

Chapter One

Lesson One

Heyday (A time in the past when someone/something was at his/its best--*generally used to state that this is no longer the case*)

Examples:

- *In his **heyday** he was the best ad-libber on the stage, but now he is prone to making mistakes and needs to prepare a script beforehand.*
- *Progressive Rock had its **heyday** in the 1970s. My memory of those days is somewhat blurred because it was a long time ago... and I was paralytic most of the time.*

To keep tight-lipped about something (Not to talk about something; to keep something to oneself, to be secretive)

Examples:

- *She's **keeping very tight-lipped about** her boyfriend. From what I can gather, he hasn't endeared himself to her friends and family..*
- *I think he's quite hopeful that business will pick up, but he's **keeping tight-lipped about** it. He doesn't want to come over as complacent.*

To deter (To discourage someone from doing something; to put someone off--*see Practical Everyday English, page 55, meaning iii*)

Examples:

- *I don't want to **deter** her from what is quite clearly a childhood dream, but she could find herself out of her depth at Cambridge.*
- *Don't be **deterred** by what your dad says about your plans. He's not so well up on what's going on in the world today, anyway.*

Knee-jerk (Automatic and fast--*used to describe a reaction/response which is generally too fast and therefore negative*)

Examples:

- *The police now admit that the mistakes they had made were as a result of a **knee-jerk** reaction to relentless media pressure to solve the case...but they resent being accused of incompetence.*

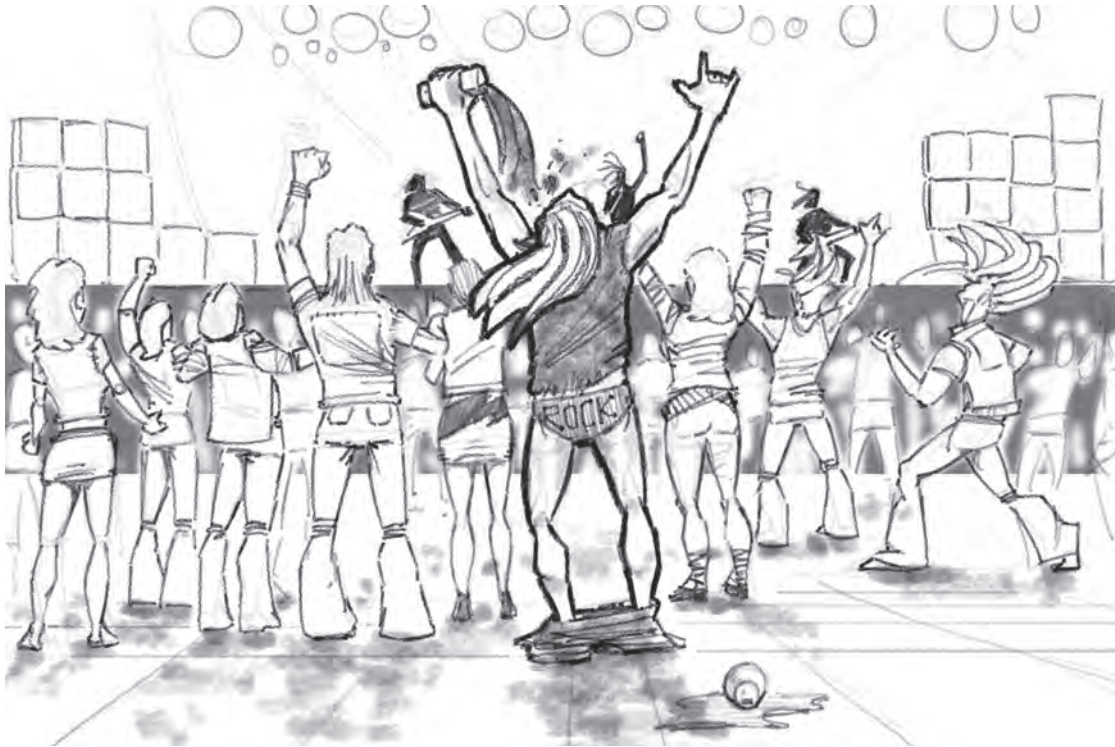
- *It all sounds perfectly plausible to me at this early stage, but I don't want to come out with some **knee-jerk** response that I will live to regret later on.*

Backlash (The negative consequences following an action or event, a hostile reaction)

Examples:

- *There's bound to be a **backlash** against the Government's decision to support the Libyan rebels, despite their current plight.*
- **Football News:**
*So far, there has been no **backlash** following on from the manager's sacking. The chairman of the supporters' club agreed that the board couldn't stave off this inevitable action any longer*

*"Progressive Rock had its **heyday** in the 1970s. My memory of those days is somewhat blurred because it was a long time ago... and I was paralytic most of the time." (see page 1)*



Gruelling (Very difficult and tiring, tough)

Examples:

- *My son said that the exams are going to be very **gruelling**. However, I'm quite hopeful he'll get through them.*
- *I went in for the London Marathon this year and I have to say I've never been through such a **gruelling** experience in my life; mind you, I was consoled by the fact that I did it in less than four hours.*

Mug (A fool/idiot, a gullible person--see *Practical Everyday English, page 104*. Also note the expression "**a mug's game**", which means a foolish activity)

Examples:

- *I now realise that in trying to endear myself to my staff I've actually alienated most of them. I've been a real **mug**.*
- *You're a **mug** if you believe his version of events was not embellished.*
- *In his heyday, he was the top lawyer in the country, but now he has deemed the legal profession to be a **mug's game**.*

To mug someone, mugging (To rob someone; robbery of a person--note the expression "**to mug up on something**" which means to study, revise, do research on something for a specific purpose)

Examples:

- *When she was **mugged** on her way home last week, her gut reaction was to scream. It's just as well she did because it scared the mugger off.*
- *This area of London is prone to **mugging**; I would steer clear of it if I were you.*
- *I can't afford to make a fool of myself ad-libbing a speech. I'll have to **mug up on** the subject beforehand.*

Gulf (A big gap/difference of opinion)

Examples:

- *The **gulf** between the two main political parties on the issue of the rise in muggings in the capital has widened considerably in recent months. But nothing will deter the Prime Minister from sticking to his policy of zero tolerance towards violent criminals.*
- *There is a **gulf** of class and quality between the two Manchester clubs and the other teams in the Premier league. Any mug can see that.*

To spark (To provoke/stimulate--used for a reaction rather than a person. You cannot “spark” someone)

Examples:

- *The Managing Director’s comments about many of the staff not being up to scratch are bound to **spark** a backlash amongst the company’s employees.*
- *The Health Minister’s report has **sparked** an outburst of frustration and anger within the nursing profession.*

To lose it (To lose one’s temper, to get furiously angry and lose control) **Colloquial**

Examples:

- *I completely **lost it**. It was an angry knee-jerk angry reaction which I was unable to control. I regret it now, but don’t want to dwell on it.*
- *We had embarked on a gruelling military campaign during which the captain **lost it** with me and the other soldiers on several occasions.*

Blunder (A big mistake)

Examples:

- Newspaper headline:
*Doctor's confession to major **blunders** sparks outrage amongst patients.*
- *The Minister for Employment accepts that he made a huge **blunder** when he said that women need to be deterred from taking so much sick-leave. It's quite unusual for a politician to make such an admission; they usually keep tight-lipped about such things.*

To take the bull by the horns (To deal with/take control of a situation/ problem properly)

Examples:

- *Stop dithering! If you want to narrow the gulf in ability between these two directors, you need to **take the bull by the horns** and act now.*
- *If we had **taken the bull by the horns** at the beginning, there wouldn't have been such a backlash from the members of the committee.*

To overlook (To ignore/forget about an error or fault; to fail to notice)

Examples:

- **Boss to employee:**
*I will **overlook** your persistent lateness if you promise to keep tight-lipped about my accounts.*
- *I do not understand how these blunders in the contract could have been **overlooked** by both sets of lawyers. Extraordinary!*

To be wary of (To distrust, to be suspicious of)

Examples:

- *I'd be very **wary** of him; he tends to lose it when he doesn't get his own way.*
- *The doctor advised my mother to be slightly **wary of** this medication. It has been known to cause blurred vision.*

- She was **wary of** going into such a strange business with no relevant experience. It all seemed a bit of a mug's game.

To plug (To promote the sale of something by talking about it in public--*especially a book, record or film. Note also the following two expressions: “to plug the gap”, which means to fill in any gaps of knowledge or information, and “to plug away”, which means to continue working hard at something. See the last two examples below.*)

Examples:

- I will put in a good word for you with some literary journalists I know, in the hope that they **plug** your next book in their weekly newspaper columns.
- Most pop musicians these days are always trying to **plug** their latest releases. It's a trait that I don't find particularly endearing.
- This exam revision course will **plug any gaps** in your knowledge of chemistry. You'll still have to mug up on the basics, though.
- During his divorce, when things were looking bleak, he kept **plugging away** at his songwriting. It helped him come through this dark period of his life.



“I'd be very **wary** of him; he tends to lose it when he doesn't get his own way.” (see page 5)

To have the gift of the gab (To be a good talker; to be good at convincing people to buy or do things)

Examples:

- You have to have the **gift of the gab** if you want to be good at ad-libbing on the stage.
- It's clear that she has the **gift of the gab**, which is why no-one needed to show her the ropes when she began her job in telephone sales.

To step something up (To increase the speed, amount or intensity of something--note also the expression "**to step up to the plate/challenge**" which means to assume responsibility for something)

Examples:

- The Prime Minister resents the fact that the leader of the Opposition is **stepping up** pressure on him to put in a good word for the British manufacturing industry at the next European Union meeting of heads of government. He feels he hardly needs reminding to give the country a plug.
- On paper it seems that an easy solution to dealing with rising crime in this city is to take the bull by the horns and **step up** police numbers. But this might be seen by some as an expensive knee-jerk reaction at a time of public sector cutbacks.
- It's clear that Julie has the gift of the gab when it comes to dealing with customers, but I'm not sure she is ready, willing and able to **step up to the plate/challenge** and take on a managerial role.

To step down (To resign from office or an important position)

Examples:

- Having made so many blunders in recent times, he had no option but to **step down**. However, he said it wouldn't deter him from looking for similar work in the future.
- I reckon he's had his heyday and it's time for him to **step down**. Politics is a mug's game anyway.

Farce, farcical (A ridiculous, absurd situation; laughable; very badly organised-- note that a “**farce**” is also a light comedy performed at the theatre. It is usually fast moving, has an improbable plot and often concerns mistaken identity or a complete misunderstanding of a situation)

Examples:

- The referee turned the game into a **farce** when he sent off two players for swearing but somehow overlooked three dangerous tackles.
- The funeral arrangements were **farcical**. They got the deceased's body mixed up with someone else's and turned up at the wrong cemetery. The poor widow was beyond consolation, and her daughter completely lost it with the funeral director.

In the wake of (Following on from an event or action)

Examples:

- **In the wake of** the Home Secretary's blunders last week, the Prime Minister has had to take the bull by the horns. He could do without these problems, especially in light of last month's fiasco concerning the Deputy Prime Minister.
- There are many things which we cannot afford to overlook **in the wake of** the farce which went on in the boardroom last Friday.

Lesson Three

To mope (To feel a little depressed and apathetic--*when used with “around/about”, it means to walk around with no purpose because of unhappiness or boredom*)

Examples:

- *I nearly lost it with him today. He has sat in his room all day **moping**, and he didn't lift a finger to help me all weekend.*
- *I know you've had a gruelling week, but it's no good **moping around** wallowing in self-pity. Keep plugging away and you'll see the rewards will come.*

To turn something around (To change something for the better; to improve one's life)

Examples:

- *John has really **turned** this football club **around**. The way the old manager ran things was a farce. We're all so glad he was asked to step down.*
- *I thought my life was doomed before I met Michael. I was a bit wary of him at first, but it is truly amazing how he has **turned** my life **around**.*

To do oneself down (To have a low opinion of oneself; to believe one is not capable of doing something)

Examples:

- *Don't **do yourself down** all the time. You shouldn't be so easily deterred from having high aspirations.*
- *I don't know what sparked this current episode of self-doubt. She must stop moping around and **doing herself down**. She's got so much going for her.*

To crave, have/get a craving for something (To need something desperately--*usually something pleasant*--to have a strong desire/fancy for something--*note that pregnant women are well known for having “cravings” for strange combinations of food at irregular hours*)

Examples:

- *She takes after her mother, in that she **craves** affection. I'm not very hopeful she'll find it in her new boyfriend.*

- When I was pregnant with Jake, I would often **have/get a craving for** sausages and ice cream. My husband Sam never seemed to notice, as he was plugging away at his work on his laptop.

To give someone a dressing-down (To scold, to tell off--*note that this expression is generally more formal and serious than “to tell off”*)

Examples:

- If he doesn't manage to turn this company around by the end of the year, the shareholders are going to **give him** a very sharp **dressing-down**.
- In the wake of such a heavy defeat against their bitterest rivals, the boss **gave** the whole team a **dressing-down**.

To lose one's marbles (To lose one's mind/mental faculties--*generally used in a humorous way and not to describe serious dementia. Note also the expression “to lose the plot”, which means to lose the ability to understand what is going on, or to go a little bit crazy and over-the-top*)

Examples:

- It was a farcical situation: neither of us could remember the other's name. At 49 years old, we are both clearly beginning to **lose our marbles**.
- A: Recently I've been prone to getting up early on Sunday morning thinking it was Monday. I must be **losing my marbles**.
B: And time for you to step down as boss of the company?
- If the Leader of the Opposition thinks that he could turn the economy round with his farcical policies, he really has **lost the plot**.

To opt (To make a choice--*followed by “for” when preceding a noun. Also note the expression “to opt out of”, which means to make a decision not to participate in a particular system*)

Examples:

- They **opted** to send their son to the local private school because of the wide gulf that exists between the state and independent sectors.
- We were overwhelmed with choices, none of which were overlooked. However, in the end we **opted for** the project that would give us fewer teething problems.
- In the wake of Government cutbacks to the National Health Service, some small hospitals have decided to **opt out of** local health authority schemes.

To be at the cutting edge of something (To be at the forefront of modern development)

Examples:

- *We are always doing ourselves down in this country despite the fact that others view us as **being at the cutting edge** of many specialist hi-tech industries.*
- *Our aim in launching this new TV station was not to spark controversy, but **to be at the cutting edge of** today's media.*

(see picture below)



To banish (To throw someone out; to send someone away; to remove a thought from one's mind)

Examples:

- *He should be **banished** from this country so that he can no longer plug his Nazi propaganda on our shores. I'm very wary of people like him.*
- *A: Do you think I might be sacked over this last blunder I made?
B: **Banish** the thought!*



Chapter One in Use

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A NEWSPAPER ARTICLE ABOUT PUBLIC TRANSPORT IN LONDON

Some people say that public transport, as we know it, has had its **heyday**, and that instead of sitting around **moping** and whingeing, politicians, many of whom ought to have **stepped down** years ago, should take **the bull by the horns** and **opt out** of public ownership altogether.

Let's face it: the system as it exists today is a complete **farce** and is doomed to even more delays and overcrowding. But is the Government right to keep **plugging** the private investment option, which appears to be a **knee-jerk** reaction to the public transport problems we had last Christmas? **In the wake** of recent financial and administrative disasters, privatisation of the national railways has **sparked** a public **backlash** against multinational companies investing in transport.

London should be **at the cutting edge of** modern Europe and it is crucial that the widening **gulf** that exists between this city and other European capitals should be addressed. In particular, the Government needs to look into the possibility of launching a new funding policy for London Underground without **overlooking** the **blunders** that have been made in other areas of national transport. They should not be **deterred** by the failure of previous governments.

CONVERSATION BETWEEN TWO LAWYERS

PETER: *I don't know about you but I've had a **gruelling** day...and I nearly **lost it** with a few annoying clients.*

COLIN: *Yes, I know how you feel. I almost gave one of the youngsters in the office a **dressing-down** but thought better of it. Being a solicitor is a **mug's game**. Why do we do it?*

PETER: *The money! Look, my best friend's an English teacher and he's totally skint. Yes, I **crave** more time with my family, and if I **had the gift of the gab**, I'd be in real estate, but deep down I'd be quite **wary of** changing my profession so late in life...when I'm beginning to **lose my marbles**.*

COLIN: *Well, I suppose I'm always **doing** the legal profession **down** and I sometimes forget that being made a partner has **turned my life around** from a financial point of view...and I still get a buzz out of **mugging up on** certain specialist areas of the law.*

PETER: *And let's be honest: all this stuff people come out with about money not being important and that capitalism should be **banished** to the history books is utter nonsense. They **keep** very **tight-lipped** when their own promotion comes up for discussion.*

COLIN: *All very true...but nevertheless, I can't wait to call it a day and retire to Spain.*



Chapter One: Exercise

CHOOSE THE CORRECT WORD FROM THOSE IN GREEN

Answers on page 139

1. Apparently, the Managing Director of Railtrack was given a ^a(backlash/dressing-down/blunder/gulf) by the Minister of Transport, and was ordered to ^b(mug up/spark/crave/step up) safety procedures on the railways.
2. I think this actor has definitely had his ^a(heyday/dressing-down/gulf/blunders). In a recent television interview he seemed to be ^b(tight-lipped/moping/losing his marbles/doing down).
3. A: If you want to get on in the world of marketing, it's crucial that you have the ^a(gulf/blunders/backlash/gift of the gab).
B: Very true, but you also need the patience and courtesy not to ^b(lose it/dress down/step down/keep tight-lipped) with people who are making your life difficult.
4. It made me cringe with embarrassment listening to him ^a(deter/mope/crave/plug) his latest book on Radio 4. Doesn't he realise that he's completely out of touch with the general public? It was obvious to anyone listening that he has ^b(mugged up/taken the bull by the horns/lost the plot/turned his life around).
5. One cannot ^a(crave/overlook/be wary of/plug) the fact that there have been major ^b(blunders/knee-jerk reactions/farces/sparks) at senior management level.
6. The negotiations for creating a faster, safer tube service for London have turned into a complete ^a(blunder/backlash/farce/gulf). There is now a massive ^b(craving/opting out/knee-jerk response/gulf) between the politicians on one side and the unions on the other.
7. ^aI don't know why you keep ^a(opting out/sparking debate/craving/doing yourself down). It's amazing how you've managed to ^b(deter yourself/turn your life around/give yourself a dressing-down/keep tight-lipped) in such a short space of time.
8. ^a(In the wake of/Opting out of/Losing one's marbles/Banishing) the Government's decision to raise taxes, there has been a ^b(heyday/stepping up/backlash/farce) amongst business leaders.
9. Instead of ^a(gruelling/moping/craving/overlooking) around on your own all day wallowing in misery, why don't you ^b(take the bull by the horns/dress it down/keep tight-lipped/have the gift of the gab) and get out of the house to enjoy the nice weather? Life is for living.
10. I think she might have been asked to ^a(step up/step down/do down/overlook) by the Board of Directors, but she is keeping very ^b(wary/tight-lipped/banished/sparked) about it.

11. Anna's parents are quite ^a(wary/mugged/turned around/deterred) of what she has got herself into in dating this odd bloke. Her trouble is that she ^b(sparks/knee-jerks/mopes/ craves) male affection, especially from dodgy guys like him.
12. ^a(Spark/Mope/Overlook/Banish)any thought of going into the acting profession. It's a ^b(mug's game/backlash/blunder/heyday).
13. If we want to be at the ^a(farce/gulf/cutting edge/wake) of modern education, we have no choice but to ^b(banish/opt out of/mug up/crave) the local school authority.
14. It was a ^a(blundering/farcical/gruelling/overlooking) afternoon of tough negotiating, but at least it has now ^b(sparked/craved/turned around/plugged) debate about the major issues we need to address.
15. A: I have made up my mind and I won't be ^a(turned around/overlooked/deterred/ mugged) by you or anybody else.
B: OK. That's fine, but I just don't want whatever you decide to be a ^b(gruelling/tight-lipped/ moping/knee-jerk) response, not properly thought out.