll be able to put an extra panel, make some detailing or something. They're pretty magical, despite not being magicians.

Andrew: They can still work magic with the sewing needle and some thread. I like it.

So, yeah, two nice phrasal verbs here. **To take in**, meaning to make clothes smaller, especially when we talk about the size of the waist, or even the size of the pant opening, the leg opening, or the sleeve opening, right? All of those spots we could **take in** to make them smaller.

Or, like you just said, Morag, we can **let them out** to make them a little bit bigger, also.

Morag: Mmhmm. OK, Andrew, so the next piece of the conversation we want to look at comes right after the customer requesting the dress to be **taken in**. She says that she feels frumpy when she wears the dress as it is, so we're gonna look at this word, frumpy. It's f-r-u-m-p-y. Let's take a listen to that section of the conversation one more time.

Andrew: OK.

Customer:	I mean, I love the fabric, but when I wear it I look frumpy. I mean, I love the fabric, but when I wear it I look frumpy.
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Andrew: Yeah, frumpy. I really like to say this word, frumpy.

Morag: It's fun.

Andrew: If you look frumpy, what do you look like?

Morag: So frumpy means you ... Your clothes don't fit well. They're ... It's not just baggy, it's not just large, it's just they're not right. You just don't look put together.

Andrew: I always feel frumpy whenever I try on my friend's clothes, you know?

Morag: Hmm.

Andrew: Maybe I'm over at my friend's house and suddenly it gets really cool, so I asked to borrow a sweater or something. Then I put it on and it just doesn't fit right. It's a little too big and I feel really boxy and a little sloppy. This is a frumpy look.

Morag: Yeah, it definitely is related to clothes not fitting properly, being ill fitting, on the larger side.

Andrew: Exactly, yeah. And we wouldn't use this expression for clothes that are too small, only for things that are too big.

Morag: Mmhmm, as much as saying frumpy is fun, feeling frumpy is terrible.

Andrew: Yeah, totally. You could also say, "I look like a frump," right?

Morag: Mmhmm.

Andrew: I look frumpy or I look like a frump.

Morag: That might be a fun one to say.

Andrew: The opposite of frumpy is to wear clothes that are fitted, right?

Morag: Mmhmm.

Andrew: And we actually heard that expression used in the very next sentence in the conversation. The customer said that she wanted the dress to be more fitted. So let's take a listen to that part one more time.

Customer: I'd like it to be a bit more fitted.
I'd like it to be a bit more fitted.

Andrew: Again, fitted is the adjective we use to describe clothes that fit well.

Morag: If you're like me, you can just wear kind of spandex-y jeans and never should worry about this again.

Andrew: That's awesome. I also like the spandex-y jeans. That was a great invention.

Morag: Yeah, spandex-y black jeans, done. Outfits over for the rest of my life. We're good.

Andrew: I concur, I concur.

Morag: Which is nice, because then I will never have to deal with our next expression, which is to take a measurement. And this happened again right after the section we just talked about. If we can just listen one more time to what the tailor says.

Tailor: Would you like to put it on so I can take a measurement?
Would you like to put it on so I can take a measurement?

- Morag: So the tailor asked to be able to take a measurement of the customer, and this is a very normal thing that a tailor or seamstress will ask. They're going to measure your body and measure the clothing, and make sure it all fits, or discover how to make it fit. And usually they'll ask you to put on that clothing, that piece of clothing, so they can see what needs to be done.
- Andrew: Yeah, and I thought it was important to highlight this expression, to take a measurement, because maybe it seems a little bit bizarre to use the verb take, and then the noun, a measurement. Because you know, we do have the verb to measure. But it would be strange to ask somebody, "Do you want to put on those clothes so I can measure you?" Because when we say measure you, then I'm thinking my height, right?
- Morag: Mmhmm.
- Andrew: I'm thinking about how tall I am. But we take a measurement, we're measuring your clothes, so I thought it was important to make that distinction, that it's actually a little weird to use the verb to measure when talking about clothes.
- Morag: It's true. To take measurements, you can do it with a couple different sorts of activities, but it's ... Like you can take measurements for furniture and that sort of thing, but it's usually when you have an end goal, you're trying to do something. You're trying to accomplish something that involves measurements.
- Andrew: Totally.
- Morag: You know? Like you're trying to figure out what you can put in a room or how exactly to change a whole piece of clothing. If you're just measuring one thing out by yourself, you probably wouldn't say I need to take a measurement.
- Andrew: Yeah. We also use take a measurement all the time when building things, and doing construction projects.
- Morag: And this is sort of like clothes construction.
- Andrew: Mmhmm.
- Morag: Or clothing repair.
- Andrew: Well, we also have the expression, **measure twice, cut once**, right? This is a construction idiom, or I guess words of wisdom in the construction industry. But I think it applies also to tailors. I'm sure a tailor wants to take measurements twice and make the cut once, because you know, once you make that hem there's no goin' back.

- Morag: It is true. Yes, it definitely applies to sewing as well.
- OK. Well, Andrew, I think that brings us to the end of today's episode.
- Andrew: Yeah, and for all of you that want to listen to the conversation that we heard today one more time, we will replay it in just a moment, so please stay tuned for that.
- Morag: And if you enjoyed today's episode, please support us.
- Andrew: Yeah! You can visit our website, Culips.com. Again, that is the place where you can sign up to become a member and take advantage of the learning materials for this episode, and all our other episodes. And we really believe that they will help take your English studies to the next level. As well, if you have any questions or comments for us, you can send us a message through our Facebook page, which is Facebook.com/CulipsPodcast. And again, our website is Culips.com.
- Morag: All right, that's it for now, everyone. We will be back soon with another new episode.
- Andrew: Bye.
- Morag: Bye.

- Tailor: Hi there. How's your day goin'?
- Customer: Not bad, thanks. How are you?
- Tailor: I'm good. What can I do for you today?
- Customer: I just got a bunch of **hand-me-downs** from my sister, but the problem is they're a bit big for me. So I'm looking to get a couple of adjustments done.
- Tailor: Yeah, sure. No problem.
- Customer: OK, so first I need these pants hemmed. They're a bit long. I've already marked where I want the hem to end, though.
- Tailor: OK, great.
- Customer: OK, I'd also like you **to take in** the waist of this dress. I mean, I love the fabric, but when I wear it I look frumpy. I'd like it to be a bit more fitted.
- Tailor: That's no problem. Would you like to put it on so I can take a measurement? The changing room's just over there.

Customer: Oh, that's OK, I already measured it at home. I need it to be **taken in** by 4 centimetres.

Tailor: Perfect. OK, well, let's see. I should be able to get these done in just a couple days. If you could write your name down and your phone number, too, just right here. I'll give you a call when they're ready.

Customer: Sounds good. Thank you so much.

Tailor: Hey, no worries. Have a good day.

Detailed Explanations

A trooper

The official definition of the noun **a trooper** is a low-ranking soldier, in British English, and an American state police officer, in North American English. However, this is not the meaning of **a trooper** that we will look at today.

In this episode, Andrew apologized to Morag for always waking her up early in the morning to record Culips episodes. He then said that she is **a trooper**. When used in casual conversation to refer to someone who is not either a soldier or a police officer, **a trooper** is a person who does something difficult without complaining or who overcomes a tough situation. So, by calling Morag **a trooper**, Andrew is complimenting Morag on her willingness to do something unpleasant, like getting up really early.

So, you can call anyone who has a good attitude when dealing with a difficult or unpleasant situation **a trooper**.

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

Leon:	How is your sister Anna doing? I heard she was in the hospital.
Shannon:	She's doing OK. Things have been really tough for her lately, though. She's been stuck in the hospital for almost a month because of complications from surgery.
Leon:	Oh no! That sounds awful. I imagine it would be hard to stay positive in that situation.
Shannon:	She has been amazingly cheerful throughout the whole thing. She's a real trooper !

Mark:	Got any plans for the evening?
Leah:	Yeah. I'm staying at work for a few more hours. I think I might be able to leave around 10 PM, then I need to go home and clean up my apartment before my weekend houseguests arrive. I'm looking forward to getting all my work done and having a nice, clean place!
Mark:	I don't know how you have the energy to do all that, and you're not even mad about it! You're a trooper .

A baby step

A baby step is a term for an action that marks a very small amount of progress towards some goal.

In this episode, Andrew mentions that he's proud of himself for sewing a button back on one of his shirts. Morag, who is more familiar with making repairs and alterations in clothing, says that he's taken **a baby step** in the right direction. In other words, sewing a button back on his shirt was a small step in learning how to do his own clothing repairs.

You can use **a baby step**, or **baby steps**, to refer to any actions that are a small advancement towards developing a skill or accomplishing a task. For example, if you wanted to one day run a 10-kilometre race, you might start with the **baby step** of jogging for 20 minutes.

Here are a couple more examples with **a baby step**:

Nora:	Hey, Alan, what are you working on? You've been staring intently at your computer for a long time!
Alan:	I decided to learn how to code. I really want to get into complicated languages like C# and Python, but I decided that I should start with baby steps .
Nora:	That's a good idea! Don't take on too much at once. So, what's your baby step ?
Alan:	I'm teaching myself HTML and CSS. They're way simpler than those other languages, but at least I'm learning!

Vicky:	Oh my gosh, it smells awful in this kitchen. I think you've burned your dinner!
Carl:	I know! I totally failed.
Vicky:	What were you trying to make? I didn't even think you knew how to cook.
Carl:	I want to learn how to cook, so I thought I'd make a beef Wellington. The pastry burned, but the meat is raw inside! I don't know what I did wrong!
Vicky:	You really should take baby steps when learning to cook, not jump into something so tricky! Why don't you start with a simple pasta sauce?

To take in/to let out

When you want to take something to a tailor or seamstress to be altered, the most common alterations to ask for are to make the item of clothing larger or smaller. In this episode, Andrew and Morag talked about two phrasal verbs you can use in this situation: **to take in** and **to let out**.

When you want to have an item of clothing made smaller, you should use **to take in**. For example, if you had a pair of pants that was too big in the waist, you could say to the tailor, "I need the waist of these pants **taken in**."

When you want to have an item of clothing made larger, you should use **to let out**. For example, if you had a shirt with arms that were too short, you could ask the seamstress, "Can you **let out** the arms of this shirt?"

So, if you need to have clothing made smaller or larger, just remember **to take in** and **to let out**!

Here's one more example each with **to take in** and **to let out**:

Karl:	What do you think of these pants?
Kate:	I like the style, but they're clearly way too big for you.
Karl:	You're right, I shouldn't buy them.
Kate:	I didn't say that! You can always get them and have them taken in . Then they would be perfect for you!

Sean:	I really like that dress on you!
Ricki:	Thanks! I like it too, but it's not comfortable at all.
Sean:	Oh, why not?
Ricki:	It's too tight in the torso. I've been meaning to take it to a seamstress and have it let out , but I keep forgetting.
Sean:	Oh well—at least it still looks nice!

Measure twice, cut once

In this episode, Andrew mentions the idiom **measure twice, cut once**. This is an expression that comes from woodworking. When you're making something out of wood, it's good practice to double check that your measurements are correct before cutting the wood. This is because it's impossible to put a piece of wood back together once it's been cut!

This expression also applies to making or altering clothing. Just like wood, you can't put fabric back together again once it's been cut.

However, **measure twice, cut once** is commonly used to talk about situations that don't actually involve measuring or cutting anything. When used in a figurative sense, **measure twice, cut once** is a piece of advice that means it's important to plan your actions carefully. In other words, being careful and making sure you're doing the right thing is better than acting quickly and making a mistake.

So, when someone says **measure twice, cut once**, they are referring to the fact that it's good to be very sure of any action if the results are irreversible!

Here are a couple more examples with **measure twice, cut once**:

Hannah:	I'm so frustrated with my boss! He's being a total jerk lately.
John:	I'm sorry to hear that.
Hannah:	I am so tempted to tell him exactly what I think of his behaviour tomorrow morning!
John:	Well, you know what they say: measure twice, cut once .
Hannah:	You're right. I should calm down before I talk to him. I don't want to end up saying something I would regret!

Jackie:	Oh no! I totally screwed up this skirt I'm making. It's way too small.
Frank:	That's disappointing. Did you make sure to measure twice, cut once ?
Jackie:	I didn't. I thought I was careful enough the first time I measured!
Frank:	Classic mistake. You should double check your measurements when making anything!

Hand-me-down

As Morag and Andrew discussed in this episode, a **hand-me-down** is a noun that means an item, usually a piece of clothing, that was owned or used by someone else before you. In this episode, when the customer says that she got some **hand-me-downs** from her sister, she means that she was given some of her sister's old clothing.

However, you can also use **hand-me-down** as an adjective! For example, if you're wearing a secondhand pair of pants that you were given by a friend, you could say you're wearing **hand-me-down** pants.

You can also use **hand-me-down** with nouns other than those related to clothing. For example, if you were given a chair by a friend, you have a **hand-me-down** chair. So, you can call any pre-used item you were given a **hand-me-down** item.

Here's one more example with the adjective **hand-me-down**:

Jacob:	Wow, Lenore, your apartment is really cool. I love all the art you have on the walls.
Lenore:	Thanks! I got all of it from my friend who moved away a little while ago. I used to have completely bare walls. I agree that this is so much nicer!
Jacob:	This is all hand-me-down art? You're lucky your friend had such good taste!

Quiz

1. **True or false: measure twice, cut once is an idiom that can be used as a piece of advice.**
 - a) true
 - b) false

2. **Which of these is a term for someone who maintains a pleasant attitude in a difficult situation?**
 - a) a trooper
 - b) a loser
 - c) a champion
 - d) a cop

3. **A hand-me-down item of clothing has been:**
 - a) purchased new
 - b) chosen carefully
 - c) previously owned
 - d) altered to fit

4. **Which of these phrasal verbs should be used when talking about making a piece of clothing smaller?**
 - a) to give in
 - b) to take in
 - c) to send back
 - d) to let out

5. **A baby step is a term for an action that marks a ____ amount of progress.**
 - a) meaningful
 - b) significant
 - c) good
 - d) small

Quiz Answers

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

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