

English for Fun

Fremdsprachentexte | Englisch

English for Fun

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Reclam

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RECLAMS UNIVERSAL-BIBLIOTHEK Nr. 19887

2014 Philipp Reclam jun. GmbH & Co. KG,

Siemensstraße 32, 71254 Ditzingen

Druck und Bindung: Canon Deutschland Business Services GmbH,

Siemensstraße 32, 71254 Ditzingen

Printed in Germany 2017

RECLAM, UNIVERSAL-BIBLIOTHEK und

RECLAMS UNIVERSAL-BIBLIOTHEK sind eingetragene Marken

der Philipp Reclam jun. GmbH & Co. KG, Stuttgart

ISBN 978-3-15-019887-2

www.reclam.de

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English Can Be Fun!

English has become a global language. All over the world people use English for a variety of activities including negotiating
5 in business settings, studying, travelling, and surfing on the Internet. However, because people are often so busy using the language they have little time to stop and have fun with it. This is a pity. It is actually great fun to play with language.

English for Fun gives people a chance to play with English. It
10 aims to help people become familiar with colourful idioms, funny euphemisms as well as famous quotes which shed light on the cultures of native English speakers. In fact, even what we consider funny is influenced by where we grew up. For example, there is a considerable difference between what Brit-
15 ons, Australians, and Americans find funny. This is sometimes just a matter of vocabulary, but it is often related to cultural taboos. *English for Fun* presents a variety of funny entries from different English-speaking countries, but it is not meant to be comprehensive. It is a sampler.

20 English is also funny when it goes wrong ... And there is a lot that can go wrong with language. This book 'takes the mickey' out of English speakers' own writing as they often misspell, use commas incorrectly and write ambiguous sentences, which can completely change the meaning from what
25 they intended.

But even when it is perfectly correct, there are some words

11 f. **to shed light on s.th.** (fig.): Aufschluss über etwas geben, etwas erhellen (*shed – shed – shed*). | 17 **entry**: Eintrag. | 19 **comprehensive**: vollständig, umfassend. | 21 f. **to take the mickey out of s.o.** (BE, coll.): jdn. auf den Arm / die Schippe nehmen. | 23 **ambiguous**: mehrdeutig.

that simply sound funny from the very beginning such as ‘boondoggle’, ‘kerfuffle’, and ‘squeegee’. And there are idioms that evoke a funny image, including ‘to open a can of worms’ or ‘to stick your foot in your mouth’. But funny can refer to more than something that simply makes us laugh.

Saying, ‘that sounds funny, doesn’t it?’ reflects a sudden awareness that something sounds strange. (Germans would say *komisch*.) *English for Fun* takes this aspect of funny into account. Actually, the closer we look at language, the funnier it becomes. Everybody has experienced this: choose any word you like and repeat it twenty times. Eventually the word starts to sound, well, funny.

Classroom Use

English for Fun can be used to lighten up lessons, as well as for casual reading. People everywhere enjoy the silliness of language – all the more reason to include it in the classroom. Tongue twisters can help learners to make their pronunciation and rhythm sound more natural. Riddles are an excellent way of learning idioms, as riddles often play with the literal and figurative meanings of idioms, and idioms can be a window into the culture of native speakers!

Last but not least, *English for Fun* provides opportunities for expanding students’ vocabulary. In particular, this book contains collections of words and idioms that sound funny and are used frequently. Native speakers know these expressions ‘like

3 **to evoke**: hervorrufen, evozieren. | 8f. **to take s.th. into account**: etwas berücksichtigen, etwas beachten. | 14 **to lighten up**: hier: auflockern. | 15 **casual** [ˈkæʒjuəl] **reading**: Freizeitlektüre. | 17 **tongue twister**: Zungenbrecher. | 18 **riddle**: Rätsel.

the back of their hands'. If you want to find out how often some of these funny words and expressions are used in everyday speech, then just spend some time listening to a group of native speakers. Sooner or later they will say 'gobbledygook',
5 'gazillion' or 'gizmo', to name just a few examples. This is equally true of written language. Words like 'bloviate', 'boondoggle' and 'brouhaha' are commonly used in newspapers and news magazines.

10 *English for Fun*, then, is not just intended to make readers laugh; it is a resource for teachers who want to add some fun to their lessons.

That Sounds Funny ...

*Strange-sounding words, rhyming just for the fun of it,
noises animals make, tongue twisters and more ...*

5 caboodle cahoots canoodle codswallop
collywobbles ...

3 **tongue twister:** Zungenbrecher.

Funny-Sounding Words

English has lots of words that simply sound, well, funny. Most native speakers use these words and don't think they sound unusual at all until you draw their attention to them. Once you
5 read the list, you'll start noticing them – and why not try using some of them yourself?

balderdash nonsense. (See also **codswallop**.) *His excuse for coming late was complete balderdash.*

bamboozle deceive or confuse. *He bamboozled his enemies
10 with an unexpected action.*

bedraggled dishevelled, untidy, messy. *After falling in the swimming pool, the cat looked bedraggled.*

bloviate (AE) to talk about something at length in an arrogant manner without saying much. *Politicians love bloviating
15 about their reforms.*

boondocks (AE) also **boonies** backwoods, a remote rural area. (See also **woop-woop** [AusE], p. 27.) *He lives way out of town – somewhere in the boondocks.*

boondoggle (AE) a project that is a waste of time and money. *Unfortunately, the new airport will be a boondoggle.
20*

brouhaha an uproar in reaction to an event, speech, decision, etc. *It's hard to believe there has been so much brouhaha about same-sex marriage.*

caboodle 'the whole kit and caboodle' is a complete collection of things. *I didn't just lose my phone. I lost the headphones, the adapter, the charger, the case – the whole kit and
25 caboodle.*

4 **to draw s.o.'s attention to s.th.:** jdn. auf etwas aufmerksam machen. |

11 **dishevelled** [dɪʃ'vevəld]: unordentlich, zerzaust. | 17f. **way out of**

town: sehr weit draußen vor der Stadt. | 21 **uproar:** Aufruhr, Tumult. |

26 **charger:** Ladegerät.

cahoots to be ‘in cahoots with’ is to be partners in a shady, dubious, or illegal activity. *The Tour de France cyclists were in cahoots with the race organizers.*

canoodle (BE, AusE) to kiss and hug. *There was a bit of canoodling at the high school party.*

codswallop nonsense. (See also **balderdash**.) *What a load of codswallop!*

collywobbles (BE, AusE) a feeling in your stomach due to nervousness or fear. *I had the collywobbles before the job interview.*

diddly squat not anything at all. Always used in a negative sentence: *I don’t know diddly squat about economics.* Or: *I don’t know diddly about economics.* Or even: *I don’t know squat about it.*

discombobulated confused and upset. *When he woke up from the coma he was discombobulated.*

dollop a shapeless lump of something, usually cream. Also as a verb: *He dolloped out the cream.*

doozy (AE) something that is extraordinary or very serious for its kind. *That tornado was a doozy* (a very strong one). *That flu was a doozy* (a very bad one). *That test was a doozy* (a very difficult one).

flabbergasted so surprised or shocked that you don’t know what to say. *I was flabbergasted when she told me her twelve-year-old was pregnant.* (See also **gobsmacked**.)

flapdoodle (AE) meaningless talk. *That cell phone conversation I heard on the train was nothing but flapdoodle.*

flummoxed puzzled, perplexed. *He was flummoxed by her behaviour and didn’t know how to respond.*

1 **shady** (coll.): zwielichtig, fragwürdig. | 4 **to hug**: sich umarmen. |

17 **lump**: Klumpen. | 28 **puzzled**: verduztzt, verblüfft.

- gazebo** a garden house with lots of windows. *They enjoyed chatting over a lovely cup of tea in the gazebo.*
- gazillion** an extremely large, but unspecified, number, quantity, or amount. *There were a gazillion people at the Oktoberfest on Saturday.*
- gizmo** a small gadget or device. *He had a great little gizmo for opening locked car doors.*
- gobbledygook** language that is so complicated and full of jargon that it becomes impossible to understand. (Similar to **codswallop**.) *Most post-structuralist theory is gobbledygook, if you ask me.*
- gobsmacked** (BE, AusE) so surprised that you don't know what to say. (See also **flabbergasted**.) *She was gobsmacked when the doctor gave her the results of the test.*
- hornswoggle** (See **bamboozle**.) *The Internet scammer hornswoggled lots of people out of their money before he got caught.*
- hubbub** the noise a crowd makes. *There was so much hubbub at the party I couldn't hear myself think.*
- hullabaloo** a loud reaction to an event. (See also **brouhaha**.) *There was a hullabaloo about the referee's decision.*
- jiggery-pokery** (BE) manipulation, either deceitful: *The president won the election by jiggery-pokery*; or any other kind of manipulation: *Unlocking your smart phone involves a bit of jiggery-pokery.*
- kerfuffle** (BE) a fuss or commotion. *There was a big kerfuffle about the Royal Family not paying taxes.*
- lackadaisical** unenthusiastic, idle. *You'll never get anywhere in life with your lackadaisical attitude.*

6 **gadget**: Gerät, Apparat. | 15 **scammer** (coll.): Betrüger(in). | 22 **deceitful**: betrügerisch. | 26 **fuss**: Getue. | **commotion**: Wirbel, Aufregung. | 28 **idle**: faul, träge.

- lickety-split** immediately, without delay. *Don't worry. I'll take care of that lickety-split.*
- mollycoddle** (BE) to spoil or pamper someone. *Today's children are mollycoddled.*
- nincompoop** an idiot, a fool. *The boss is a complete nincompoop when it comes to communication.* 5
- pernickety** (BE), **persnickety** (AE) very inflexible, fussy. *He is very pernickety about grammar rules. As a noun: His pernicketyness knows no limits.*
- rambunctious** uncontrollably excited. *That child gets rambunctious when he eats too much chocolate.* 10
- ramshackle** in very bad physical condition. *They lived in a ramshackle house that was **on its last legs**.* (See p. 69.)
- razzmatazz** showiness. (See also **razzle-dazzle**, p. 26.) *That politician is known for his razzmatazz in speeches, but not for keeping his promises.* 15
- shebang** 'the whole shebang' is everything, all of it. (See **caboodle**.) *At the flea market, I found lots of LPs at one stand and decided to buy the whole shebang.*
- shenanigans** misbehaviour. *The boys were up to their usual shenanigans when the teacher left the classroom.* 20
- skedaddle** to run away, flee, leave quickly. *When her ex-boyfriend showed up at the party, she skedaddled out the back door.*
- skew-whiff** (BE) crooked, not straight. *She adjusted his tie because it was skew-whiff.* 25
- skulduggery** trickery, dishonest behaviour. *If you look closely, there is a lot of skulduggery in the stock market.*

3 **to pamper**: verwöhnen, verhätscheln. | 7 **fussy**: pingelig, kleinlich. |
 14 **showiness**: Effekthascherei, Geprahle. | 25 **crooked** ['krʊkɪd]:
 krumm. | **to adjust**: in Ordnung bringen; hier: (Krawatte) zurechtrücken.

smithereens small fragments caused by an explosion. *The land mine blew the truck to smithereens.*

squeegee an object with a handle and a rubber edge that you use to clean windows.

5 **wazoo** (AE) butt, ass. As in: *a pain in the wazoo*. With *up* or *out* it can mean ‘in excess’. *Germans are insured out the wazoo*. (In other words, Germans have far too much insurance.) *When the president came to town there was security up the wazoo*. (In other words, there were police everywhere.)

10 **whirligig** something that spins. It can also refer to any **gizmo** or strange piece of rotating technical equipment. *The scientist’s laboratory was full of whirligigs.*

Elephant’s at the Rubbity: Rhyming Slang

What does it mean when someone says everything is ‘apples’?

15 What if someone calls you a ‘berk’? And what should you do if an Australian tells you it’s high time you changed your ‘Reginals’?

20 The key to these puzzling expressions is something called ‘rhyming slang’, a kind of slang that originated in East London to confuse listeners who were outsiders. It is understood and used not only in Britain, but also in Australia, South Africa and New Zealand. (Americans, however, are generally not familiar with rhyming slang.)¹

1 One reason for the popularity or at least general acceptance of rhyming slang
25 in Australia may be the fact it was used among convicts and spread by them as they were shipped out to the Australian penal colonies.

5 **butt / ass** (AE, coll.): Arsch. | 18 **puzzling**: rätselhaft. | 19 **to originate** [ə'ɪdʒɪneɪt]: entstehen.

How does it work? You simply replace a word (it can be any word you like, but it is usually an everyday word) with a phrase of two or three words that rhymes with it. ‘Head’, for example, rhymes with ‘loaf of *bread*’. So if you want to tell someone to use their head (in other words: to think), you might say ‘use your loaf of bread’. The next step is to leave out the rhyming word, so that the end result is:

‘Use your loaf!’

People who are not familiar with rhyming slang will find this incomprehensible. A second example: we could replace ‘look’ with ‘butcher’s *hook*’. So if you want to take a look at the newspaper you could say, ‘I’m going to take a butcher’s at the newspaper.’

A relatively recent example involves **Reginald** (or ‘Reg’) Grundy, a very successful television producer, whose name became a household word in Australia in the 1980s.

‘You need to change your Reginalds.’

As ‘Grundys’ rhymes with ‘undies’ (underpants), some Australians started saying ‘Reg Grundys’ instead of ‘undies’. As in the example above (‘loaf’), the rhyming word is left out, so finally you end up with ‘reggies’ or ‘Reginalds’.

As far as **‘berk’** goes, it comes from the **‘Berkley hunt’**, a group of hunting hounds (with a very long history) from Berkshire in England. ‘Hunt’ rhymes with an English four-letter ob-

10 **incomprehensible**: unverständlich, unbegreiflich. | 16 **household word**: Alltagsausdruck, (fester) Begriff. | 22 **as far as (that) goes**: was (das) betrifft. | 24 f. **four letter (...) -unt**: *cunt* (vulg.): Fotze, Möse; (fig., pej.) Arsch.

scenity that begins with ‘c-’ and ends in ‘-unt’. So if somebody calls you a ‘berk’, it is an insult – although in most cases it simply means ‘idiot’. See if you can figure out these examples of rhyming slang:

5 Run up the **apples** and get on the **dog** to your **trouble**.

apples [and pears]	stairs
dog [and bone]	telephone
trouble [and strife]	wife

I’m wearing a **bag of fruit** to the interview tomorrow.

10 **bag of fruit** suit

‘Oh, so I have to look after the **saucepan lids** and do the housework while you enjoy yourself at the **rubbity** and get **elephant’s** – that’s very **apples and rice**.’

saucepan [lids]	kids
rubbity [dub]	pub
elephant’s [trunk]	drunk
apples [and rice]	nice

Hey **china**, how ya goin’? (AusE)

china [plate] mate

20 I spent the whole weekend sitting around on my **Khyber**.

Khyber [Pass] arse

8 **strife**: Zwietracht, Streit. | 16 **trunk**: Rüssel. | 18 **china**: Porzellan. | **how ya goin’?** (sl.): wie geht’s? (*ya* [coll.]: you). | 21 **Khyber Pass**: Chaiber-Pass (Bergpass zwischen Pakistan und Afghanistan). | **arse** (BE, sl.): Arsch.

Tourists who visit Australia are often afraid of **Joe Blakes** and **Noah's Arks**.

Joe Blake	snake
Noah's Ark	shark

“Hasta luego cocodrilo”

5

You may have noticed that the title of this section is in Spanish. “Hasta luego cocodrilo” is the Spanish version of a song by Bill Haley & His Comets from the year 1955. The original title was “See you later, alligator”, followed by “After 'while, crocodile”. This saying has become very popular and is still used today in 10 America. Elsewhere, it is usually like this:

A: See you later, alligator!

B: In a while, crocodile!

Children love this sort of rhyming game. Here are ‘some more, department store’:

15

No way, José!

Far out, Brussels sprout!

What's the deal, banana peel?

What's cookin', good lookin'?

4 **shark**: Hai. | 10 **saying**: Redensart. | 16 **no way**: niemals!, vergiss es! | 17 **far out**: super, toll. | **Brussels sprout**: Rosenkohl. | 18 **what's the deal?** (coll.): worum geht's? | 19 **what's cookin'?** (coll.): was ist los?

20 That Sounds Funny ...

What's up, buttercup?
What's the plan, Stan?
Okey-dokey, artichokey!
Don't panic, Titanic!

5 **Tongue Twisters**

In German you break your tongue; in English, you twist it. For a little tongue tango try these:

Unique New York.

A noisy noise annoys an oyster.

10 The sixth sheik's sixth sheep is sick.

Nine nimble noblemen nibbling nuts.

Sally sells sea shells by the sea shore.

Sam's shop stocks short spotted socks.

Six slippery snails slid slowly seaward.

15 Fred fed Ted bread and Ted fed Fred bread.

1 **buttercup**: Butterblume. | 3 **okey-dokey**: okay. | 8 **unique** [ju:'ni:k]: einzigartig, einmalig. | 9 **oyster**: Auster. | 10 **sheik(h)** [ʃeɪk]: Scheich. | 11 **nimble**: flink, behende, geschickt. | **nobleman**: Adliger. | **to nibble**: knabbern. | 12 **shell**: Muschel. | 14 **to slide**: rutschen, gleiten (*slide* – *slid* – *slid*).

How much wood would a woodchuck chuck
if a woodchuck could chuck wood?

A skunk sat on a stump and thunk the stump stunk, but the
stump thunk the skunk stunk too.²

The big black bug bit the big black bear 5
but the big black bear bit the big black bug back.

To begin to toboggan first buy a toboggan. But do not buy
too big a toboggan. Too big a toboggan is too big a toboggan
to buy to begin to toboggan.

Theodore Oswaldtwistle, the thistle sifter, sifting a sack of 10
thistles, thrust three thorns through the thick of his thumb.

Betty Botter had some butter, ‘But,’ she said, ‘this butter’s
bitter! If I bake this bitter butter, it would make my batter
bitter. But a bit of better butter – that would make my batter
better.’ So she bought a bit of butter, better than her bitter 15
butter, and she baked it in her batter, and the batter was
not bitter. So ’twas better Betty Botter bought a bit of better
butter.

The following tongue twisters have an additional twist. Try
saying them slowly at first. Then increase the tempo until you 20
say something you didn’t actually want to say ...

2 ‘Think’ is a playful past participle of ‘think’. After all, if you say ‘drink –
drank – drunk’, why not ‘think – thank – think’?

1 **woodchuck**: Waldmurmeltier. | **to chuck**: schmeißen, werfen. | 5 **bug**:
Insekt. | 7 **to toboggan** [tə'boʊgən]: Schlitten fahren, rodeln. | 10 **thistle**
sifter: »Distelsieber(in)« (*thistle*: Distel; *to sift*: sieben). | 11 **to thrust**:
stechen; stoßen (*thrust – thrust – thrust*). | 13 **batter**: (Ausback-, Pfann-
kuchen-)Teig.

One smart man, he felt smart.

I'm not a fig plucker or a fig plucker's son. But I'll pluck figs
till the fig plucker comes.

I slit a sheet, a sheet I slit and on that slitted sheet I sit.

5 I am a pheasant plucker, a pheasant plucker's son, and I'll be
plucking pheasants till all the pheasant plucking's done.

Two Witches

There was a witch
The witch had an itch
10 The itch was so itchy it
Gave her a twitch.

Another witch
Admired the twitch
So she started twitching
15 Though she had no itch.

Now both of them twitch
So it's hard to tell which
Witch has the itch and
Which witch has the twitch.³

20 Alexander Resnikoff

3 Davies, John (ed.), *Everyman's Book of Nonsense*, London: Dent, 1981, p. 187.

2 **fig plucker**: Feigenpflücker(in). | 4 **to slit**: (auf)schlitzten (*slit – slit – slit*). | 5 **pheasant** ['fezənt] **plucker**: Fasanenrupfer(in). | 9 **itch**: Juckreiz. | 11 **twitch**: Zucken; Zuckung.

Wishy-Washy, Arty-Farty

Things like ‘wishy-washy’ and ‘willy-nilly’ are called reduplications. A reduplication is simply a repetition of a syllable – with or without a slight change. English has literally hundreds of them. Some of them can be used as verbs (‘dilly-dally’), but most of them function as adjectives or nouns. Believe it or not: people use these all the time!

airy-fairy not concerned with reality; vague, impractical. *He has an airy-fairy plan to save the rainforests.*

arty-farty (BE) / **artsy fartsy** (AE) pretentious, acting as if interested in the arts. *I’m sick of your arty-farty pseudo-intellectual friends.*

argy-bargy (BE) a lively, but not serious, argument. Also used as an adjective: *You don’t need to get all argy-bargy about it!*

bric-a-brac old, worthless stuff used as decoration. *The old woman decorated the entire house with bric-a-brac.*

chit-chat, chitter chatter light conversation, gossip, ‘hot air’. *I don’t have time for her endless chit-chat.*

claptrap (BE) insincere or pretentious talk, nonsense *Everything he says is claptrap.*

dilly-dally to waste time, fuff around. *No dilly-dallying!*

easy-peasy (BE) very simple. *That test was easy-peasy.*

flip-flop (AE) to constantly change your opinion. *That politician is known for his flip-flopping on issues.*

fuddy-duddy an old-fashioned person. *He’s such an old fuddy-duddy, he never wants to try anything new.*

10 **pretentious**: überheblich, präntentiös. | 20 **insincere**: unaufrichtig. |

22 **to fuff around**: Zeit vertrödeln.

goody-goody someone who never breaks the rules. *At school she's a goody-goody, but at home . . . watch out!*

hanky-panky sexual misbehaviour: kissing, cuddling and groping. *No hanky-panky!*

5 **heebie-jeebies** to feel nervously uncomfortable or slightly scared. *The way he looked at me gave me the heebie-jeebies.* (See also **the creeps**, p. 117.)

helter-skelter in a confused way. In Britain, it also refers to a spiral slide at an amusement park. *The people ran helter-skelter when they heard the gunshots at the demonstration.*

10 **higgledy-piggledy** chaotic, disorganized. *It's no wonder he can never find anything: he throws everything on his desk higgledy-piggledy.*

hob-nob to rub elbows with, to **schmooze** (see p. 83) with, to chat with influential people hoping that they will do you favours. *I went to opening night to do some hob-nobbing.*

hocus-pocus magic formula; or deceit or trickery. *The government balanced the budget using a bit of hocus-pocus.*

20 **hoity-toity** arrogant, snobbish. *That rich woman had a hoity-toity look on her face.*

hodgepodge a disorganized set of things. *There used to be a hodgepodge of currencies in Europe.*

25 **hurly-burly** refers to loud activity, commotion, or noisy confusion. *Some people love the hurly-burly of the Oktoberfest.* (Compare with **helter-skelter**.)

2 **to watch out:** aufpassen, sich vorsehen. | 4 **groping** (coll.): Fummeln. | 14 **to rub elbows with s.o.:** mit jdm. – besonders mit einflussreichen Menschen – Umgang/Kontakt haben. | 16 **opening night:** Eröffnungsvorstellung, Premiere. | 18 **deceit:** Täuschung; Betrug. | 19 **to balance the budget:** den Haushalt ausgleichen. | 24 **commotion:** Unruhe, Wirbel.