

Catch Word #46 – Down-to-earth

Transcript

Jessie: Hi everybody out there, you're listening to Culips with Jessie ...

Harp: And Harp.

Jessie: And today we have a Catch Word podcast for you.

Harp: Exactly, that's where we bring an expression or a phrase and we explain it and we give you examples of how to use it and we give you some related expressions.

Jessie: And you can check out the Lipservice for this podcast on our website at Culips.com.

Harp: Yup, that's C-U-L-I-P-S.com. So when you go to the website you can find the Lipservice, which has the detailed explanations and transcript, which is word-for-word everything we say in this episode and all our episodes. There's also a quiz in the Lipservice.

Jessie: So Harp, today's Catch Word is kind of exciting.

Harp: Really? Why Jessie?

Jessie: Well, because it actually comes from a listener question.

Harp: Really?

Jessie: Yeah, Armando asked us if we could explain the meaning of the phrase **down-to-earth**.

Harp: **Down-to-earth**.

Jessie: Right, so this one's for you Armando.

Harp: So Jessie what does **down-to-earth** mean?

Jessie: Well, **down-to-earth** is an adjective used to describe usually a person, who is very realistic, very sensible. They're really sincere, natural ... kind of a good **solid** person that you can really **depend on**.

- Harp: Right, so someone who is **down-to-earth** has all of these qualities and you can find out the definitions of each of them on the Lipservice. Should we give some examples of how to use **down-to-earth**?
- Jessie: Right, well, my friend Becky for **instance**, she's really **down-to-earth**. She never **shows off** or acts like she's better than people. She's just honest and she always just acts genuine and real.
- Harp: OK, that makes sense. She's a **down-to-earth** person.
- Jessie: Right, but then my cousin **on the other hand** ... He tells everybody that he's a **down-to-earth** guy but actually he spends all his time dreaming about being a movie star. He's always dreaming about being something else.
- Harp: So, he's not **down-to-earth** at all.
- Jessie: Not at all. Yeah, he's always spending all his money on hair products and expensive clothes, but actually he can **barely** even pay his rent.
- Harp: Oh no, that's horrible.
- Jessie: Yeah, he needs to be more **down-to-earth**.
- Harp: He definitely does.
- Jessie: So being **down-to-earth** is usually a good thing.
- Harp: Exactly. Do you think you're a **down-to-earth** person?
- Jessie: I think I'm a pretty **down-to-earth** person.
- Harp: Yeah me too. I think you are. Jessie, where do you think the term **down-to-earth** comes from?
- Jessie: Well, in my mind I think about it like if you **have both feet planted solidly on the ground**, you're very realistic, you're very stable. Whereas if you're not realistic you're kind of **floating** around, you're **not grounded** to anything.
- Harp: OK. **Grounded**, that's a good expression that you can use.
- Jessie: Right, that's actually a synonym for **down-to-earth**.
- Harp: OK, so that's our second expression today.

- Jessie: Exactly. So someone who's very **down-to-earth**, very sensible, we could say that they're a very **grounded** person.
- Harp: Yeah, they **have their feet on the ground**.
- Jessie: Now if you're not a very **down-to-earth person**, if you're not **grounded**, we could say that you **have your head in the clouds**.
- Harp: Exactly, so your cousin has **his head in the clouds**.
- Jessie: Right, he's always dreaming. It's like even though his body is on the ground it's like his mind is off **floating** in the air somewhere.
- Harp: Yeah, **in Hollywood**, I think.
- Jessie: Right. So an important thing to remember about these phrases – things like **down-to-earth**, **grounded**, and **head in the clouds** – is that we usually only use them to describe people.
- Harp: Yeah, exactly. Sometimes you can use them to describe an idea, for example, "that's a **down-to-earth** plan," but you don't use it to describe things. Like your table can't be **down-to-earth**.
- Jessie: No, a table would never be **down-to-earth**. You could be a **down-to-earth** person but a table or a chair could never be **down-to-earth**.
- Harp: Exactly.
- Jessie: But if you bought a table that was really **solid**, really useful ...
- Harp: And on sale.
- Jessie: And on sale, then I might say that you're a very **down-to-earth** person because you bought it.
- Harp: Exactly.
- Jessie: Harp, what's one of the things you look for in the perfect guy?
- Harp: Well, I look for someone who's **down-to-earth**. I like someone who's sensible, who's reliable, not someone with their **head in the clouds**, dreaming all the time.
- Jessie: Right. You want someone who's **down-to-earth** and realistic.

- Harp: Exactly.
- Jessie: So Armando, we hope we've done a good job of explaining the expression **down-to-earth** and we also talked about the terms **grounded**, which is a synonym, and **head in the clouds**, which means the opposite.
- Harp: Exactly, and if anyone else has any expressions they want explained, please send us an email.
- Jessie: We love to get your questions.
- Harp: Exactly. You can find the contact information on the website.
- Jessie: And we'll talk to you next time. This has been Jessie ...
- Harp: And Harp.
- Jessie: Bye.
- Harp: Bye everyone.

Detailed Explanation

Down-to-earth

We can simply say that someone is **down-to-earth** or that they are a **down-to-earth** person. This means that the person is sensible and realistic. **Down-to-earth** is most often used to refer to a person, and sometimes used about an idea or a concept. It is not used about a physical object.

Here are a couple more examples.

Person – After a lot of fame and money, some celebrities are still **down-to-earth**.

Concept – The group had a really **down-to-earth** approach to the problem.

In English, and probably many other languages and cultures, when someone is described as close to earth or the ground it means that this person is sensible and realistic. The opposite of being close to the ground is being up in the sky, and so someone who is described as being in the sky or not on the ground is not being realistic. This applies to the opposite vocabulary that we are looking at below.

Other synonyms for **down-to-earth** that we mention in this episode include *sensible*, *realistic*, *sincere*, *stable*, and *solid*.

Down-to-earth is an adjective

Why are there hyphens or dashes (-) between all the words in **down-to-earth**? This is because **down-to-earth** is an adjective. When more than one word is an adjective, they are connected by dashes. Here is the best example of that.

Gertrude is 3 years old.

OK? Now, we are going to change “3 years old” into an adjective.

Gertrude is a 3-year-old girl.



When “3 years old” describes “girl,” it becomes an adjective, and so dashes between the words. (An adjective is never plural and that is why “years” becomes “year” in the second example.)

BUT this is not always done correctly. If you read any publication it should be written correctly, with the hyphens, but when many people write (not professionally) they do not include the hyphens. You may see **down-to-earth** and other adjectives like this without the hyphens. It is not correct, but it is quite common.

Depend on

Depend on is a two-word verb that has a different meaning from only *depend* by itself. And even **depend on** has a couple different meanings. One of the ways we can use **depend on** is that someone expects a person to help them.

In this episode Jessie says, "... a good solid person who you can really **depend on**." In this case, Jessie is talking about a person who you know you can go to if you are in trouble or are sad or just need someone to help you. Jessie says that a **down-to-earth** person is someone who you can **depend on**. Here are some examples using **depend on** in this way.

Jill: What are you going to do if you don't have enough money to pay rent this month?

Bruce: I know I can always **depend on** my parents to help me.

Sheila: Are you moving into your new place this weekend?

Howard: Yes, but I still need a couple more people to help me move all my stuff.

Sheila: I can help you. You can **depend on** me.

Camille: What is important for you in a friendship?

Tyrone: It is important for me to have a friend who I can **depend on**, and they can rely on me too.

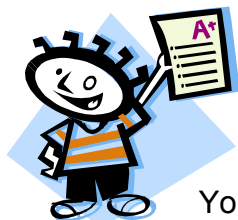
Some synonyms for this use of **depend on** are *rely on* (in the above example) or *count on*.

For instance

For instance is a synonym for *for example*. Instead of saying "for example," Jessie says "for **instance**" with exactly the same meaning. The next time you are giving an example, try using **for instance**.

Show off

Show off is another two-word verb like *depend on*. **To show off** means that someone is showing other people something that they are very good at or proud of. A person could **show off** a talent or a possession. Usually, it is not a good thing to show off!



For instance, if Jon knows that he is an excellent basketball player, he invites his friends to play so that they can see how good he is. Or maybe Fiona got an A+ on her test and she asks all her classmates what their scores were so she can tell them that she got an A+.

You only **show off** when you mean to show people your skills. If Jon just plays basketball well and scores a lot of points and people see him, that is not **showing off**. It is **showing off** only when he is trying to show others how great he is.

If Fiona only tells her score to Judy when Judy asks her, then she is probably not **showing off** but just stating a fact. So to know if someone is **showing off** is not always easy.

Here are a couple example dialogues using **show off**.

Justin: Have you ever played chess with Greg?

Kelly: No, but I've heard he is really good.

Justin: Yeah, it's true. But he always **shows off** and wins the game in 5 minutes.

Cindy: Where is Ron?

Brandon: He is out **showing off** his new car again!

To show off can also be changed into an adjectival noun. Just like the expression **down-to-earth**, we need to use dashes when making show off into an adjective – or in this case a noun that describes - **show-off**. For instance, Ron is a **show-off**.

On the other hand

The expression **on the other hand** is used when you want to talk about the other side of a story or issue. So **on the other hand** really has the meaning of **on the other side**. If you tell one point and then want to tell an opposite point, you can use this expression.



Jessie introduces the topic of her cousin by using the expression **on the other hand**. Jessie first says that her friend is truly **down-to-earth** and gives examples. But Jessie's cousin is different from her friend, and this is why she uses the expression **on the other hand**. By using the expression **on the other hand**, we know that Jessie is going to tell us about a person who is NOT like her friend.

Jessie's friend is very **down-to-earth**. **On the other hand**, Jessie's cousin says he is **down-to-earth** but actually is not.

Here is another example of **on the other hand**.

Jack: Are you coming out tonight?

Violet: I want to go out tonight, but **on the other hand** I need to stay home and study.

Barely

Barely is an adverb, which means we use it in a sentence to help describe the verb. If someone **barely** does something, it means that they almost didn't do it. **Barely** means almost nothing, or just enough. It is more useful to look at examples with **barely**.

When Jessie uses **barely**, she says that her cousin can **barely** pay his rent. This means that her cousin does pay his rent, but that he has just enough money to do it. Sometimes, maybe, he is not sure if he will be able to pay it, but in the end he finds a way.

Let's look at a couple more examples.

Doug: Do you have much homework to do this weekend?

Jackie: No I have **barely** any homework.

This means that Jackie does have homework but she doesn't have very much, almost nothing.

Mike: Do you know what you're doing at your new job yet?

Anne: Just **barely**.

This means that Anne knows what she is doing, but only a little bit.

Grounded

Here is another word we can use to describe someone who is realistic, sensible, and practical, just like **down-to-earth**. When someone is **grounded** they are a practical and logical person.

You can use it as a direct synonym for **down-to-earth**. We can also say **well-grounded** with the same meaning as **grounded**.

To have your feet planted solidly on the ground

Here is another synonym for **down-to-earth** and **grounded**. If someone **has their feet planted solidly on the ground**, the meaning is the same in that the person is sincere and realistic.

You can also say, **to have you feet planted firmly on the ground** and **to have you feet on the ground**.



Here is one example.

Greg: Do you know what she will do about her problem?

Rita: She **has her feet planted firmly on the ground**, so I am sure she will make a good decision.

Head in the clouds

The expression **to have your head in the clouds** is the opposite of all the **down-to-earth** expressions we looked at. If you **have your head in the clouds** you are not being realistic or sensible, you are dreaming about unrealistic things. Generally, expressions talking about someone in the clouds or the sky means they are a dreamer.

Jessie also says, "... his mind is **floating** off in the air somewhere." If you are **floating**, your feet are not on the ground, and so you are not being realistic. Using **floating** in this way is not an expression, but it expresses the same description of a person.

Here are a couple examples with **head in the clouds**.



Bruce: What is she going to do when she finishes high school?

Nancy: I have no idea. She always has her **head in the clouds**, so we never know what her real plans are.

Adam: Sue's **head is always in the clouds**.

Harriet: I know. Sometimes it is hard to have a serious conversation with her.

To say that someone **has their head in the clouds** is NOT a compliment.

Quiz (see the answers at the bottom of this Lipservice)

1. **Jessie is a really down-to-_____ person.**

Please fill in the blank.

- a) moon
- b) planet
- c) earth
- d) dirt

2. **If Sue can always call her friend Gary when she is in trouble, we can say that Sue _____ on Gary.**

Please fill in the blank.

- a) depends on
- b) depends in
- c) bends on
- d) depends off

3. **Which word is a synonym for *example*?**

- a) explain
- b) instance
- c) accident
- d) show off

4. **Which of the following is an example of showing off?**

- a) being very smart
- b) doing well on a test
- c) displaying your skills deliberately
- d) not being smart or doing well on a test

5. Jan: Do you have a lot of cleaning to do?
Bernadette: I have barely any cleaning to do.

Does Jan have a lot of cleaning to do?

- a) yes
 - b) no
 - c) she doesn't know
6. Which expression is the opposite of *down-to-earth*?
- a) to have your head in the clouds
 - b) to be grounded
 - c) to have your feet on the ground
 - d) to be on cloud nine
7. In this episode what kind of guy was Jessie's cousin?
- a) down-to-earth
 - b) grounded
 - c) has his feet firmly on the ground
 - d) has his head in the clouds

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