

Real Talk #058 – How to compliment someone's appearance

Episode description

It feels great to give compliments, but do you know how to do it in English? When done correctly, it can help you create warm connections with others. In this Real Talk episode, Andrew and Kassy guide you through effective and easy-to-understand ways to compliment someone's appearance.

By learning these expressions, you'll be able to make your friends feel good and appreciated while also improving your own English fluency and cultural understanding. Don't miss out on this exciting opportunity to improve your conversational English in a fun and meaningful way!

Fun fact

A fun and simple expression to remember is “You look like a million bucks!” This is a great way to compliment someone on their makeup, clothes, or hairstyle.

Expressions included in the study guide

- To be pretty [adjective] oneself
- To make something pop
- Don't make me blush
- To make waves
- All dolled up
- To pull something off





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. The transcript has been edited for clarity.

Andrew: Real Talk number 58, *How to complement someone's appearance*. Featuring Andrew and Kassy.

Kassy, could you tell us what we are going to be learning today?

Kassy: Yeah, sure. Today we are going to be learning about useful phrases and vocabulary words you can use when complimenting someone's outfit or appearance.

Andrew: Very nice. This is kind of a touchy subject, would you say, Kassy? Like, you have to be careful when you're doing this.

Kassy: Yeah, I agree. You could easily insult someone by mentioning their appearance, even if they look good, just by being like, "Well, don't I usually look good? Are you saying that I look bad all of the other days?" Something like that.

Andrew: And I know every culture has different rules about this, what you can compliment somebody on, or what you can't compliment somebody on. And so, I think this lesson will be really helpful for all of our listeners out there. So, let's break down exactly what we are going to do in this lesson. We're going to learn some practical expressions that you can use when you want to compliment somebody's outfit or appearance. And we'll start by listening to an example conversation. In that conversation, two friends are meeting at a fancy black-tie event. A fancy black-tie event, maybe Kassy, we should break this down for our listeners as well. What is a black-tie event exactly?



Kassy: A black-tie event is an event that requires some sort of formal attire. For example, men wear suits, and women wear dresses, predominantly. An example of these events could be like dinner parties, award ceremonies, weddings, or, you know, the celebrity red carpet events you see on TV.

Andrew: And if you're someone like me, Kassy, who doesn't attend one of these events very often, it can be really surprising when you go and you see your friends wearing formal clothing, right? If you're like really used to seeing your friends just wear T-shirts and jeans all the time and then you go to a wedding and everybody's wearing a nice suit or a fancy dress, then you're like, "Oh my God, you look totally different, like a new person." So, in this kind of situation, we actually compliment people's appearances often.

Kassy: Yeah, that's right. This example conversation we're gonna listen to in a few minutes is exactly like that. It's two friends, seeing everybody they know all dressed up and they're so surprised by it.

Andrew: And the expressions that we will learn here in this lesson are good to use in this kind of situation where you see regular people dressed up in their best clothes. But it doesn't only have to be used in that situation. We can use these expressions to compliment people in many other areas of life as well. Like, for example, if your friend got a new haircut, or a new outfit, or a new pair of shoes, some kind of situation like that. Well, why don't we get started by listening to the example conversation?

Kassy: Let's do it.

Claire: Charlie, over here! I've been looking all over for you in this crowd.

Charlie: Claire! Wow, this place is massive. You look great!



Claire: Thanks. **You look pretty spiffy yourself.** I don't think I've ever seen you wear a tie.

Charlie: I know, right? I usually don't like to wear them, but I thought I'd go all out for the occasion.

Claire: Well, that colour looks so good on you. It really **makes your eyes pop.**

Charlie: Aw, come on, **don't make me blush.** But seriously, that dress is stunning. You're glowing!

Claire: Thanks. I saw it when I was window shopping the other day and I just had to buy it. OMG! Is that Owen over there?

Charlie: Woah, is that Owen? It totally is. He really cleans up nice, huh? I barely recognized him.

Claire: Yeah, that haircut looks great on him, and he's trimmed his beard.

Charlie: Oh, and there's Tracy over there. She's sure **making waves** with her outfit as well.

Claire: Yeah, she looks amazing. I could never **pull off** a dress like that.

Charlie: I was a little afraid that this event would be so boring, but it's not so bad.

Claire: Yeah, I agree. It's pretty fun seeing everyone **all dolled up** for the party.

Andrew: All right. So, in that example conversation, we hear two friends talking about a black-tie event that they are attending. And as we mentioned in the introduction to this episode, a black-tie event is a kind of party where you wear your best clothes, a suit and tie, or a fancy dress, something like that. And the two friends are a little bit surprised when they run into each other because they look very different than they usually do. One of the friends, his name is Charlie, he's wearing a suit and a tie, and that's something that he

doesn't usually wear. And the other friend, whose name is Claire, is wearing a really amazing, beautiful dress, so they both compliment each other on their appearance. And then they kind of chat about some of their other acquaintances that they see walking around in the party room, and they compliment their friends on how amazing they look as well. So, Kassy, why don't we go through this conversation again, and break down some of the interesting expressions that we heard, because there were so many useful and helpful expressions that we can use in our everyday lives when we compliment people on their appearances in that conversation. What are some of the ones that popped out to you?

Kassy: There are two that I use probably every day or every other day, not just for fancy events, but just you know, complimenting someone's everyday outfit that looks nice. And the first one was right at the beginning of the conversation, it's really simple. The phrase is, "You look great."

Andrew: You look great. Yeah, I use a similar expression. Usually when I compliment people, and this is maybe a little bit cultural as well. I'd be interested to hear from our listeners about whether they can do this in their countries or not. But I feel like in Canada, and maybe this is the same in the USA as well, Kassy, it's better to focus on the parts of somebody's appearance that they can control. So, you know, sometimes we can't really control what our face looks like, or what our hair is like, or our body size, but we can control our outfit and what we choose to wear. So usually, I compliment people on their outfits. So, I'll say, "Wow, your jacket looks great on you!" Or, "Your shoes look great." Something like that. So, I use a very similar expression, but usually I focus on some clothing or an accessory instead of somebody's physical appearance.

Kassy: Yeah, exactly. A little bit later in the conversation, there was a similar phrase to "You look great," which is, something looks good on you, which is what you mentioned and this phrase, "to look good on you" can be used for any article of clothing or accessory that you own. So, "That bracelet looks great on you." "That new haircut looks so good on you." You can use it in any situation.

Andrew: Yeah, that's a great one to know as well. Another cool expression that we heard that stood out to me was "spiffy." You look pretty spiffy. We heard the character Claire say, "Well, you look pretty spiffy yourself." And that's probably a word that is new to some of our listeners. The spelling is S-P-I-F-F-Y, spiffy, and I feel like this is kind of an old-fashioned word. Like maybe it's slang from the 1940s or 1950s. That's just my feeling. I don't know if that's true or not. But we still use it these days from time to time, and it's totally fine to use, every English speaker will understand the meaning. What does it mean if you look pretty spiffy?

Kassy: It just means like you looked all dressed up and clean-cut and fancy and not your normal self. You're right, it is an older, old-fashioned kind of word but it's a cute word that people still love to use as kind of ironic or yeah, cutesy talk.

Andrew: Mhmm. Yeah, absolutely. You just said another great expression there Kassy that we should break down and I think this especially applies to guys, could apply to everyone but especially to guys I think, and that is the expression, "clean-cut", "clean-cut". So, if you're clean-cut, it means you don't look like me because I'm not very clean-cut. I know listeners can't see me right now, but I usually have a beard and I haven't really shaved my beard or cleaned it up for a few days. So, I have a little bit of stubble and some facial hair that is not clean-cut. Clean-cut is the opposite. So, usually a clean-cut appearance is when you have a shaved face if you're a guy or if you do have facial hair, it's very neat and tidy and trim and clean looking. That is what clean-cut means.

Kassy: Exactly. I feel like especially in the past it was super important to be clean-cut but in modern times, you know if you have a little bit of scruff, it actually adds to the appeal sometimes like people want to look like that.

Andrew: Yeah, I mean, if you were to look, like you mentioned earlier Kassy, at a Hollywood red-carpet event, a lot of the actors that would be on that red carpet, I think wouldn't necessarily be clean-cut. Of course, there would be many who are but there



would also be many guys who are not clean-cut. So, both options are fine. But that's just what the word means.

All right, some other cool expressions in this conversation that I noticed were, "To go all out", "To go all out." We heard one of the guys, Charlie, say you know, he doesn't usually like to wear ties, but he thought he'd, "go all out for the occasion." So, to go all out means to put your best foot forward, to put a lot of effort into making sure that your appearance looks fantastic.

Kassy: Yeah, we use this expression a lot for costume parties as well, like Halloween time. If you wear this really intricate, amazing costume people say, "Wow, you went all out this year."

Andrew: And in fact, we can use it to talk about other things as well, whenever you put a lot of effort really into doing anything, right? Like if you were trying to break your personal record at a marathon. I know I always use marathon examples but it's a good one, right? In order to break your personal record, you would have to go all out, you would have to put all of your effort into breaking your record. And you can also use it to talk about your appearance. If you really try to look the best you can look, well, then you have gone all out into making yourself look the best possible.

Kassy: The next phrase I want to talk about is something that you hear a lot of girls say, especially when talking about makeup, but it's kind of a weird phrase in English, if you don't know what it means. And that is, "to make your eyes pop."

Andrew: To make your eyes pop. Yeah, it sounds almost disgusting. Like your eyes are blowing up, and nobody wants that. But that's not what it means, right? Could you break it down for us, Kassy? What does it mean if your eyes pop?

Kassy: Yeah, sure. So, usually, we use the phrase like a pop of colour, which means you add just a little bit of colour to something, and it makes something else's colour, even more, vibrant, like a background colour that just brings your facial features forward. So, in

this case, Claire says that, "Charlie's tie colour looks so good on him, and it makes his eyes pop." Maybe he has really beautiful blue eyes, and his tie emphasizes his blue eyes and makes them even more vibrant.

Andrew: Another expression that we use when talking about appearance, clothing, and eyes is it "brings out the colour in your eyes", "brings out the colour in your eyes." Which just means that the clothing matches your eye colour well, so it's a good fit. And yeah, this is another way that we compliment people on their appearance is saying that their clothes match their eyes or that the clothing that they wear really makes their eye colour more noticeable. And it just means like you look good with those clothes on, makes your face look more appealing.

Kassy: I like how you mentioned earlier that it might be a little scary or risky to make compliments about someone's appearance, for example, if they don't have traditional beauty standards or something. But one thing I love about dressing up fancy is that you can give true, and genuine, and wonderful compliments to someone and even if they feel insecure, they could feel confident about their look if they dress fancier than usual. So, there are so many expressions that we can use to make someone feel extra handsome and extra beautiful by focusing on the clothing that they wear and accentuating how great they dressed for that evening. Two words that were used in this episode were "stunning" and "you are glowing" to talk about Claire's dress, but there are so many other expressions you could use to talk about someone's over-the-top beautiful outfit, like "gorgeous", "glamorous", "beautiful." Can you think of some others, Andrew?

Andrew: Yeah, any adjective like that, Kassy. "Magnificent", "amazing", "fantastic", right? We can use all of these really strong adjectives that essentially mean very, very good or very, very beautiful to compliment somebody's outfit, absolutely. And I really like the expression that we have heard in the conversation, "you're glowing", "you're glowing" because you know when, I think especially we use this to describe women more than guys, but you could, I mean, these days we can describe anybody, it's OK, they're not really super gendered, but I think usually we use it to describe women. That being said,



"you're glowing" just means you have this great atmosphere, this great vibe around you, you look so happy in these fancy clothes at this special event for this special occasion. You're giving off this really good, radiant energy. So, I really think that is a lovely expression. And I think if somebody said to me, "Oh, Andrew, you're glowing." I'd feel very nice. Like, that would be a nice thing to hear.

Kassy: Yeah, it makes you glow more inside, your heart warms up.

Andrew: Yeah, I think so. I think so it's like, it feeds into that energy, right? You'd start even glowing more and more.

Kassy: Yeah. Especially when you put a lot of effort into your outfit. Even if you're not vain and digging for compliments. It makes you feel good and validated. Like, yeah, I put in an extra hour into this outfit. I'm happy I'm getting some feedback on it.

Andrew: I think especially we would use an expression like this to compliment somebody on their special occasion. So, if you go to a wedding, you would compliment the bride and say, "You're glowing." It would be a little bit awkward, like at a wedding to compliment one of the other attendees of the wedding, right? You want to focus on the bride, that's her special day. Or, you know, if it's like somebody's birthday party, and they're having a really special birthday party, you say, "You're glowing." But it's like a compliment that you would perhaps want to reserve for the VIP of the day.

Kassy: That's a good point, Andrew.

Andrew: Some other interesting expressions that we heard in this conversation were, "making waves." Charlie, the guy in the conversation, he said, wow, there is Tracy over there and "she's really making waves." Which means she's really making a big impact with her outfit, right? People are maybe turning their heads and being like, "Wow, who's that beautiful woman over there? Wow, amazing. That outfit is noticeable." I mean, it could be good or bad, right? We don't really know you could be making waves because your outfit

is so horrible or so unique or so beautiful, all of these situations, but it just means that it is having a huge impact among the other party guests.

Kassy: Exactly. Speaking of not being sure if it's a compliment or not, I remember a few years ago, when Lady Gaga started to become famous, and she wore the most unique insane outfits, and she definitely was making waves on social media platforms with her dresses.

Andrew: Mhmm. You could think of like an ocean going from a very calm state to a very stormy, wavy state. So, it goes from just being like calm to super, super agitated, right? Maybe that's the same atmosphere in the party. The party might be just kind of calm and people are just mingling with each other. And then Tracy arrives and everybody's like, "Oh, my God." And that could be either good or bad, we don't know but she's making waves. She's created some excitement in the party.

Kassy: Yes, right after "making waves" was brought up in the example conversation, the next sentence also had a cool phrasal verb which is, to "pull off something." In this case, Claire said, "She could never pull off a dress like Tracy's." This phrase is used to talk about, you know, successfully being able to do something. In this case, Claire thinks that Tracy's dress is so cool, but she doesn't have the confidence or maybe the knowledge of how to wear that kind of dress successfully, so she can't pull off the dress.

Andrew: Yeah, there's just some clothing that some people feel uncomfortable wearing or that they couldn't wear. They don't have enough confidence to wear that style of clothing. For example, I don't think that I could pull off wearing a speedo to the beach.

Kassy: You could totally do it, Andrew.

Andrew: I mean, I could do it. And maybe as I get older, I'd feel more confident because it seems like the people who usually wear speedos to the beach are middle-aged men. But yeah, right now I don't think I could do it. I couldn't pull it off. I'd feel too embarrassed. Kassy, are there any pieces of clothing that you wouldn't feel comfortable pulling off?

Kassy: Ugh so many, I'm pretty boring when it comes to clothes, but I love telling others who are wearing edgy or unique clothes, how well they pull it off. If a friend got a really cool flaming hot-pink hairstyle, I'd be like, "Wow, you pull that off so well."

Andrew: Yeah, it's really interesting now that I'm thinking of this expression because it could be very confusing for learners, right? You think of pull off as meaning remove. But in this instance, it actually means to put on, to put on and wear something really well. So, it almost has the opposite meaning of what it looks like on the surface, but just to make it clear listeners to pull off an outfit or to pull off wearing a piece of clothing means to wear it really, really well and really, really confidently.

OK, Kassy, there is one more expression that I wanted to focus on here before we wrap up and sign off. And that expression is "To be dolled up" or "To get all dolled up." And dolled just to spell it here for everyone is D-O- L- L- E-D, and up the preposition, U-P. So, when we put them together, dolled up. What does it mean to get dolled up or to get all dolled up?

Kassy: It's kind of similar in terms of appearance to go all out, to get all dolled up is to dress in your very best clothing. And I'm guessing this expression comes from you know, like actual dolls, you know, they dress in super cute outfits with their makeup. So, to get all dolled up is to make yourself look cute and appealing like a doll.

Andrew: Mhmm. And correct me if I'm wrong, Kassy, but my understanding of this expression is that we also use it to talk about putting on a lot of makeup, or to do your makeup in a way that's different from your regular style.

Kassy: Yeah, could be too or like a fancy updo when you put your hair up in these cool curls and fancy configurations.

Andrew: Yeah, you get your hair styled in a really special and unique way that's different than your regular hairstyle. And again, you know, these days, we can use expressions to talk about anyone. But traditionally, this expression is usually used mostly to describe

women. I've never in my life heard anybody tell me, "Oh, Andrew, you got all dolled up." That's something I've never heard in my life.

Kassy: The only time I might think about it is if like a grandma said it to her grandson, who was wearing a cute little tie and suit like, "Oh, Johnny, look at you all dolled up."

Andrew: Yeah, I guess. Yeah, now that I hear it in that context, it could happen. But it's not the default expression that we would use. We'd probably say something like, you know, you look spiffy, or you look great. Or one of the other expressions that we heard today instead.

Kassy: You look so dapper this evening.

Andrew: Yeah, you look so dapper, which again, just means really formal and clean-cut and fancy. Something like that would be more natural to use.

We're almost at the end of today's episode, but before we go, let's summarize what we covered.

Kassy: OK, so today we learned all about how to compliment someone on their outfit or appearance.

Andrew: Yeah, and we learned some useful phrases that you can use when giving compliments such as, "That looks great on you", "You look stunning", and "Spiffy."

Kassy: We also learned phrases like, "To go all out", "To make waves", and "It makes your eyes pop."

Andrew: And finally, we learned the expression "To get all dolled up", which is a phrase that we use to talk about putting on fancy and stylish clothes for a special occasion.

That brings us to the end of this lesson. Talk to you next time, bye!

Detailed Explanations

To be pretty [adjective] oneself / To not be so [adjective] oneself

Expression

In the very beginning of the example conversation, Claire and Charlie meet up at a black-tie event. They greet each other and Charlie tells Claire that she looks great. She responds by saying, “Thanks. You **look pretty** spiffy **yourself!**”

A basic way to reply to a compliment like this would be, “Thanks. You look great, too!” However, you can level up your reply by saying “You **look pretty great yourself!**” Here, “pretty” doesn’t mean “beautiful,” but is actually an adverb similar to “really” or “very.” This way of replying is a fun and friendly way to return a compliment. It takes a little bit of the attention away from the person receiving the compliment and returns it to the person giving the compliment.

Take a look at this example:

A: Wow, you’re really talented at playing the guitar.

B: Thanks. You’re **pretty talented yourself!**

Sometimes we say things like “not bad” instead of “good” so that our sentences are more varied. You can do the same thing with this structure – try saying “**You aren’t so bad yourself!**”

Take a look at this example:

A: This soup is delicious. You’re a wonderful cook.

B: Thanks. You **aren’t so bad yourself!** I loved the cookies you made me last week.

Here’s a few more examples with **to be pretty [adjective] oneself**:

Nick: I’m always impressed with your sense of style, Brittany.

Brittany: Wow, thank you! That means a lot coming from you. **You’re pretty stylish yourself,** you know.

Nick: Do you really think so?

Lois: Nice dance moves, George. I love seeing you show off on the dance floor!

George: Thanks! **You’re not so bad yourself.** Want to dance to the next song with me?



To make something pop

Idiom

In the example conversation, Claire compliments Charlie by saying that the colour of his tie **makes his eyes pop**.

To make something pop means to make something stand out or become more noticeable. We usually use this expression to talk about colour, just like Claire did when talking about Charlie's eyes.

For example, a colour contrast between a grey sofa and bright yellow pillows would **made them pop**. Another example is make up. Some women wear purple eyeshadow **to make their eyes pop**.

Although we usually use **to make something pop** to describe visuals, it can also be used to describe other sensory things like flavor or sound. For instance, you can add a little cinnamon to your latte **to make the flavor pop**. Similarly, the background vocals really **made the chorus of that song pop**.

The next time someone's outfit or makeup emphasizes their best features, try using this phrase. You can say something like "Wow, the colour of your lipstick really **makes your smile pop**!"

Here are a few more examples with **to make something pop**:

Ryan: Josie, congratulations! Your wedding ceremony was beautiful. By the way, who did your floral arrangements? They're stunning.

Josie: Thank you! Actually, I did them myself! I thought it'd be a good way to save money since weddings are so expensive.

Ryan: Wow, they look incredible. You're so talented! I love the way **you've made the red roses pop** by surrounding them with white flowers.

Josie: I'm glad they turned out well!

Teresa: Babe, what do you think about this new eyeshadow? Does it look good on me?

Andy: Yes, I like it a lot. I think that shade really **makes the green of your eyes pop**. You look beautiful!

Teresa: Thank you!



Don't make me blush

Expression

After Claire tells Charlie his tie **makes his eyes pop**, he responds to her compliment by saying, "**Don't make me blush.**"

When your cheeks become red because you're embarrassed or flattered, that's called blushing. The simplest way to respond to a compliment is to just say thank you. However, a playful way of responding is to say **don't make me blush** or **you're making me blush**. This is a good way to show modesty and appreciation for the compliment.

For instance, if someone compliments your impressive piano playing, you could say, "Aw, **don't make me blush.**" If a friend says your outfit is gorgeous, you can say, "**Oh, you're making me blush.**"

This expression is informal and playful. It can be used among friends and acquaintances, and you can also use it to flirt with a romantic interest. However, if you receive a compliment from someone like your boss or your professor, you should use a different expression, like "Thank you so much," "I really appreciate that," or "That means a lot to me."

Here are a few more examples with **don't make me blush**:

Emily: Did you get a haircut?

Jason: Yeah, I thought I'd try something new. What do you think?

Emily: It looks so good on you!

Jason: Aw, **don't make me blush.**

Emily: I'm serious, it looks great!

Daniel: Linda, did you bake these cookies yourself?

Linda: Yup, they're homemade. It's my grandma's recipe. Do you like them?

Daniel: These might be the best cookies I've ever had. They're so soft and flavorful!

Linda: **Don't make me blush!**

Daniel: You've got to send me the recipe.

To make waves

Idiom

In the example conversation, Claire points out her friend Tracy to Charlie and says that Tracy is really **making waves** with her dress.

Andrew and Kassy explain that to make waves means to cause a big impact or to make a strong impression on other people. This can be a good or a bad thing. A positive example might be, "That new band made waves at the music festival and gained a lot of new fans." A negative example might be, "The celebrity's comments made waves on social media and a lot of people criticized him."

As you saw in the example conversation, someone's outfit or appearance can also make waves. Since this expression can be positive or negative depending on the context, be careful when using it to compliment someone. Try to specify by saying, "Your outfit made waves at the event last night. You looked incredible!" If you just say, "Your outfit made waves at the event last night," it might be unclear whether people liked or disliked the outfit.

Another common way to use this idiom is to say, "I don't want to make waves." This means, "I don't want to cause any trouble or draw a lot of attention to myself." Sometimes people will say this before they share their opinion or bring up a criticism. For example, a friend might ask you for advice and say, "It's only my first week at my new job, so I don't want to make waves, but I already have some concerns about my workload. What should I do?"

Here are a couple more examples with **to make waves**:

Zoey: Did you hear about the new work-from-home policy?

Steve: Of course I did! The news has been **making waves** in the sales department. Everyone thinks it's incredibly unfair, including me.

Zoey: It's super unfair. We should be able to continue our hybrid work-from-home policy.

Steve: Absolutely. We should confront management about this.

Denise: Did you hear about what happened at Lucy's wedding?

Aaron: No, what happened?

Denise: Her mother-in-law showed up wearing a white dress that looked just like Lucy's wedding gown. It really **made waves** among the wedding party. Lucy was furious!

All dolled up

Idiom

In the example conversation, Charlie tells Claire that it's fun to see everyone **all dolled up** at the party. Kassy explains that being all dolled up means dressing up in your best clothes or wearing your best makeup. However, being all dolled up doesn't just mean you look good – it also means you've put effort into looking much fancier than usual.

Kassy also mentions that you can use the verb “get” with this idiom, as in “It's time to get all dolled up for the dinner party!” Then, Andrew brings up an important tip about this expression – he says you almost always use 'all dolled up' to describe a woman or someone with a feminine appearance. A similar expression for a masculine appearance would be “looking dapper” or “looking sharp.” For instance, you might say, “Did you see Beth? She curled her hair and she's all dolled up.” On the other hand, you might say, “Tom is looking dapper in his new suit.”

Here are a few more examples with **all dolled up**:

Mike: When will you be ready for me to pick you up tonight?

Sandy: Wendy and I are getting together around 4pm to start **getting all dolled up** for the gala. It could take a couple hours. How about 6pm?

Mike: That sounds good!

Sandy: I'm going to curl my hair. I've also got a sparkly new dress. I can't wait to show you!

Fiona: Oh my gosh, can you believe that prom is tomorrow night?

Lucas: I know, right? It feels like we've been waiting for so long.

Fiona: I can't wait to party with my friends and see everyone **all dolled up**. I wonder if anyone bought the same dress as me.

Lucas: Me too. What kind of dress are you going to wear?

Fiona: You're just going to have to wait and see!

Lucas: Haha, OK, fine.

To pull something off

Phrasal verb

After complimenting Tracy's dress in the example conversation, Claire says that she could never **pull off a dress** like Tracy's. Andrew and Kassy explain that, when talking about appearances, to pull off means to successfully wear an outfit, makeup, or hairstyle that doesn't always look good on everyone.

Examples of clothing that might be hard to pull off include revealing clothing, tight clothing, or bold colours. It could also be difficult to pull off clothing that is out of style. For instance, you could say, "I'd love to wear these denim overalls, but I don't know if I could pull them off." When trying on makeup, you might ask, "Do you think I can pull off this black lipstick?"

More generally, to pull off means to successfully accomplish something difficult. For instance, "I didn't think I would finish the marathon, but I managed to pull it off in the end." Similarly, you might say, "The magician pulled off the complicated trick and amazed the audience."

Here are a couple more examples with **to pull off**:

Kyle: Woah, check out Dave's new mohawk.

Izzy: Oh my goodness. It actually looks really cool!

Kyle: It totally does. That's impressive – I certainly **couldn't pull off** a mohawk.

Izzy: Me neither.

Kyle: Hmm... Actually, now that I'm picturing it, I think you **could pull off** a mohawk, Izzy!

Gina: Are you almost done trying on those clothes? We have to leave the mall and meet your father for lunch in twenty minutes.

Vince: Yeah, yeah, I'm almost done. Hey, Mom, do you think I can **pull off** this floral-patterned button-down shirt?

Gina: Yes, I think so! Just make sure you choose pants without a pattern. You don't want your outfit to look too busy.

Vince: OK, thanks for the tip.

Gina: Of course.

Quiz

1. What does “to make something pop” mean?

- a) To enhance something so it stands out or draws attention
- b) To break something into small pieces
- c) To hide something from view
- d) To blend something in with the background

2. Your friend tells you that your favorite celebrity’s outfit “made waves” at the award show. She means that...

- a) The outfit was inspired by the ocean
- b) Many people noticed the outfit and were talking about it
- c) Nobody noticed the outfit
- d) The outfit looked out of style

3. What does “to blush” mean?

- a) To giggle
- b) Your cheeks grow pale
- c) To avoid eye contact
- d) Your cheeks get red

4. What is the opposite of “all dolled up”?

- a) Dressed in retro clothing
- b) Dressed casually
- c) Dressed in fancy clothing
- d) Dressed in tight-fitting clothing

5. What is an example of an accomplishment that is hard to pull off?

- a) Preparing a bowl of cereal
- b) Vacuuming the living room
- c) Completing a marathon
- d) Walking your pet dog

Writing and Discussion Questions

1. Do you like to get dressed up or do you prefer casual clothing? Why or why not?
2. Describe an event you went to that required formal dress, such as a black-tie event. What was the event? What did you wear? Did you have a good time?
3. How do you feel when you get a compliment? Do you blush and feel shy? Please describe the best compliment you ever received.
4. Please describe a difficult achievement you managed to pull off. What was it? When did you pull it off? What was the experience like?
5. Are you interested in fashion? When was the last time you went shopping for new clothing or makeup? What were you looking for?

Quiz Answers

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

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