

To play down (To claim publicly that something is not important, even if in reality it is)

Examples:

- *The Prime Minister tried to **play down** the results of the public enquiry into pension frauds, shrugging off blame from journalists for having handled the matter incompetently.*
- *We shouldn't let ourselves get carried away over the information which has just come to light. Let's **play it down** for the time being.*



*“The Prime Minister tried to **play down** the results of the public enquiry into pension frauds, shrugging off blame from journalists for having handled the matter incompetently”*

To budge (To move something/To be moved with difficulty from its position, to change one's mind, to compromise--*often used in the negative. Note also the colloquial expression “to budge up”, which is used to ask a person/people to make more space so that someone else can sit down*)

Examples:

- *She was the only one who managed to **budge** the fridge. I never knew she had that sort of strength in her.*
- *I know you think I'm a wimp but I'm telling you, this piano won't **budge**. You have a go!*

- The leaders of these three European countries have told the press that they are *not* going to **budge** on their recent decision not to write off any of the Third World debt.
- You two kids are taking up three spaces. **Budge up** and let this lady have a seat...and stop sulking!

To take someone's word for it (To accept/To rely on something someone says as being true or a fact, without verifying it for oneself)

Examples:

- She assured me that the accommodation was spotless and that my client would be missing out on something if he didn't take it up. The biggest mistake I made was that I **took her word for it**. It was filthy!
- Don't **take my word for it**. If you don't think there'll be enough to go around, order some more...but don't go over the top.

Prudish (Very conservative, not open-minded in respect of sexual matters--*note that a "prude" is a person who is embarrassed by sexual matters*)

Examples:

- Husband to wife:
H: I don't want to jump on the bandwagon but I think these documentaries about sex for the over 40s should be frowned upon.
W: Don't be so **prudish**! We could do with more television like this.
- It's true that my dad is a bit of a **prude**, but he hasn't got it in him to stop my sister going out in a short skirt. He just sulks in the corner of the room not talking to my mum.

To enlighten (To reveal information to someone who is likely to find it interesting/useful--*note also the adjective "enlightening", which means revealing/an eye-opener--see Practical Everyday English, page 186*)

Examples:

- We got the gist of what he was on about, but perhaps you could **enlighten** us a little further on this matter.
- Once in a blue moon, when there's nothing much at stake, he gives us some information which is quite **enlightening**.
- **'Enlightening'** would be an understatement to describe the stories that went round about her family.

To clutch at straws (To be desperate to achieve something when there is clearly little hope of success, to try to answer a question or deal with a problem, making it obvious that one has no idea what the answer is or how to deal with it)

Examples:

- A: *How is your son coping with his redundancy?*
B: *Well, he's trying to play it down at the moment but he has been going for high level jobs in the City, even though, deep down, he knows he is just **clutching at straws**.*
- *The Government haven't got a clue as to how to go about sorting this mess out. It's quite apparent to everyone that they're **clutching at straws**.*

To stick something out

- i. (To continue doing something even though it is unpleasant--*note also the expression "to stick out like a sore thumb", which means to be noticed as being different from all the others--see also "the odd one out", Practical Everyday English, page 75, note to meaning v)*)

Examples:

- *Take my word for it; if you weigh up all your options, you'll see that you'd be better off **sticking your course out** until you've qualified.*
- *I **stuck** his lessons **out**, until he turned up one morning drunk. That was the final straw. I couldn't cope with him after that.*
- *He's more cocky and outgoing than his brothers and sisters. This is why he **sticks out like a sore thumb** at family gatherings.*

- ii. (To be showing/visible --*often used for clothes which should be "tucked in", e.g. shirt or label*)

Examples:

- *My mother-in-law wrote me off as a scruff when I first met her because not only did I have my shirt **sticking out** (which she tucked in for me), but my shoelaces were undone, and I had odd socks on.*
- *I don't want to keep picking you up on your appearance, but did you realise the label of your pullover is **sticking out**?*

To stick one's neck out (Not to be afraid to say what one really thinks will happen, knowing that one may later be proved to be wrong or get into trouble for saying it)

Examples:

- A: I've bet £15 on Italy for the next World Cup.
Who do you reckon's going to win it?
B: It'll all boil down to which team has the fewest injuries.
I'm going to **stick my neck out** and go for England.
A: Ha Ha! They might have a few stumbling blocks...
like the fact they aren't very good.
- At the meeting I had with the Managing Director yesterday I decided that, in the long run, I'd be better off **sticking my neck out** and being honest, rather than clutching at straws and coming out with something I don't really believe in. So I told him that we'd have to lay off half the workforce if we wanted to break even next year.

To disrupt (To prevent someone from continuing with what they were doing, to spoil an occasion or event etc. by causing a disturbance--*note also the adjective "disruptive", which means causing a disturbance*)

Examples:

- Sorry to **disrupt** you in your work, but I just wanted to tell you that I've pencilled you in for a meeting with James Reid for next Tuesday at 1.30pm. I know you have a lot on your plate, so please let me know if you can make it.
- He used to put up with his aunt's odd behaviour, putting it down to eccentricity; but she really rubbed him up the wrong way when she **disrupted** his wedding celebrations, and that was the final straw.
- We really don't know how to go about dealing with this child. Even though he is one of the brightest pupils in the class, he continues to be a **disruptive** influence on the other children.

To be lulled into a false sense of security (To be deceived into thinking or to take for granted that, due to recent success, everything is going to be fine, when it isn't)

Examples:

- Manager of football team to his players:
Just because we've got through to the quarter finals without conceding a goal, I don't want you all to **be lulled into a false sense of security** and write off all the other teams left in the competition.

- *The soldiers had thought that it was a foregone conclusion that they would outnumber the enemy. However, it later became apparent that they had **been lulled into a false sense of security**.*

To waffle (on) (To digress, to talk a lot without saying anything of significance--*note the noun “waffle”, which means irrelevant, superficial language*)

Examples:

- *We got the gist of what he was getting at after just a couple of minutes, but then he **waffled on**, drawing out his speech for almost an hour.*
- *Teacher to students:
Most students who fail the exam do so because instead of sticking to the task in hand, they **waffle (on)**, consequently bogging the examiner down with too much useless information.*
- *As usual, he came out with a lot of **waffle** about how the Government had come up against a few minor stumbling blocks, but that now economic recovery had got well under way.*

Lesson Two

To grow out of (To change one's taste or behaviour as one becomes more mature/ an adult)

Examples:

- *He was most disruptive as a child but fortunately he **grew out of** it.*
- *My sister dreads the idea of missing out on up-and-coming trends in music, but I **grew out of** all that nonsense quite a while ago.*

To go/come in phases (To occur at irregular intervals-e.g. business success, popularity, the desire to do/have something--*note that a "phase" is a temporary stage or period of time, often in a person's life or development*)

Examples:

- *Business tends to **go in phases**; for example, last week we didn't have enough work to go round the office. This week, however, we've taken on more than we can handle.*
- *My passion for Indian food **comes in phases**; sometimes I'll go over the top and eat it five nights in a row, then I'll completely go off it for a month.*
- *Doctor to parent: Your child is going through a disruptive **phase**, but I'm sure he'll grow out of it within a few months.*

Outlook

i. (General attitude towards life)

Examples:

- *He no longer sulks, but by no stretch of the imagination can it be said that he has a positive **outlook on** life.*
- *As he went through his old diaries, it dawned on him how much his **outlook** had changed as the years had gone by.*

ii. (Prospects, the likelihood of something getting better or worse--*often used for the economic situation or weather*)

Examples:

- *Politicians are predicting an upturn in the economy, but I'm not taking their word for it. Weighing everything up, the **outlook** is far less promising.*

- Weather forecaster:
*The **outlook** for the weekend is quite bright, apart from patchy fog in the North. We'll keep you posted with any changes.*

Cumbersome (Large and heavy and therefore difficult to move or carry, a clumsy and heavy style of writing, slow and inefficient because of its large size and bureaucratic nature-e.g. a large company or government organisation)

Examples:

- *I don't know what came over us when we bought such a **cumbersome** wardrobe. Now, no one can get it to budge.*
- Teacher to student:
*You tend to waffle a lot in your compositions and your style is too **cumbersome**. Try to cut down on the words you use, and then your message will come over much more effectively.*
- *It's a foregone conclusion that they won't be able to comply with EU regulations; their local government structure is far too **cumbersome**.*

To make ends meet (To earn enough money to survive or pay one's bills)

Examples:

- *He somewhat cockily makes out that they're quite well off, but I happen to know they've got through all their savings and are struggling to **make ends meet**.*
- Father to son:
F: *When your mother and I got married, we could barely **make ends meet**, let alone go off around the world.*
S: *So you keep telling me; but I don't want to miss out on what could be a very enlightening trip.*

Tactful (Careful what one says so as to avoid upsetting someone--*note the opposite of "tactful" is "tactless", i.e. not careful about what one says*)

Examples:

- *I think he has an uninviting, cumbersome style of writing in his books, which I find unreadable...but it wouldn't be very **tactful** of me to tell him.*

- A: I think it would be more **tactful** of you if you didn't bring it up until the whole thing has blown over.
- B: No, I'm sorry; I reckon we'll all be better off if the matter is nipped in the bud right now.
- I can't get over how **tactless** you are sometimes. Fancy telling her she was only taken on as a dogsbody.

To butt in (To interrupt a conversation)

Examples:

- Sorry to **butt in**, but I just wanted to tell you that I'm popping out to get some tea bags. Apparently, there aren't enough to go round.
- Parent to child:
Stop sulking! I only told you off because you should know how rude it is to **butt in** when I'm talking to someone.



Teacher to student:

“You tend to waffle a lot in your compositions and your style is too **cumbersome**. Try to cut down on the words you use, and then your message will come over much more effectively.”

(see page 40)

To stand one in good stead (To be or have been a good preparation for the future, even if the experience seems unpleasant at the time, to be of good service to one, i.e. an object)

Examples:

- *Looking back, it is only just beginning to dawn on me how my childhood hardships **stood me in good stead** later on in life. It's a wonder I ever came through it all.*
- *This handy computer will **stand you in good stead** when you've got a backlog of work to get through.*

I wouldn't put it past him/her ("It wouldn't surprise me if he/she did a thing like that"--*usually expressed in a negative sense*)

Examples:

- **A:** *Do you think he's likely to disrupt the meeting again with the same outrageous behaviour?*
- **B:** ***I wouldn't put it past him!***
- ***I wouldn't put it past her** to use him as a scapegoat. Alternatively, as there's so much at stake, she might decide to play the whole thing down.*

Uneasy (Unsure, fearful, nervous, anxious--*note the noun "uneasiness", i.e. anxiety or fear*)

Examples:

- *They were a little **uneasy** about taking him on because he came over as rather cocky in the interview but, as it turned out, his down-to-earth approach towards sorting out problems has gone down well with their clients.*
- *We felt **uneasy** about our daughter going to all-night parties. Fortunately, as the years went by, we realised it was just a phase which she would grow out of.*
- *When this most recent piece of information came to light, we realised that our **uneasiness** had been warranted.*

Lesson Three

To bring out

- i. (To produce, publish something, i.e. book, CD etc.)
Examples:
- A: *I'm baffled as to why he didn't **bring out** this book much earlier.*
 - B: *Perhaps he felt it might rub certain people up the wrong way.*
 - *Apparently, they have a backlog of about a hundred previously unreleased songs of his which they hope to **bring out** this Christmas.*
- ii. (To encourage someone to be less shy, to draw out--see *Chapter 2, page 20*)
Example:
- *It's really quite enlightening. Who would have guessed that your prudish mother would be the only one who could **bring her out** (of her shell) and talk her into discussing her sexual problems?*
- iii. (To cause a particular type of behaviour or sentiment in someone which is not normally seen--*often used with "best" or "worst" followed by "in"*)
Examples:
- *We thought that our relationship had a lot going for it, but unfortunately it has recently dawned on us that we **bring out the worst in** each other....and that we're just clutching at straws trying to keep up appearances.*
 - *His outlook on life became much more positive when the business started to get going. It really has **brought out the optimist in** him.*
- iv. (To expose the qualities of someone or something, such as a writer/composer or a piece of music/drama)
Examples:
- *I had underrated her piano playing in the past but now I realise what I was missing out on: she **brings out** Mozart's subtlety beautifully.*
 - *The actors seemed to shrug off the criticism that they had failed to **bring out** the play's humour; mind you, a couple of them were clearly put out by the fact that it had not received a single rave review.*

By and large (Mostly/On the whole)

Examples:

- **By and large**, the people in this town can make ends meet, but the outlook is quite depressing.
- We have, **by and large**, achieved our financial targets for this year but we mustn't allow ourselves to be lulled into a false sense of security.

Bland (Without character or flavour, superficial, unexciting--*especially food or music*)

Examples:

- When I was pregnant, I couldn't handle spicy food. I usually stuck to **bland** yoghurts and pasta, which were hardly exciting by any stretch of the imagination.
- My brother grew out of heavy rock music in his twenties. Since then he has gone for a much **blander** sound and his friends have written him off as an old bore.

To corner the market (To dominate/Take control of a certain market so that one's competitors have little chance of success in this field)

Examples:

- I'm going to stick my neck out here and say that if we go through with these plans, we will have **cornered** the entire computer software **market** by this time next year.
- After our product line had undergone a complete change of design, we thought we would **corner the market**. We didn't know what we were letting ourselves in for at the time, and now looking back, we should have weighed up our options more thoroughly.

Complacent (Too satisfied with oneself so that one has a feeling that it is not necessary to try to improve, make an effort or worry about anything--*note the noun "complacency"*)

Examples:

- This year's turnover is the best we've ever had but we can't afford to be **complacent**; there's too much at stake.
- Since he has been top of the class, he has become **complacent** about his exams. I think he's going about them in the wrong way.
- We won't stand for **complacency** in this firm. Don't for one moment think that your promotion is a foregone conclusion.

To turn off

- i. (To switch off the supply of electricity, water or gas)

Example:

- *Don't you think you should **turn** the TV **off** and get on with some work? These bland game shows bring out your lazy streak.*

- ii. (To take a road going away from the main road which one is travelling along)

Examples

- *I'm baffled as to why Dad always **turns off** here. Surely he'd be better off going straight on and dodging the hold-ups on the A3?*

- iii. (To disgust someone, to make someone feel uninterested--*especially in a sexual sense--note the noun "turn-off" and see Practical Everyday English, page 160 for the opposite "to turn on" and the noun "turn-on"*)

Examples:

- *Wife to husband:
Do you know that it really **turns me off** when I see you biting your nails? I thought you would have grown out of that childish habit by now.*
- *A: He'll probably come out with some nonsense about marriage being a **turn-off**.
B: I wouldn't put it past him!*

To be the laughing stock (To be the person, team, country etc. whom everyone makes fun of/laughs at--*especially when he/it has previously been considered to be the best or very important*)

Examples:

- *If you go by what the experts are saying, the outlook for English tennis is not very promising. We have been the **laughing stock** of world tennis for far too long.*
- *As a young actor it was reckoned that he had a lot going for him and was apparently highly sought-after. However, the goings-on which have recently come to light have made him the **laughing stock** of the theatre.*

To bear in mind (To consider or note, not to forget about a certain fact or person)

Examples:

- *I know she has been a bit touchy lately, but you have to **bear in mind** what she's been through during the last year.*
- *He came in for a lot of stick over the way he handled his personal life, but the directors have promised they will **bear him in mind** when the position of Vice Chairman comes up at the end of the year.*

Streetwise (Used to describe a person who, through experience, has become aware of the dangers and risks of life/business/people who should not be trusted)

Examples:

- *Saying my brother isn't **streetwise** is an understatement. Any fool could take him in.*
- *A: Survival in this city boils down to how **streetwise** you are.
B: I'll vouch for that!*

To touch on (To mention something only briefly)

Examples:

- *I'd like to pick up on some of the points we **touched on** last time. I know many of you feel uneasy about this subject, but it's not something that's just going to blow over.*
- *The Prime Minister refused to be put on the spot and just **touched on** the matter, assuring the journalists present that plans were in the pipeline to get the road-building work going as soon as possible.*



*“Saying my brother isn’t **streetwise** is an understatement. Any fool could take him in.”*
(see page 46)

Chapter Three in Use

MAGAZINE ARTICLE BY A PARENT OF TEENAGERS

If you haven't experienced the joys of bringing up teenagers, *take my word for it, it brings out the worst in you. By and large, I would say I'm quite an easy-going person by nature, but a lively, disruptive child can make me feel uneasy. I once read a book about bringing up boys and I must say I found it most enlightening. It says that the vast majority of kids grow out of their annoying habits and that their periods of awkwardness come in phases. The outlook, apparently, is positive for caring, worried parents. It is clear that what you can teach children early on in life will stand them in good stead for the future.*

However, you have to be *tactful* when giving advice to teenagers, and in particular be careful not to *waffle on* about the dangers of sex. They would just think you were being *prudish*.

Many times you think your son is not going to *budge* over a certain issue, but if you *play down* the matter, he will think you are just being *complacent*. The thing to do is *stick it out*. You'll get your own way in the end. I always say I *wouldn't put it past* my son to leave home and never speak to me again...but he'd soon come back after finding *he couldn't make ends meet*.

INTERVIEW WITH CLASSICAL MUSICIAN

INTERVIEWER: *Is it true you've changed the direction of your music because you felt that you **stuck out like a sore thumb** in the classical musical world?*

MUSICIAN: *In part, yes because I found out that...*

INTERVIEWER: *Sorry to **butt in**, but you are on record as saying that the people you were working with were often stuck-up, and that you were also getting fed up having to carry around a huge **cumbersome** double bass.*

MUSICIAN: *Yes all very true...although a lot of what you say is taken out of context. But apart from that, I felt there were other musicians who had **cornered the classical market**, and so I was persuaded by my producer to **bring out** something more down-to-earth.*

INTERVIEWER: *If you don't mind me saying, people have said it's **bland** and that you have become the **laughing stock** of the classical world.*

MUSICIAN: *That's their opinion. What is definitely true is that I've become more **streetwise**. You have to **bear in mind** that most people from my musical background haven't got a clue about what's going on in the world. They **turn off** the news when anything political comes up. Their lives are far too comfortable. I don't want to be **lulled into the same false sense of security**. I hope you get the gist of what I'm saying...but I don't want to come over as being pretentious.*

INTERVIEWER: *Not at all, and thank you. I wish you all the best with your new CD.*

Chapter Three: Exercise

CHOOSE THE CORRECT WORD FROM THOSE IN RED

Answers on page 133

1. Please feel free to ^a(*budge up/disrupt/stick out/butt in*) if you think I'm ^b(*waffling on/playing down/cornering the market/touching on*) for too long.
2. When he lost his job two years ago, he found it hard to ^a(*be disruptive/make ends meet/clutch at straws/bear it in mind*), but, ^b(*by and large/complacently/uneasily/playing it down*), that difficult period has ^c(*turned him off/come in phases/stood him in good stead/grown out of him*) in recent times.
3. The new teacher felt a bit ^a(*bland/uneasy/prudish/streetwise*) about taking over such a ^b(*complacent/turned off/disruptive/cumbersome*) class, but by the end of term, she felt she had managed to ^c(*budge/bring out the best/enlighten/butt*) in them.
4. A: I told Maria that I thought her cooking was a bit ^a(*uneasy/complacent/cumbersome/bland*).
B: That wasn't very ^b(*tactful/uneasy/disruptive/prudish*) of you, was it?
5. I don't know how you think you're going to ^a(*stand in good stead/corner the market/stick out like a sore thumb/clutch at straws*) with such an expensive product. You have to ^b(*bear in mind/enlighten/budge up/play down*) that the economic ^c(*unease/prude/outlook/market*) is not very positive at the moment, and people aren't splashing out.
6. We mustn't let our recent success ^a(*touch on us/lull us into a false sense of security/budge us up/disrupt us*). I'm sure you are all aware how dangerous ^b(*clutching at straws/sticking out like a sore thumb/streetwise/complacency*) can be.
7. He likes to ^a(*play down/stick out/butt in/turn off*) his celebrity status as a TV historian, but we have all found his documentaries most ^b(*streetwise/bland/complacent/enlightening*).
8. A: Do you think he realises that at the age of 52 he ^a(*goes in phases/sticks out like a sore thumb/is lulled into a false sense of security/looks cumbersome*) at the university bar?
B: I don't think he does. He's trying to find himself a beautiful young wife. It's so sad to see him ^b(*taking my word for it/putting it past him/clutching at straws/turning them off*).
9. A: I have failed to convince your father that you are now old enough to wear a bikini on the beach. He won't ^a(*budge/disrupt/turn off/bear it in mind*) on this matter, I'm afraid.
B: Why am I the only one of my friends with such a ^b(*disruptive/streetwise/prudish/waffling*) dad?
10. ^a(*Be enlightened/Take my word for it/Bear it in mind/Grow out of it*): if we don't toughen up and get more ^b(*prudish/disruptive/cumbersome/streetwise*), we'll be the ^c(*laughing stock/outlook/complacency/enlightened*) of the business community in this city.