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Podcasts and Puns

Improve your listening skills through podcasts, the art of wordplay, how to speak better English, and fun word quizzes.



Pun-tastic Puns – The Art of Wordplay

Pun-tastic Puns!

A pun is a type of quick-witted one-liner or comment that exploits the different possible meanings, forms and pronunciation of words. Puns are plays on words that are intended to produce a witty or humorous effect.

The ability to think of a quick pun is often considered a sign of intelligence, but more often than not, they are disparagingly referred to as “dad jokes”. In fact, either you love them or you hate them. Some people appreciate them or enjoy using them in everyday conversation, others roll their eyes and groan a little when they hear one.



That said, they are still very popular and still commonly used in speech and writing, and particularly in newspaper headlines.

Here are some common puns you might hear and see:

- The future, the present and the past walked into a bar. Things got a little tense. (a Siri grammar joke)
- Denial is not just a river in Egypt. (the Nile/denial, get it?)

Some businesses also choose to have puns in their names:

- **Kebab shop:** Abra Kebabra
- **Fish and chips shop:** The Codfather
- **Florist:** Florist Gump
- **Ophthalmologist:** For Eyes

Funny, eh?

However, is there a clear distinction between a pun and a joke? Indeed, there is. A pun relies on wordplay, while jokes don't. It's as simple as that!

About a month or so ago, I wrote a blog on [Homophones, Homonyms and Homographs](#). These are creative ways in which the English language shows its fascinating nuances and these can also apply to pun formation.

Here are the most popular types of puns you can find:

HOMOPHONIC PUNS

This type of pun uses homophones, which are words that have the SAME PRONUNCIATION but a DIFFERENT MEANING and SPELLING.



Example:

“Why is it so wet in England? Because many kings and queens have reigned there.”

- (reign- rule as monarch/rain – a weather condition common to the UK).

The wedding was so emotional that even the cake was in tiers.

- tears – water falling in drops from the eyes when you cry/tiers – layers overlapping each other).

I cried when I found out my macaroni had expired. It pasta way.

- pasta/passed

HOMOGRAPHIC PUNS

These types of pun use words that have THE SAME SPELLING for TWO DIFFERENT MEANINGS.

Example:

The motorist says to the cop, “Why can’t I park my car here? The sign says ‘Fine for Parking’!”

- *fine* – good or good enough/*fine* – an amount of money that has to be paid as a punishment for not obeying a rule or law.

A blind man picked up a hammer and saw.

- saw – a tool to cut wood with/ saw – past simple of the verb to see.

Why was it so hot in the stadium after the baseball game? All the fans left!

- fans – someone who admires and supports a person, sport, sports team, etc./ fans – air conditioning devices).



HOMONYMIC PUNS

Similar to homographs, a homonymic pun involves words that are SPELLED and SOUND THE SAME, yet have DIFFERENT MEANINGS.

Example:

Two silk worms had a race and ended in a tie.

- tie – a clothing accessory/ tie – a result in a game or match in which two or more teams have the same score.

COMPOUND PUNS

A compound pun includes more than one pun in the same sentence.

Example:

You can tune a guitar, but you can't tuna fish. Unless you play bass."

o This pun combines a homophonic pun (tuna /tune a) and a homographic one (bass -a type of fish)/bass a type of guitar)

RECURSIVE PUNS

This type of pun requires understanding the first half of the joke to understand the second.

Example:

- Fourth of May is [International Star Wars Day](#). May the Fourth be with you.
- Oscar Wilde: Immanuel doesn't pun, he Kant.



To understand these puns, you must have an exophoric understanding of Star Wars and who the philosopher Immanuel Kant is.

When do we use the expression “No Pun Intended” ?

This expression is often used when you unintentionally make a pun that you think might cause offense or make light of the situation. In order to backtrack or clarify you follow your pun with “no pun intended”.

Example:

Before presenting at a conference, the organiser came up to me and said: “Ok, are you ready? Just remember to keep it short.” Then he looked me up and down and, realising how tall I was (not very!) he sheepishly added: “No pun intended.” To which I replied, “None taken”.

I hope you had fun learning about puns. See if you can find any around London, and send us photos!

Learn to Speak better English with these Helpful Tips

This week we are looking at 2 ways to boost your confidence in your ability to learn to speak better English. Speaking to the chap at the coffee shop, chatting to your mate, making a presentation or addressing an audience of 150 people all comes down to one thing; confidence.

- Remember those first years in primary school when the teacher asked you to read aloud in class? That dreadful thought; *everyone is watching me, everyone is listening to me and I sound so strange*. Well the same thing happens when you are learning English. The sound of your voice can most certainly be scary. So what do you do? Start reading aloud at home.
- Select a text which you are comfortable with. Something you consider manageable; a text from your course book, a favourite book or even a film if you want.
- Ask someone’s whose English you think is excellent to read it aloud for you while you record it. You could even use a listening and tape script from your course book if you have the CD.
- Practice reading the text alongside the audio. It might be difficult at first because of the speed, features of connected speech etc., but the more you practice the easier it will become.
- Practice reading it without the audio recording and see how you do. If you don’t feel confident yet, repeat the previous step until you do.
- Finally, record yourself reading the text and compare.

How to Improve your Listening Skills Through Podcasts

I often ask my students what they struggle with most when they are learning English, and more often than not, the answer is: listening!



There are many ways in which a learner can improve their listening skills, such as watching TV series and films in English, finding a language exchange partner and listening to songs in English, but not many students realise how podcasts can be an effective to hone in on their listening

skills, and have fun at the same time.

Podcasts are a brilliant and entertaining way of improving one's listening skills. They expose the listener to native and non-native English: to different dialects, pronunciation and intonation. They help learners build their vocabulary, and they help them understand native speakers, even when they speak quickly.

In recent years, podcasts have become more and more popular. As a matter of fact, you can find a podcast on almost any topic on the Net, from food, drinks and music, to politics, comedy and weird stuff. What's more, podcasts are widely accessible and often free. You can listen to them on your phone, computer or laptop and, more importantly, you can listen to them anywhere and everywhere: at home, whilst commuting to work or school, in your car, or even at the gym.

Now you might be thinking that the language of podcasts might be too difficult for you. The great thing about podcasts is that many of them are now available with transcripts so you can check whether you have understood or read while you listen, and quite a lot of the English learning podcasts are accompanied by tasks and worksheets to help you improve and advance your level. Brilliant, isn't it?

How to make full use of podcasts:

1. Choose a podcast you might be interested in.

2. Read the summary to understand whether it tickles your fancy.
3. Predict 10 words and 5 expressions that you imagine might appear in the podcast.
4. Listen and check whether you were correct

Another tip for making full use of podcasts is to:

1. Choose your topic.
2. Do some research on the topic and make notes.
3. Listen to a podcast on your chosen topic to check if they mention any of the information you have researched.

Best Podcasts to improve you English and have fun doing so:



Podcasts in English

An excellent site where you can choose which podcast to listen to according to level. Most Podcasts are accompanied by worksheets, tapescripts, and vocabulary tasks. The

easiest and most comprehensive way of improving your listening skills!

podcastsinenglish.com

The English we speak Podcasts

This website allows you to download short podcasts which focus on short natural English expressions or idioms. A fun way of learning expressions in context!

bbc.co.uk

English Class 101

Learn English with fun, interesting and culturally relevant lessons that are easy to listen to.

Free lifetime account where you can access audio and video lessons on-the-go, as well as a variety of podcasts and vocabulary learning tools. App available for your phone or tablet.

englishclass101.com

Learn English Podcasts

Learn English by listening to graded audio podcasts. Each podcast is accompanied by a variety of language tasks and worksheets to help you improve your English language skills and your level.

learnenglish.britishcouncil.org

IELTS Podcast

A wonderful site where you can listen to IELTS experts give you tips and advice on how to complete IELTS exam tasks.

ieltspodcast.com

Down to Business

These podcasts deal with recent international news headlines, and is a great resource for learners who want to improve their listening skills while keeping up to date with the latest local and international business trends.

downtobusinessenglish.com

Ted talks daily

Ted Talks offers its latest thought-provoking talks in audio format here at itunes.apple.com

A great opportunity to learn as you develop your listening skills.

And for a couple of funny comedy podcasts try these:

Marc Maron's Podcast

Comedian Marc Maron interviewing Barack Obama (USA).

wtfpod.com

Adam&Joe

Two hilarious radio hosts Adam and Joe (UK).

bbc.co.uk



SIMILES

Similes are used to make descriptions clearer or more vibrant by saying that one thing is similar to another thing. This is a very useful English skill for language learners.

Match the first part of the simile on the left with the second part of the simile on the right.

as big as
as white as
as tall as a
as light as
as slow as a
as free as an
as cold as a
as busy as a

giraffe
ice
snail
snow
bee
elephant
bird
feather

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Answers: as big as an elephant, as white as snow, as tall as a giraffe, as light as a feather, as slow as a snail, as free as a bird, as cold as ice, as busy as a bee.



Words to find:

bacon buttie
 cornish pasty
 cottage pie
 shepherds pie
 fish and chips
 welsh rarebit

bangers and mash
 bubble and squeak
 scones and jam
 steak kidney pie
 toad in the hole
 yorkshire pudding

crumpets
 fry up
 full english
 roast dinner
 sunday roast
 trifle

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- Read our bi-weekly [blog](#) which includes study tips, interesting aspects of the English language, worldwide facts and much more!
- Read what our [students](#) have to say about studying at Bloomsbury International and life in London.