

PRACTICE ROOM 18 · GOING FURTHER

WHAT THE BRITISH *really mean*

Politeness, understatement and everyday idioms: the hidden layer of British English.

Name: _____ Date: _____ Interactive version: attenglish.com/talk/18

PHRASE BOX SAY IT
UNDERSTATEMENT

Not bad (= very good)
A bit annoying (= very annoying)
Quite good (= could be anything!)

POLITENESS

I'll bear it in mind (= probably not)
With respect... (= I disagree)
You must come round some time
(= friendly, but not an invitation yet)

IDIOMS

It's not my cup of tea.
I'm knackered.
It's a piece of cake.

WHAT THEY SAY, WHAT THEY MEAN MATCH

Match each British phrase to what it usually means. Write the letter in the middle column.

They say	Letter	They usually mean
1. I'll bear it in mind.		A. Often: it was your fault, but let's be polite.
2. Not bad at all.		B. I disagree, and I don't want to discuss it.
3. I hear what you say.		C. That's really good.
4. Quite interesting.		D. I probably won't do anything about it.
5. Sorry, my fault.		E. Friendly, but not a real invitation yet.
6. You must come round for dinner some time.		F. Not very interesting.

EVERYDAY IDIOMS MATCH

Match each idiom to its meaning. Write the letter in the middle column.

Idiom	Letter	Meaning
1. I'm knackered.		A. It's very easy.
2. It's not my cup of tea.		B. I'm very disappointed.
3. It's a piece of cake.		C. It was very expensive.
4. I'm gutted.		D. I'm very tired.
5. Let's call it a day.		E. Let's stop working now.
6. It cost an arm and a leg.		F. I don't really like it.

UNDERSTATEMENT QUIZ QUIZ

The British often say less than they mean. What do these speakers really mean? Circle your answer.

1. After running a marathon: "My legs are a bit tired."

a) Slightly tired

b) Extremely tired

c) Not tired

2. Looking at a flooded kitchen: "Well, that's not ideal."

a) It's a disaster.

b) It's nearly perfect.

c) It's fine.

3. Your friend tastes your cake and says, "Ooh, that's not bad at all."

a) It's terrible.

b) It's really good.

c) It's just OK.

4. Your colleague says, "The meeting was a bit lively."

a) There was a big argument.

b) It was fun.

c) Nobody spoke.