

## Oxford compiles top 10 irritating phrases

Researchers have recently compiled a list of the most irritating phrases - Britain's *Daily Telegraph* reported. Heading the list was the expression 'at the end of the day' which was followed by the phrase 'fairly unique'. In third place was 'I personally'. This expression BBC Radio 4 presenter John Humphries has described as "the linguistic equivalent of having chips with rice." Also making the top ten is the grammatically incorrect 'shouldn't of', instead of "shouldn't have". These phrases appear in a new book called *Damp Squid*, named after the mistake of confusing a squid with a squib, a type of firework. The phrases were compiled by researchers onto a database called the Oxford University Corpus, which comprises papers, magazines, books, broadcast material, the internet and other sources. The database alerts them to new words and phrases. It can also tell them which expressions are disappearing. In addition it shows how words are being misused.

The book's author Jeremy Butterworth says, "Many annoyingly over-used expressions actually began as office lingo, such as "24/7" and "synergy". Other phrases to irritate people are "ironically" and "literally", when they are used out of context". He added, "We grow tired of anything that is repeated too often - an anecdote, a joke, a mannerism - and the same seems to have happened with some language." It does beg the question what are the top ten phrases that bug you? There are thousands of phrases to consider like: "Can I get a coffee?" "I don't know, can you?" is one answer to this. What about the "enormity" of the task ahead. "No problem" is another. The American "Filling out" appears to have replaced the English "Filling in". You could "Get a life!" Try to learn these phrases "ASAP" and "Enjoy!"

**The top 10 most irritating phrases.** 1) At the end of the day; 2) Fairly unique; 3) I personally; 4) At this moment in time; 5) With all due respect; 6) Absolutely; 7) It's a nightmare; 8) Shouldn't of; 9) 24/7; 10) It's not rocket science.

**Category: English language / English / Phrases**  
**Level: Intermediate / Upper intermediate**

## Oxford compiles top 10 irritating phrases – 25<sup>th</sup> December 2010

More daft phrases include "9/11" when it's 11/9 or "African American". Unless you were born in Africa, you are American. Another is "what gets my goat". You could be "kinda pregnant" or "basically" you could be ok or "vice versa". "Awesome!" "You know what I mean?" An "ATM machine" is also known as "a hole in the wall". Other phrases include "For the record", "moving forward" or "it's like"; "Whatever"; "See what I'm sayin'"; "Correct me if I'm wrong"; and "Really". You could begin every sentence with "I mean". You can also say "How come?" instead of "why"? The phrase "been there, done that" annoys some; while "Oh my god" annoys others. Americans right now want "change".

"Frankly speaking" can also be written as just "Frankly" or even "Let me be Frank with you." All these phrases could all be "over the top". You could use "basically" at the start of a sentence". How about "going forward". What exactly does this mean? We all like to "sleep in". Does anyone sleep out? "Literally" it could be "an actual fact" "you know". "Hi I'm on the train" must be the most irritating phrase spoken into a mobile or "Press 1 for English". "Okey Dokey!" "The bottom line is" "it's a nightmare" so please "bear with me". "Make no mistake about it" "like you do" "at the end of the day" it is time to say "bye-bye" and "legit". "God forbid" us all. "Maybe" "the glass is half full". "When it's all said and done" we can "touch base". "I appreciate that". "How much?"

These days "I am sick and tired of" when we have to be "politically correct". Some phrases like "re-inventing the wheel" are "like taking a step back". "In my opinion" is another phrase. "To die for" is another. "Is that it?" Some phrases are "old school". How often do we hear "lessons must be learnt" when they rarely aren't. "You know?" "I, myself". Who else would it be stupid! Sorry, "it never dawned on me". Still, "have a good one". A good one what? "Having said that" "the fact of the matter is" "I have too much on my plate".

"We have a window of opportunity" in this "comfort zone". To sum the top ten phrases up I "absolutely" agree... and "with all due respect", "at this moment in time", "I personally feel" that "it's a nightmare" to be told "24/7" that finding a "fairly unique" new phrase is "not rocket science". After all, "at the end of the day" "one shouldn't of" to literally use "upcoming" phrases "on a daily basis" simply because "it's the done thing". That, my friend "is neither here nor there". "Have a nice day!"

Oxford compiles top 10 irritating phrases – 25<sup>th</sup> December 2010  
**EXERCISES**

1. **Irritating phrases:** What phrases irritate you? Go round the room swapping stories. Change partners often.

2. **Dictation:** The teacher will read four to six lines of the article slowly and clearly. Students will write down what they hear. The teacher will repeat the passage slowly again. Self-correct your work from page one - filling in spaces and correcting mistakes. Be honest with yourself on the number of errors. Advise the teacher of your total number of errors. Less than five is very good. Ten is acceptable. Any more is room for improvement! More than twenty - you need to do some work!

3. **Reading:** The students should now read the article aloud, swapping readers every paragraph.

4. **Vocabulary:** Students should now look through the article and underline any vocabulary they do not know. Look in dictionaries. Discuss and help each other out. The teacher will go through and explain any unknown words or phrases.

5. **The article:** Students should look through the article with the teacher.

- a) What is the article about?
- b) What do you think about the article?
- c) **Try to explain as many of the phrases as you can.**

6. **Let's think!** Pick five irritating phrases from the article. Then add five of your own. Write them below. Explain to your partner why you chose these. How often do you use them? Use them to compile a short story!

Five irritating phrases from the article	Five irritating phrases of your own
1	1
2	2
3	3
4	4
5	5

**The teacher** will choose some pairs to discuss their findings in front of the class.

7. **Sentence starters:** Finish these sentence starters. Correct your mistakes. Compare what other people have written.

- a) Irritating phrases \_\_\_\_\_
- b) Researchers \_\_\_\_\_
- c) What bugs me \_\_\_\_\_
- d) Stupid phrases \_\_\_\_\_

Oxford compiles top 10 irritating phrases – 25<sup>th</sup> December 2010

**8. Quick debate:** In pairs. Students A thinks irritating phrases are fun. Students B don't agree. They irritate you. Explain why.

**9. Let's write an e-mail:** Write and send a 200 word e-mail to your teacher about: Irritating phrases. Try to use at least ten in your email. Your e-mail can be read out in class.

**10. Let's do 'The Article Quiz':** Have the students quiz each other in pairs. They score a point for each correct answer and half a point each time they have to look at the article for help. See who can get the highest score!

**Student A**

- 1) What is the name of the book?
- 2) Who wrote this book?
- 3) Name three top ten irritating phrases.
- 4) What does squib mean?
- 5) Which university is mentioned?

**Student B**

- 1) How do these over-used expressions usually start?
- 2) Name the radio station.
- 3) Who is the presenter mentioned?
- 4) Name the newspaper.
- 5) Who have recently compiled a list of the most irritating phrases?

## DISCUSSION

**Student A's questions**

- 1) Did the headline make you want to read the article?
- 2) What irritating phrases do your friends use?
- 3) Have you ever been to Oxford?
- 4) Do you ever listen to BBC Radio 4?
- 5) What irritating phrases do your teachers use?
- 6) What new phrases have you learnt today?
- 7) Why do we use irritating phrases?
- 8) What is the most irritating phrase you use?
- 9) Have you ever tried to stop using an irritating phrase?
- 10) Do your friends tell you when you use an irritating phrase?

**Student B's questions**

- 1) What do you think about what you read?
- 2) What irritates you?
- 3) Do you use irritating phrases? Which?
- 4) What do you think of all these irritating phrases?
- 5) Are many words misused?
- 6) Do you use grammatically incorrect words?
- 7) Do you use slang?
- 8) Give an example of some slang.
- 9) Where do you learn your new words from?
- 10) Did you like this discussion?

Oxford compiles top 10 irritating phrases – 25<sup>th</sup> December 2010  
**GAP FILL: READING**

Put the words into the gaps in the text.

**Oxford compiles top 10 irritating phrases**

(1)\_\_\_\_\_ have recently compiled a list of the most irritating phrases - Britain's *Daily Telegraph* reported. Heading the list was the expression 'at the end of the day' which was followed by the phrase 'fairly unique'. In third place was 'I personally'. This expression BBC Radio 4 (2)\_\_\_\_\_ John Humphries has described as "the (3)\_\_\_\_\_ (4)\_\_\_\_\_ of having chips with rice." Also making the top ten is the grammatically incorrect "shouldn't of", instead of "shouldn't have". These (5)\_\_\_\_\_ appear in a new book called *Damp Squid*, named after the mistake of confusing a squid with a squib, a type of (6)\_\_\_\_\_. The phrases were compiled by researchers onto a database called the Oxford University Corpus, which comprises papers, magazines, books, broadcast material, the internet and other (7)\_\_\_\_\_. The (8)\_\_\_\_\_ alerts them to new words and phrases. It can also tell them which expressions are disappearing. In addition it shows how words are being misused.

*database*

*researchers*

*presenter*

*phrases*

*sources*

*linguistic*

*firework*

*equivalent*

The book's (1)\_\_\_\_\_ Jeremy Butterworth says, "Many (2)\_\_\_\_\_ over-used (3)\_\_\_\_\_ actually began as office lingo, such as "24/7" and "synergy". Other phrases to (4)\_\_\_\_\_ people are "(5)\_\_\_\_\_" and "literally", when they are used out of context". He added, "We grow tired of anything that is repeated too often - an anecdote, a (6)\_\_\_\_\_, a (7)\_\_\_\_\_ - and the same seems to have happened with some (8)\_\_\_\_\_." It does beg the question 'What are the top ten phrases that bug you?' There are thousands of phrases to consider like: "Can I get a coffee?" "I don't know, can you?" is one answer to this. What about the "enormity" of the task ahead. "No problem" is another. The American "Filling out" appears to have replaced the English "Filling in". You could "Get a life!" Try to learn these phrases "ASAP" and "Enjoy!"

*ironically*

*mannerism*

*language*

*author*

*expressions*

*joke*

*annoyingly*

*irritate*

Oxford compiles top 10 irritating phrases – 25<sup>th</sup> December 2010  
**GAP FILL: LISTENING:**

*Listen and fill in the spaces.*

### Oxford compiles top 10 irritating phrases

Researchers have recently compiled \_\_\_\_\_ irritating phrases - Britain's *Daily Telegraph* reported. Heading the list was the expression 'at \_\_\_\_\_' which was followed by the phrase 'fairly unique'. In third place was 'I personally'. This expression BBC Radio 4 presenter John Humphries has described as "the linguistic equivalent of having chips with rice." Also making \_\_\_\_\_ grammatically incorrect "shouldn't of", instead of "shouldn't have". These phrases appear in a new book called *Damp Squid*, named after the mistake of confusing \_\_\_\_\_, a type of firework. The phrases were compiled by researchers onto a database called the Oxford University Corpus, which comprises papers, magazines, books, broadcast material, the internet and other sources. The database alerts them \_\_\_\_\_ phrases. It can also tell them which expressions are disappearing. In addition \_\_\_\_\_ are being misused.

\_\_\_\_\_ Jeremy Butterworth says, "Many annoyingly over-used expressions actually began as office lingo, such as "24/7" and "synergy". Other phrases to irritate people are "ironically" and "literally", when they are \_\_\_\_\_". He added, "We grow tired of anything that is repeated too often - an anecdote, a joke, a mannerism - and the same seems to have happened with some language." It \_\_\_\_\_ 'What are the top ten phrases that bug you?' There are thousands of phrases to consider like: "\_\_\_\_\_?" "I don't know, can you?" is one answer to this. What about the "enormity" of the task ahead. "No problem" is another. The American "Filling out" appears to have replaced the English "Filling in". You could "Get a life!" \_\_\_\_\_ phrases "ASAP" and "Enjoy!"

Oxford compiles top 10 irritating phrases – 25<sup>th</sup> December 2010  
**GRAMMAR**

Put the words into the gaps in the text.

**Oxford compiles top 10 irritating phrases**

Researchers have recently compiled a list of the most irritating phrases - Britain's *Daily Telegraph* reported. Heading (1)\_\_\_ list was the expression '(2)\_\_\_ the end of the day' which was followed by the phrase 'fairly unique'. In third place was 'I personally'. This expression BBC Radio 4 presenter John Humphries has described (3)\_\_\_ "the linguistic equivalent of having chips with rice." Also making the top ten is the grammatically incorrect "shouldn't of", instead of "shouldn't have". These phrases appear in (4)\_\_\_ new book called *Damp Squid*, named after the mistake (5)\_\_\_ confusing a squid with a squib, a type of firework. The phrases were compiled (6)\_\_\_ researchers (7)\_\_\_ a database called the Oxford University Corpus, which comprises papers, magazines, books, broadcast material, the internet (8)\_\_\_ other sources. The database alerts them to new words and phrases. It can also tell them which expressions are disappearing. In addition it shows how words are being misused.

*and*  
*onto*  
*at*  
*of*  
*by*  
*as*  
*a*  
*the*

The book's author Jeremy Butterworth says, "Many annoyingly over-used expressions actually began as office lingo, (1)\_\_\_ "24/7" and "synergy". (2)\_\_\_ phrases to irritate people are "ironically" and "literally", when (3)\_\_\_ are used out of context". He added, "We grow tired of anything that is repeated too often - an anecdote, a joke, a mannerism - and the (4)\_\_\_ seems to have happened (5)\_\_\_ some language." It does beg the question 'What are the top ten phrases (6)\_\_\_ bug you?' There are thousands of phrases to consider like: "Can I get a coffee?" "I don't know, can you?" is one answer to this. What about the "enormity" of the task ahead. "No problem" is another. The American "Filling out" appears to have replaced the English "Filling in". You (7)\_\_\_ "Get a life!" Try to learn (8)\_\_\_ phrases "ASAP" and "Enjoy!"

*such as*  
*that*  
*same*  
*other*  
*with*  
*they*  
*these*  
*could*

Oxford compiles top 10 irritating phrases – 25<sup>th</sup> December 2010  
SPELLING TEST

The teacher will ask the class individually to spell the following words that are in the article. Afterwards, check your answers with your teacher, using the following ratings: **Pass = 12, Good = 15, Very good = 18, Excellent = 20**

1	phrases	11	daft
2	irritating	12	synergy
3	grammatically	13	lingo
4	personally	14	politically
5	nightmare	15	anecdote
6	basically	16	uniquely
7	awesome	17	ironically
8	opportunity	18	absolutely
9	literally	19	expressions
10	annoyingly	20	mannerism

**LINKS**

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/newsttopics/debates/3394545/Oxford-compiles-list-of-top-ten-irritating-phrases.html>

[http://www.newenglishreview.org/blog\\_direct\\_link.cfm/blog\\_id/17892](http://www.newenglishreview.org/blog_direct_link.cfm/blog_id/17892)

[http://literaryculture.suite101.com/article.cfm/the\\_english\\_languages\\_most\\_irritating\\_phrases](http://literaryculture.suite101.com/article.cfm/the_english_languages_most_irritating_phrases)

<http://www.wired.com/underwire/2008/11/oxford-research/>

**ANSWERS**

GAP FILL: Oxford compiles top 10 irritating phrases: **Researchers** have recently compiled a list of the most irritating phrases - Britain's *Daily Telegraph* reported. Heading the list was the expression 'at the end of the day' which was followed by the phrase 'fairly unique'. In third place was 'I personally'. This expression BBC Radio 4 **presenter** John Humphries has described as "the **linguistic equivalent** of having chips with rice." Also making the top ten is the grammatically incorrect "shouldn't of", instead of "shouldn't have". These **phrases** appear in a new book called *Damp Squid*, named after the mistake of confusing a squid with a squib, a type of **firework**. The phrases were compiled by researchers onto a database called the Oxford University Corpus, which comprises papers, magazines, books, broadcast material, the internet and other **sources**. The **database** alerts them to new words and phrases. It can also tell them which expressions are disappearing. In addition it shows how words are being misused.

The book's **author** Jeremy Butterworth says, "Many **annoyingly** over-used **expressions** actually began as office lingo, such as "24/7" and "synergy". Other phrases to **irritate** people are "**ironically**" and "literally", when they are used out of context". He added, "We grow tired of anything that is repeated too often - an anecdote, a **joke**, a **mannerism** - and the same seems to have happened with some **language**." It does beg the question "What are the top ten phrases that bug you?" There are thousands of phrases to consider like: "Can I get a coffee?" "I don't know, can you?" is one answer to this. What about the "enormity" of the task ahead. "No problem" is another. The American "Filling out" appears to have replaced the English "Filling in". You could "Get a life!" Try to learn these phrases "ASAP" and "Enjoy!" (V1)

(This is a remodelled lesson)



Created by **David Robinson**. This ESL lesson is the copyright of [www.newsflashenglish.com](http://www.newsflashenglish.com)