

Real Talk #025 – How to give a compliment

Episode description

“You look great!” “Thanks so much for your effort!” “It’s all thanks to you!” The art of giving a compliment is sometimes difficult in a second language. In this episode, Andrew and Suzanne explore the best ways to give and receive compliments.

Fun fact

Early in this episode, Andrew talks about his coffee plant. Coffee has a long and fascinating history. For example, one legend has it that an Ethiopian farmer noticed his goats getting really excited after eating from a coffee plant, and so coffee culture was born!

Expressions included in the study guide

- To cross [one’s] fingers
- Little guy
- Tricky
- Thanks to you
- Group effort
- Moment to shine



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: You're listening to the Culips English podcast. To download the study guide for this episode, which includes the transcript, detailed vocabulary explanations, real-world examples, and a quiz, visit our website, Culips.com, C-U-L-I-P-S.com.

Hey, everybody. My name is Andrew.

Suzanne: And I'm Suzanne.

Andrew: And you're listening to Culips.

Hey, Suzanne.

Suzanne: Hey, Andrew, how's it going?

Andrew: Suzanne, I have something that's making me a little bit sad over here.

Suzanne: Oh no.

Andrew: I bought a coffee tree recently. It's a houseplant, a coffee tree.

Suzanne: Oh, a plant? OK, OK.

Andrew: A houseplant that's an actual tree, that if it grows to be a big, successful houseplant, may actually produce coffee beans. It's a coffee tree.

Suzanne: Wow.

Andrew: And I was so excited to buy this tree and have it here in my house. But today I woke up and one of the leaves has started to turn yellow, and I'm worried that I'm doing something wrong. I don't know how to fix it, I'm a little bit nervous, a little bit sad.

Suzanne: Oh, this sounds like a job for Google. I think maybe if you Google or bring it in to the plant store and ask for help.

Andrew: That's a good idea, the plant store. I did Google it, and what Google told me is that sometimes the leaves will turn yellow and start to die if you don't give it enough water or if you give it too much water. So I think maybe I haven't found that sweet spot yet, about how much water to give the coffee tree.

Suzanne: OK, so that's the next thing, find out how much water and maybe measure it?

Andrew: Good point, measurements. But I'm **crossing my fingers** for this **little guy** because I really want him to produce some coffee beans for me. I think that would be so cool, growing my own coffee beans.

Suzanne: That's so cool. I'm **crossing my fingers** too, for your coffee plant.

Andrew: I appreciate that.

Well, Suzanne, today we are going to do a Real Talk episode. And all you listeners out there, if you don't know, Real Talk is the series where we teach you the English expressions that you need to know for real-world situations. And, Suzanne, what real-world situation will we take a look at today?

Suzanne: Today we're going to look at what not to say and what to say when giving and receiving compliments. And this is a really important one because, as you go through life, it can be hard to receive compliments so, yeah, this could be very beneficial.

Andrew: Absolutely. Actually, you would think that giving a compliment is an easy thing, but it can be **tricky** giving a compliment. You don't want your words to be misunderstood by the person you're trying to compliment, and you know these days you have to be careful. You have to make sure that you don't cross any boundaries when complimenting people. So this is what we'll take a look at today.

Suzanne: Yeah. And just to remind you guys, the best way to study with this episode is with our study guide. And you can download that on Culips.com, and you'll get the transcript from the episode, detailed vocabulary explanations, real-life examples, and a comprehension quiz. So you'll really want to check out that study guide and sometimes you get even more additional material, so check it out.

Andrew: OK, Suzanne, let's get into it. The plan for today is, I think we should start by listening to an example conversation between two coworkers where they talk about a project that they recently completed. And we'll hear one of the coworkers named David compliment his colleague Elizabeth on her contribution to this project.

Suzanne: And then after listening to the example, we'll take a close look at the expressions and vocabulary you can use next time you give or receive a compliment.

Andrew: Sounds great. So let's take a listen to that conversation right now.

David: Ah, feels so good to finally wrap up this project.

Elizabeth: I know, right? No more long nights at the office. I think I can actually go home at 5 P.M. today.

David: Well, it's all **thanks to you**. You really stepped up in a big way these last few weeks.

Elizabeth: No way, it was a **group effort**.

David: No, I'm serious. If it weren't for you, we'd still be working overtime for the next 2 weeks. You really worked hard, and it shows.

Elizabeth: Thanks, David, I appreciate it. You did great, too.

David: Thanks. Well, anyway, I'm gonna take off now. See you tomorrow.

Elizabeth: See you.

Suzanne: In this conversation, David compliments his colleague Elizabeth on the work she contributed to a project at the office. And in response, Elizabeth humbly downplays her part in the success of the project and also pays a compliment to David.

Andrew: Perfect. So now let's take a closer look at some of the language and the expressions that were used in this conversation to give and receive compliments.

And, actually, there's four key parts to this conversation that I think we should look at today, Suzanne. And the first key part is when David actually pays a compliment to Elizabeth. So let's listen to that part of the conversation one more time, when David pays the compliment to Elizabeth.

Well, it's all **thanks to you**. You really stepped up in a big way these last few weeks.
Well, it's all **thanks to you**. You really stepped up in a big way these last few weeks.

Andrew: OK, so he says to start, Elizabeth, it's all **thanks to you**. It's all **thanks to you**. OK, it's all **thanks to you** that we wrapped this project up. It's all **thanks to you** that we finished. Suzanne, what does this mean exactly? It's all **thanks to you**?

- Suzanne: Well, I think he also explains that a bit when he says, you know, she really stepped up in a big way. So it's all thanks to her effort. If it weren't for her effort or her creativity, her thought, taking on more hours, putting in more work; it's all thanks to all of that work that she put in. So all of this success and completion that they experienced is completely because of all of the effort and extra work that she put in.
- Andrew: Exactly, exactly. And in the next sentence, David says, you really stepped up in a big way, stepped up and here we have another phrasal verb, to step up. And, actually, this one is easy to visualize, right? If you imagine maybe a line of people standing in a row and somebody steps up, kind of steps forward, that means they take control, take the lead.
- Suzanne: Yeah.
- Andrew: Take on more responsibility.
- Suzanne: I kind of visualize it like when you put yourself in a higher gear, maybe you've been going in a certain gear and you realize that, wow, to get all of this work done, I really just need to put it in a higher gear and focus more. Do a little bit extra. So I think that, that's how I visualize stepping up.
- Andrew: Right, and this is a very common expression, right? To step up, we can use it when paying a compliment, I think it's actually a really nice compliment. I would like it if somebody told me, oh, Andrew, you really stepped up, you did a good job.
- Suzanne: Yeah.
- Andrew: But, yeah, we can hear it in many different contexts. So it's a good expression to add to your vocabulary: to step up.
- Suzanne: Do you think it comes from baseball? To step up to the plate?
- Andrew: Oh, that's an interesting thought.
- Suzanne: I'm curious. We might have to look it up.
- Andrew: You might be on to something there, I think you might be right. To step up to the plate like a batter when they're about to bat has to step up to the home plate, right? And so maybe if your team is losing and you need to hit a home run, to win the game for your team, you could step up to the plate and really it's your **moment to shine** in that situation. Interesting, I think you're on to something Suzanne.

Andrew: Let's move on to the second key part of the conversation. And this is where Elizabeth downplays the compliment. She receives it with humility, right? She doesn't say, oh, you know, David, you're right, you're right I did a great job, it's all thanks to me, yup. No, she humbly receives the compliment, and this is a very polite, nice way to do. So let's listen one more time to this part of the conversation.

No way, it was a **group effort**.
No way, it was a **group effort**.

Andrew: OK, so, Suzanne, she said it was a **group effort**, it was a **group effort**.

Suzanne: Yeah, so she's really giving the props or, you know, the accolades to everyone, that everybody put in extra work, and if it weren't for everyone, we wouldn't have accomplished our goal so fast.

Andrew: Suzanne, could you brainstorm some other ways that we could receive a compliment politely by downplaying our role in it? Like, for example, if I said to you, ah, Suzanne, you did a great job recording today, it was amazing. I couldn't have done it without you, which is 100% true by the way. But how could you respond to a compliment like this?

Suzanne: Well, I would probably say, wow, thank you so much. That's so kind of you. But I would say the same about you, we could not have done it without you as well, and I would accept the compliment because I think it's nice to accept a gift when someone is giving it, but I would also extend it to the other person. Thanks so much, but I couldn't have done it without you.

Andrew: Ah, that's so interesting, because I think my style is more to always take the focus away from my effort. So usually when someone compliments me, my initial reaction is always to say, oh no, it was nothing. It wasn't a big deal, it was easy, you know, to sort of downplay my effort. But I think your approach is also very valuable.

Suzanne: Yeah, I think I learned over the years, being in acting and being in a performance sort of circle, it's actually being kind to accept and say thank you for their kind words. Just because it's a gift they're giving and you know, say I give you a present for a holiday or your birthday and you're like, oh no, you shouldn't have done this, you shouldn't have done this, it's kind of not always so nice because I did do it, and I wanted to do and I wanted to give you that gift.

Suzanne: So it's nice to receive it and then also extend it out sometimes to other people. I think there's a difference between saying, oh, I know, I did so great, I was so good, thanks so much and by just saying thank you so much, it's very kind of you to say, you know? Thank you, that's very sweet, and I also think that you really put in so much work and effort and appreciate your work as well. So I don't know, I think that they're both great ways.

Andrew: I agree. I like that expression that you just said, and this is a common one that I hear all the time. Actually, I don't say it very often and I'm thinking maybe men don't say it as often as women, but to say, that's so sweet, right? That's so sweet of you to say that. It's a very, very common way to respond to a compliment, that's so sweet. But I don't think I've ever said that in my whole life, personally.

Suzanne: Except now.

Andrew: Except now. Now I'm on the record.

Suzanne: All right, should we listen to the third key expression?

Andrew: Yeah, let's listen to the third key part right now.

No, I'm serious. If it weren't for you, we'd still be working overtime for the next 2 weeks. You really worked hard, and it shows.
No, I'm serious. If it weren't for you, we'd still be working overtime for the next 2 weeks. You really worked hard, and it shows.

Andrew: OK, so what happens in this part is that David pushes back almost, right? He pays a compliment at the start of the conversation to Elizabeth and Elizabeth is very humble and says, oh no, you know, it wasn't really anything special that I did, I was just doing my job. But then David pushes back and says, no, really, really, you did a really great job. If it weren't for you, we would still be working overtime for the next 2 weeks. You worked really hard and it shows. It's noticeable, everybody could tell that you put in a lot of extra effort to make sure that the project finished on time.

Suzanne: Yes, he's really making sure that she understands that her efforts were appreciated.

Andrew: Exactly. And sometimes you have to do this. If you do run into a person who is like, oh no, it was nothing, it's kind of like me, right, where I tend to downplay my role in a project or I tend to deflect compliments away from me. You know, eventually, I don't think I'm as bad as Elizabeth here, but some people are really, really bad about never wanting to take credit, right? And so sometimes in these situations you have to push back a little bit. You have to be like, no, really, come on, you did great, you did amazing.

Suzanne: By being specific, he really drives the point home, you know, you worked really hard, if it weren't for you, we would still be here for 2 weeks longer, so.

Andrew: Sounds like Elizabeth really did a great job, because if she saved her team from working overtime for 2 weeks. That's huge.

Suzanne: Yes, that's a lot.

Andrew: He should be buying her dinner, not giving her a compliment.

Suzanne: At least a gift card, you know? Starbucks gift card.

Andrew: A gift card, I like it.

All right, so we have one final key part of this conversation, and we'll take a listen to it right now.

Thanks, David, I appreciate it. You did great, too.
Thanks, David, I appreciate it. You did great, too.

Andrew: OK, so what happens here, Suzanne?

Suzanne: Elizabeth finally accepts a compliment and says I appreciate it, and does extend that compliment to David as well, right? She accepts it, thank you. Thanks, David, I appreciate it. And she extends it to David as well, you did great, too. Acknowledging his effort on the team as well.

Andrew: Yup, and I just wanted to focus on that part, thanks, I appreciate it. Just a very good chunk to add to your vocabulary to use when you receive a compliment. It's always gonna come across as polite, oh, thanks, I appreciate it. Oh, thank you, I appreciate it. It's a very, just, good set expression that you can use in many different contexts when receiving a compliment.

Suzanne: Yes. You can even use it if someone does you a favour at a store, extends a little bit extra help at the coffee shop, or something like that. Thanks, I appreciate it, is always a really good chunk of dialogue.

Andrew: Now, Suzanne, just before we wrap it up here, I think we should quickly touch on the topic of appropriate things to compliment people on and inappropriate things to compliment people on, especially in a work setting, like we just listened to an example of two coworkers complimenting each other. So, Suzanne, in the context of an office, a work environment, what are appropriate things to compliment people on?

Suzanne: Well, at work, complimenting people on their effort is really positive. Their success, maybe any little accomplishments like reaching a goal or winning an award at work. Stepping up, as well, like Elizabeth did in our example, she really put in the extra effort so she really stepped up for the team. She took a leading role, that's another way you can compliment someone, really taking charge. And organizing the team and going that extra mile or doing that extra effort or maybe doing the things that other people don't want to do, like making all the phone calls or doing the kind of dirty work, right? That is something you could really compliment someone on.

Andrew: Now on the other hand, what things are inappropriate to compliment somebody on in a work situation?

Suzanne: Complimenting someone on more personal things like their appearance or their looks, right? Things they can't really control, things that are more personal, those are things to avoid, like their appearance, their looks, their clothes, their race, right? Things that are more personal. Or ordinary work, things that they are suppose to do anyway, things that should be done in order to keep the business running, those are things you don't usually compliment on. So reserving compliments for extra work or success is probably the best way to go.

Andrew: I agree with you completely.

OK, Suzanne, well I think that brings us to the end of today's episode. But just before we let everyone go, I wanna remind you guys that our website is Culips.com. It's a great website, recently redesigned, better than ever, and it's the place where you can listen to all of our back episodes. And we also have our study guides available for download on the website, so take a second, visit Culips.com, and enjoy.

Suzanne: Yeah, and also check us out on Facebook at Facebook.com/CulipsPodcast and feel free to get in touch with us by emailing contact@Culips.com and commenting on the posts.

Andrew: Yeah, that sounds good.

Hey, guys, we'll be back with another brand-new episode soon, talk to you then. Goodbye.

Suzanne: Bye.

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Detailed Explanations

To cross [one's] fingers

Idiom

To cross [one's] fingers is to hope for the best for either yourself or someone else. It comes from an old superstition in which hoping or praying for something with your fingers crossed will help it come true.

Here are a couple more examples with **to cross [one's] fingers**:

Erin:	I'm driving from Winnipeg to Edmonton tomorrow.
Rick:	Really? In your old car?
Erin:	Yes.
Rick:	How long is that, about 12 or 13 hours?
Erin:	About that.
Rick:	I'm going to cross my fingers for you tomorrow. Good luck! Call me if anything major happens.

Brin:	I'm so nervous. They're announcing the winners in 10 minutes. I don't know what to do.
Wendy:	Just stay calm. Breathe deeply.
Brin:	I don't want to breathe. I want to win!
Wendy:	OK, then, cross your fingers and pray, pray, pray!

Little guy

Idiom, informal

In this episode, Andrew speaks of his coffee plants as his **little guy**. It's a term of endearment, something you would say in a kind and friendly manner about a male who is younger than you or some other living thing you really like, such as a plant or an animal. If it's a person, you wouldn't say this to a female. But if it's a plant or an animal whose gender you do not know, saying **little guy** is quite friendly, even if the plant or animal doesn't understand!

Here are a couple more examples with **little guy**:

Heather:	Look out the window!
David:	What's that? Is that a racoon?
Heather:	Yes! Oh, it's so cute.
David:	It looks hungry and maybe a little sick.
Heather:	I know. We should give the little guy some food. What do racoons eat?

Coach:	Hey, little guy , what's the matter?
Billy:	The other kids are making fun of my baseball pants.
Coach:	Your pants? Those are nice pants. Don't worry about that. Act like it doesn't affect you. They actually admire your skill.
Billy:	Really? OK, thanks, Coach.

Tricky

Adjective

If something is **tricky**, it is complicated or difficult to achieve. In this episode, Andrew mentions how giving compliments can be **tricky**. He means that giving compliments is not simple and requires some know-how to do it well.

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

Laura:	Hello, Jane. Why are you sitting there just looking at your phone?
Jane:	I'm thinking. I went on a date with this guy and I'm wondering if I should text him.
Laura:	That's tricky . How many days ago was the date?
Jane:	Earlier today.
Laura:	Oh, then you definitely should wait until tomorrow, at least!
Jane:	But I really liked him. We got along really well.

Greg:	OK, but how do I get to your house again?
Fred:	Take a left on Jefferson Street. Continue for about a kilometre.
Greg:	Yeah, I remember that. But after that, it gets a little tricky , right?
Fred:	That's right. The street splits into four different streets.
Greg:	Oh boy.
Fred:	Remember to take the second one on the left.
Greg:	Um, I'll try!

Thanks to you

Idiom

Saying **thanks to you** to someone is a great way to thank another person for their effort.

Here are a couple more examples with **thanks to you**:

Aida: Finally!

Dean: What's going on?

Aida: Finally this house is clean.

Dean: It's all **thanks to you**.

Aida: Oh no, you helped a little.

Dean: Well, just a little. You did all the dirty work. Thanks, dear. I'll cook supper.

Victoria: I think this new design is really going to woo the bosses.

Harry: You think so?

Victoria: Of course. It's our best product yet.

Harry: **Thanks to you**.

Victoria: Thanks to me? No way! You came up with the blue and purple theme.

Harry: But it was your suggestion to go darker.

Victoria: OK, OK. It was a team effort. Agreed?

Harry: Agreed.

Group effort

Noun

A **group effort** is an example of team work. It is when an entire team of people contribute to the final product.

Here are a couple more examples with **group effort**:

Interviewer: So, Mario, what do you think about tonight's win?

Player: Obviously, it was great to get the win. The team played well.

Interviewer: Yes. And after not scoring a goal for two games, you scored four tonight.

Player: It was a **group effort**. My teammates passed the puck really well. Everyone skated hard.

Gavin: Congratulations everyone! We did it. We finished our project ahead of schedule. And, if you don't mind, I would like to thank one special person. Karen, come up here!

Karen: Oh, no—not me!

Gavin: As you all know, Karen, our fearless leader, has been working overtime and coordinating with our overseas partners night and day. Everyone, let's give her a big hand.

Karen: Thank you, but really it was a **group effort**. We all put in the work, and now we see the results. Congratulations to everyone!

Moment to shine

Idiom

A **moment to shine** is a time when you have the opportunity to prove your talent. Think of being on a stage in a theatre and suddenly the spotlight flashes on you. That's your **moment to shine**! That's when you should show everyone your skills.

Another common variation is the expression time to shine.

Here are a couple more examples with **moment to shine**:

Gia:	I'm nervous about my show tomorrow.
Frederica:	Why do you say that? You're a great singer.
Gia:	Thank you. But I'm used to singing in front of three or four people, not a full room.
Frederica:	Don't worry. This is your moment to shine . Concentrate on the music. And if you're nervous, look towards me and just sing to me.

Connie:	Are you ready for the presentation?
Wilson:	Yes, I am. I didn't sleep much last night, though. How about you?
Connie:	Just a little.
Wilson:	Well ... Moment to shine . Let's go!

Quiz

1. If you're crossing your fingers, that's because:

- a) you're hoping for a good outcome
- b) you want to send a message
- c) your skin is itchy
- d) you want to cross a boundary

2. My friend likes to deflect compliments. What does that mean?

- a) he is a narcissist
- b) he tries to downplay his contributions
- c) he wears protective equipment
- d) he wears sunglasses

3. True or false: the expression moment to shine has to do with lighting.

- a) true
- b) false

4. Who should you not say little guy to?

- a) your plant
- b) your puppy
- c) your nephew
- d) your younger sister

5. If a task is tricky, it is:

- a) fairly difficult
- b) trying to trick you
- c) kind of sticky
- d) way too easy

Writing or Discussions Questions

1. How do you react when people offer you compliments?
2. How would you react if your boss complimented you in front of the whole staff for something you did not deserve?
3. Do you work well in groups? What is your ideal group size for getting a task done?
4. Are you a natural leader? If we put you in a room with four other people, would you emerge in a leadership role?
5. Early in this episode, Andrew talked about his coffee plant. In English, we say people who are good at raising plants have green thumbs. Do you have a green thumb?

Quiz Answers

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

Episode credits

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