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ESL Reference Series

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**English  
Expressions**  
for Real Life

Stepping Stones to Fluency  
for Advanced ESL Learners

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Focus On

ESL Reference Series

*Making the difficult parts of learning English easy!*

***Using English Expressions for Real Life***

***Stepping Fluency for ESL Learners***

*by*

Thomas Celentano

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Focus on English Books

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### ***About the author***

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THOMAS CELENTANO HAS been teaching English as a second language to students from all over the world for more than 20 years. He holds university degrees in language studies and anthropology from the University of Hawaii at Manoa, and has held academic and managing directorships in various English language schools over his career.

**To my students everywhere**

ENGLISH EXPRESSIONS are everywhere in the English language. The correct use of English expressions in English communication can sometimes be difficult and comes with practice. This text was written as a quick reference guide, a primer, and a practice text to help students quickly learn new expressions, and find and correct problem areas. The book was written for high intermediate and advanced learners.

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*Understanding the language of sarcasm, clichés, slang, jargon, colloquialisms and informal speech patterns in English.*

**Using English Expressions for Real Life**



*Using English Expressions for Real Life* was designed for the advanced ESL learner. This book is not an exhaustive list of English idioms and expressions. It is, instead, an approach to understanding how native English speakers articulate their daily concerns, needs, wants and feelings. Most fluent day-to-day American English is spoken via expressions whose meanings are best understood in the context of a specific situation and of American culture in general. This book attempts to give the advanced ESL learner a window onto this world of English expression.

*Using English Expressions for Real Life* is a wonderful way to explore and practice some of the more common forms of fluent English expression. The book explores common English idioms, sarcasm, clichés, slang, and informal expressions used every day by native speakers in a variety of different situations. The student will find lots of explanations and examples of correct usage in common sentences.

If the student has the Focus on audio book version of this book (for smart phones and other digital audio devices; available separately at the student will be able to listen to the examples along with the teacher. Reading and listening helps the student remember a lesson more easily and also helps the student with pronunciation.



## ***Free audio book access***

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THERE IS AN AUDIO BOOK for *Using English Expressions for Real Life* available on our website to all of our students, free of charge. [Go here to access this audio](#)



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**INTRODUCTION**

**ABOUT LOUISE FAMOUS ADVICE AND GOSSIP COLUMNIST**

**CHAPTER LOUISE GIBESSI GIVES ADVICE ABOUT A TRAVEL**

**SITATION** ~~by the~~ bye

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chill out

chomping at the bit

coming from

contain yourself

engage your brain

fast track

get away from it all

getting all worked up over nothing

go over like a lead balloon

hogtied

in tow

lay it all on the table

.(to) make a pact

.(to) make a mountain out of a molehill

open a can of worms

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romantic interlude

the rub

second honeymoon

significant other

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.(to) try one's hand at something

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get this message

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look on the bright side of things

mingle with

on the part of

sit down with them

CHAPTER 6 REVIEW: TALKING ABOUT EDUCATION; SOME IDIOMS  
AND EXPRESSIONS



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“Using English Expressions for Real Life” is a wonderful way to explore and practice some of the more common forms of fluent English articulation. The book explores common English idioms, sarcasm, clichés, slang, and informal expressions used every day by native speakers in a variety of different situations. The student will find lots of explanations and examples of correct usage in common sentences.

## About Louise Gibessi

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LOUISE GIBESSI IS OUR famous advice and gossip columnist from New York City who writes for our newspaper and a famous Internet blog called Dear Louise Gibessi.

People write to her from all over the world to ask her about personal problems and sometimes problems that they are having when they are using English in real life situations.

Louise Gibessi is famous because she is very *up front*\* and *tells it like it is*. She gives advice about **the** and

**be up front** means to be completely honest with someone, without hiding any facts.)

(\*\* **To tell it like it is** (slang) means to be completely honest when telling someone something; to describe something to someone by simply telling the facts. Straight talk; often used to express the reality of something. Often very frank, bordering on impolite.)

In this and following sections you will learn how native English speakers use various idioms and expressions correctly in real life situations.

***CORRECT USAGE OF SOME common English expressions and idioms in travel situations***

In this first chapter Louise Gibessi's column deals with traveling.

Directions: Read and / or listen to Louise's column and try to understand the general meaning. Don't **stress out**\* about **every little** After you have read (or listened to) the story, you will have a chance to read (or hear) the meanings of the idioms used in the story with some brief examples. After you've learned what everything means, there will be a practice and review session at the end of the chapter. By this time you will be **up to snuff**\*\*\* on the meanings of all of the idioms and other expressions in the story.

(\* **stress** don't worry)

(\*\* **every little** about every detail)

(\*\*\* **up to** you will know about or be up to date on)

*Some common English expressions and idioms when talking about travel*

Below we have reprinted one of Louise Gibessi's recent columns about **travel**.

**TRAVEL**

*Below is a letter from a man who is concerned that his mother-in-law wants to be a part of the romantic vacation that he has planned for himself and his wife.*

Dear Louise Gibbesi,

I'm looking forward to my vacation, which is right around the I have been thinking about traveling to an island far away in the South Pacific because I really need to get away from it

The is that my wife wants her mother to go along with us on this vacation and, frankly, I don't want to open a can of by telling her that her mother is a pain in the and that I really wouldn't enjoy my vacation with her in I can't just come out and my wife that I don't want her mother around because that would go over like a lead

Louise, I'm chomping at the to fast my South Pacific vacation plans. My job is really stressful and this kind of vacation would be a great way to chill Having my mother-in-law along would be stressful. How do I put it my wife that three's a on this vacation? Signed: in Minnesota

Louise Gibessi responds:

Dear

You're getting all worked up over Contain and simply engage your Take a and then follow these steps. it all on the so that your wife can really understand where you are coming Suggest to her that this vacation should be just for the two of you—a kind of romantic or second Second, make a with your significant to the that mother would be welcome on the next vacation, or the next extended family outing.

Now, stop making a mountain out a and start making your vacation plans!

And, by the try your hand learning how to hula when your down there. It's a great way to relax!

Signed: Louise

**Right around the** (idiom) When something is *right around the corner* that means that it will happen very soon.

### **Examples:**

- My sister's wedding is right around the corner and I still haven't bought a dress for the occasion.
- Summer vacation is right around the corner and the students have already made their summer plans.

**To get away from it** (*idiom*) To escape from your normal, everyday life. To go somewhere where life is very different from what you experience in your daily life. To distance yourself from your normal daily life in such a way as to be pleasant and different from what you are normally used to.

### **Examples:**

- My job is terrible, my wife is not happy because she wants a new house, and the kids are complaining because they want new video Right now, I just want to get away from it all on some deserted South Pacific island!
- Some people like to get away from it all by taking a vacation on a cruise ship.

**The** (*noun, informal*) The problem, the obstacle, or the difficulty.

### **Examples:**

- John and Betty wanted to invite everyone they knew to their The rub was that they had a small apartment and they could only invite a small number of people.

- Kana loved to going speeding around the city in her sports The rub was that she couldn't afford to pay for all the speeding tickets.

Open a can of (idiom) To introduce more problems, possibly worse problems than those already occurring.

**Examples:**

- I really opened a can of worms when I reminded my girlfriend of the time she flirted with my She then started to remind me of all of the times when I flirted with her What a mess.
- You are just opening a can of worms when you start to argue with a policeman about giving you a traffic ticket.

Pain in the (idiom) A person or thing that is very annoying. This is for casual use, usually around people you already are acquainted with.

**Examples:**

- The new math class is such a pain in the We have to do homework every night.
- I hate it when Becky's friends come They're such a pain in the

In (idiom) A person who comes in tow is a friend or family member of the person who is actually invited. A person who

comes in tow with someone else is usually welcome mainly because of their affiliation with the person who brought them.

**Examples:**

- Sally came to my party last night with her sister in
- I attended the health seminar with my brother in. He came along because he wanted to learn more about nutrition and health.

**Can't just come out and (idiom)** When a person comes out and tells someone something, he or she is being very direct about passing information to someone else. Often, the information is obvious to other people but not to the recipient. Often, the information is embarrassing to the recipient and / or to the people around the recipient. Sometimes coming out and telling someone something can be impolite, embarrassing, or stressful, but usually it is necessary so that the person knows how others are feeling about him or her.

**Examples:**

- Stop. You should just come out and tell Harry that he has a hole in the back of his pants.
- Rather than *beat around the bush* the boss just came out and told his secretary that she was *around the bush*= being indirect or evasive about telling someone something.)

**Go over like a lead** (*idiom*) Information that is not welcome by another person.

**Examples:**

- Telling my wife that we would have to skip our vacation this year **went over like a lead**
- I told the police officer that the reason why I was speeding was because I had to go to the That **went over like a lead**

**Chomping at the** (*idiom*) Really anxious or excited to get started doing something.

**Examples:**

- I was **chomping at the bit** to learn English because then I could communicate with lots of people around the world.
- Our soccer team was **chomping at the bit** to win the championship.

**Fast** (*idiom*) To accelerate, to speed up, or make go faster.

**Examples:**

- My human resources manager decided that I could **fast track** my career by taking some courses in English.
- The architect told the builder that he could **fast track** the approval of the building plans by changing the design (*Building*



*plans must first be approved by the government before a building can be Sometimes this takes a long time.)*

**Chill** (idiom) Usually used as an imperative, **chill out** means to relax or be calm. Sometimes this is shortened to just the word

**Examples:**

- We should be home in about ten **Chill** you can get a drink of water then.
- After school, a group of us go to a pizza place, order pizza and just **chill**

**Put it to** (idiom) Means to explain something, usually something that may be difficult to discuss.

**Examples:**

- Let me **put it to you** this if you don't study for the exam, you won't pass.
- I couldn't figure out how to **put it to** my son that we wouldn't be able to go fishing this weekend.

**Three's a** (idiom) When a third person is unwelcome. Usually used when a couple wants to be alone or do something by themselves without a third person coming along or being present. The third person could be a friend or relative of one or both members of the couple.

**Examples:**

- My brother should know by now that when I am with my girlfriend, there's a
- Jackie had to tell her brother that he couldn't come with her and her boyfriend to the She told him that there was a

(*idiom*) To disrupt or restrict movement. When you are you feel restricted about what options you have to resolve an issue.

**Examples:**

- I was trying to plan our vacation, but everyone wanted to do something I really felt
- My brother was having a difficult time finding a birthday gift for his wife because she didn't really need His choices were limited and he felt a little hottied because he wanted to get her something nice.

Getting all worked up over (*idiom*) When you *get all worked up over* you get emotional about something that is not very important, or that appears to be more important than it really is.

**Examples:**

- This is just a You're getting all worked up over We're not going to be attacked by aliens from outer space!

- I thought the test was going to be really hard, but it was I **got all worked up over**

**Contain** (*idiom*) Means to control your behavior and relax. Often used playfully, contain yourself is used when someone is over emotional about something.

**Examples:**

- **Contain** I was only kidding when I said that your favorite movie star was coming to dinner with us.

- My girlfriend's plane will land in approximately ten I can hardly **contain**

**Engage your** (*idiom*) When you *engage your* you think rationally. **Engage your brain** is another idiom that is often used playfully; sometimes we say this to a person who is being lazy and they appear unwilling to think about something more carefully. (Note: this expression is used among people who are friendly. Saying this to someone you do not know could be insulting.)

**Examples:**

- Don't worry, you can pass the Just **engage your brain** and you will see how easy it is.
- Life doesn't have to be Just **engage your**

**Take a** (slang) *Take a pill* is another way to say or *stay*. This term is usually used playfully among people who are acquainted. It can be used sarcastically in some situations.

**Examples:**

- My wife kept bothering me about going to the doctor for a I told her to **take a** I'm too busy for a checkup right *(Slightly sarcastic in this context and may not be appreciated by the wife!)*
- I was really excited about seeing my favorite rock band and I couldn't contain my. Finally, my friend told me to **take a pill** because we'd be at the concert auditorium in less than ten minutes.

**Lay it all on the** (idiom) When you **lay it all on the** you are giving someone all of the facts and details about a situation. Many times, you use this expression when there is a misunderstanding that needs to be cleared up, or when something needs to be made more clear.

**Examples:**

- I **laid it all on the table** for I couldn't sign the contract unless all of my needs were listed in the contract.
- She just didn't understand the danger of smoking cigarettes so her doctor **laid it all on the table** for her.

**Coming\_** (idiom) The origin / source of your thinking, having to do with your point of view.

### ***Examples:***

- I'm not sure where my boss was coming from when he said I was doing a good job. Was he being sarcastic, or was he sincere?
- When my wife says she loves me, it comes from her heart.

**Romantic** A pause or segment of someone's life when they are romantic with someone else; a time taken for romance.

### ***Examples:***

- My sister and her husband used to watch the sunset. It was a beautiful romantic interlude for them.
- Jim's wife had a little romantic interlude with another man. When Jim found out, he filed for divorce.

**22. Second** After many years of marriage, some couples decide to take a honeymoon for the second time in their lives. The first honeymoon usually occurs right after marriage. A second honeymoon can occur many years later.

### ***Examples:***

- My mother and father took a second honeymoon after 50 years of marriage.
- My wife and I decided to take a second honeymoon after 25 years of marriage.

**To make a** To **make a pact** with someone is to make an agreement. A pact is usually more binding, stronger than just an agreement.

***Examples:***

- My friend and I **made a pact** to always help each other in emergencies.
- The two leaders **made a** nuclear non-proliferation **pact** (*an agreement not to continue to produce nuclear*

**Significant** Usually your wife or husband. Your significant other can be a girlfriend or a boyfriend.

***Examples:***

- I wanted to go have a few beers with my friends so I called my **significant other** to find out if she had any plans for us.
- It is possible for your **significant other** to be of the same sex in gay relationships.

**To the** Approximately, or something similar to (this idea).

***Examples:***

- I wasn't there when the mayor gave his speech, but he said something **to the effect** that taxes would be going up next year.