

# Živa riječ

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## FUNCTIONAL ENGLISH

Everyday, colloquial English is marked by a host of little phrases and expressions not generally prominent in the foreign learner's text-book. And yet they are a feature of alive, authentic language, which the native speaker uses all the time. The non-native can communicate adequately without these little phrases, but with them can sound much more like a real Englishman.

In the following pages, a series of language functions (apologizing, persuading, expressing surprise, etc.) are illustrated by short dialogues featuring some of these little colloquial phrases. The choice of language also depends on the particular situation: different phrases are appropriate to different situations, though the function may be the same. It wouldn't be very apt, for example, to say »Come on! It's not the end of the world!« to a girl whose boyfriend has just been involved in a fatal accident.

The speaker's mood and feelings are also important — one may refuse a request abruptly or more tactfully, and grant one willingly or reluctantly, with accompanying gestures and facial expressions.

Informal register is emphasized throughout, in everyday situations. When Chris can't accept Sarah's views on modern music, he uses the colloquial »Come on« and »Come off it«, where an executive at a board meeting might prefer the much more formal »I'm not entirely convinced...« or »I really must take issue with you there« to express his disagreement.

Certain little words and expressions, such as »well« and »Come on«, are very versatile, their meaning depending on the situation and on the speaker's intonation. »Well« is a particularly useful word, which can for example suggest disagreement in itself, tactful or even ironic, according to the tone of voice. It may introduce, or occur during, a sentence, as a filling-in word which the flow of the utterance going, without having a concrete meaning in itself.

### 1. PLEASANT SURPRISE

Two old friends, Richard and Graeme, happen to meet at a party.  
They haven't seen each other for a long time.

Richard: Graeme! *Well I never!*

Graeme: Richard! *I haven't seen you for ages!*

Richard: (Slapping him on the shoulder) *Great to see you!*

Graeme: And you! *What a nice surprise!*

Richard: You look marvellous! Let's have a drink to celebrate!

Other phrases: Is it really you!

It can't be!

You're the last person I expected to see here.

You haven't changed a bit!

## 2. UNPLEASANT SURPRISE

Penny and Doug have just heard that their friend Alan has been injured in a car crash.

Penny: *Oh no! How awful!*

Doug: *What a terrible thing to happen!*

Penny: What a shock for poor Jenny.

Doug: Oh, dear, oh, dear! Apparently he's broken both his legs.

Penny: Oh no! *He hasn't, has he?*

Other phrases: What dreadful news!

It can't be true.

I can't believe it.

In a situation where e.g. Mark has left his wife to go off with his secretary:

What? He can't have!

You're not serious!

There must be some mistake.

But how could he?

He wouldn't do such a thing.

## 3. DRAWING SOMEONE'S ATTENTION TO SOMETHING

At the railway station. Nick has just got off the train in a dreadful hurry to make a phone call.

Caroline: (shouting through window on train) *Hey! Nick! Wait!*

Other person on

platform, to Nick: *Excuse me. Just a moment* — I think someone's shouting to you from the train.

Nick: What? (sees Caroline waving frantically)

Oh, it's Caroline!

Caroline: Nick! You've left your wallet on the train, you idiot!

Other phrases: Excuse me! (but you're standing on my foot)

Sorry, but ... (... isn't that your handbag on the floor?)

More direct: Hey! You!

You there! Oh! (Can be rude)

## 4. TRYING TO FIND THE APPROPRIATE WORD

Alec is finding it difficult to make a rather important request.

Alec: *Well, what I'm trying to say is ... er ... you know ... how can I put it ... um ...*

Paula: Yes?

Alec: (coughing) Well, we've known each other for some time now and ...  
*er* ... actually, quite a long time, and ... (his face turning a bright  
red)

Paula: Yes?

Alec: ... *and the fact is that ... how can I put it? ... um ... well ...* (taking  
a deep breath) Paula, will you marry me?

Paula: Oh, Alec! (flinging her arms around him)

English speech is punctuated with hesitation devices like »um« and »er«, which give the speaker time to think and to find the right words.

Others include: you see  
in fact  
the thing is  
you know

(Excessive use of these devices should be avoided, as they can become very irritating e.g. constant repetition of »you know«.)

## 5. AGREEING

Cliff and Matthew are discussing modern sport.

Cliff: I think sport should be strictly amateur.

Matthew (nodding his head): Yes, *I quite agree*. It's far too commercial nowadays.

Cliff: *Definitely*. And it's too serious — where's all the fun gone?

Matthew: *Just what I was going to say*. These tennis players, for example ...

Cliff: *That's right*. It's just big business.

Other phrases: Yes, of course.

That's true.

Certainly! Absolutely! Exactly!

That's a good point.

I couldn't agree more.

You've hit the nail on the head.

## 6. DISAGREEING

Sarah: Modern music is much better than Beethoven.

Chris: *Come on! You can't be serious!*

Sarah: Pop music is so much more exciting than boring old symphonies.

Chris (shaking his head): *Come off it!* I've never heard such rubbish in all my life!

Other phrases: I disagree.

Oh, I don't know ...

Well, actually ...

Well, in fact ...

Yes, but ...

Yes, but ... on the other hand ...

That's all very well, but ...  
But don't you think ...

More emphatic: Surely, ...  
Surely not!  
Hardly!  
What?  
Nonsense!

## 7. PERSUADING, TALKING SOMEONE INTO SOMETHING

Margaret is trying to persuade Sean to apply for a higher position in his firm.

Sean: But I haven't got the experience ...  
Margaret: *Come on!* You can do it!  
Sean: Malcolm's bound to get it anyway ...  
Margaret: *Please! For my sake*, as well as yours.  
*Go on!* At least, try! You've nothing to lose.  
Other phrases: I believe in you.  
Don't underestimate yourself.  
We're all behind you.  
If anyone can do it, you can.  
You'll regret it if you don't try.

## 8. GRANTING A REQUEST

Fiona wants to go to the party of a friend who is not approved of by her parents.

Fiona: Please, Dad. It's going to be a really special party.  
Father: You know I disapprove of Carol and her friends. But *if you really insist* ...  
Fiona: I'll have a fantastic time!  
Father: I'm not happy about it, you know. But *if you must* ...  
Fiona: So I can go?  
Father: (shrugging his shoulders): *Well, I suppose so. Just this once.* But never ask me again!

Other phrases, giving reluctant permission: All right. Have it your way.  
I suppose I'll let you twist my arm.

Other situations, involving possible disappointment, even danger: Bet it on your head.  
Don't blame me if something happens.

More willing: Yes, of course.  
Sure. Certainly.  
Why not?  
Go ahead!  
By all means.  
It's fine by me.

## 9. REFUSING A REQUEST

16-year-old Juliet asks her parents if she can go on holiday with her boyfriend, Robert.

Juliet: But Mum ...

Mother: (shaking her head) *It's out of the question, Juliet.*

Juliet: Oh, please ...

Mother: *No, and that's final!*

Juliet: But you know Robert and I are serious.

Mother: I'm not going to discuss it anymore!

Emphatic, sweeping rejection: Never! Not in a million years!

Over my dead body!

You must be joking!

Are you serious?

You have a cheek even to ask!

More moderate, tactful: I'm sorry, but no.

Sorry, I'm afraid ...

I'd like to say yes, but ...

## 10. TELLING SOMEONE OFF

David has defied his parents' ban on smoking in the house.

Father: You're, really trying it on, aren't you!

*I'm very disappointed in you.*

David: But all my friends smoke ...

Father: *I've just about had enough of you and your juvenile friends.*

David: But, Dad ...

Father (shouting, banging his fist on the table): *You're a disgrace! You'd better pull your socks up!*

Other phrases: I'm speechless.

I'm lost for words.

*Now what?*

*Now what have you done?*

*Where did we go wrong with you?*

*What do you think you're playing at?*

I'm very annoyed with you.

## 11. APOLOGIZING

Shirley: Mike, *I'm awfully sorry*, but the dog got hold of your book ...

Mike: Oh, no!

Shirley: *Look, I'm really sorry*. It won't happen again, I promise.

Mike: That's what you said last time!

Shirley: *I'll make up for it*. I'll buy another book, of course. *Please forgive me!*

Other phrases: I'm terribly sorry.

I'm so sorry.

How stupid of me.

It's all my fault.

I didn't mean it!

## 12. SHOWING EXCITEMENT, ENTHUSIASM

Frank: Hey! *I've got a great idea!* Why don't we go up to Scotland for a few days?!

Sue: Oh, yes! Let's go to the Highlands — the scenery is magnificent!

Frank: *Oh, out of this world! Skye is absolutely breathtaking!*

Sue: *I can't wait!*

Other phrases: What a terrific (brilliant) idea!  
I'm really looking forward to it.

Adjectives: Fantastic! Superb! Amazing! Incredible!

## 13. COMFORTING

Sheila has just failed her driving test for the second time.

Clare (putting her arm round Sheila): *Come on!* It's not the end of the world!

Sheila (face down, in despair): I'll never pass my driving test.

Clare: Yes, you will. I know how it feels. *Hey, cheer up!* Oh dear, poor old Sheila!

Sheila (crying): I'll never pass ...

Clare: Hey, don't cry! Come on, let's go and have a coffee. *Everything will be okay.*

Other phrases: Don't worry!  
Don't be upset!  
Don't take it so seriously.

*Different uses of »Come on«*

1. Comforting (Falling intonation)
2. Encouragement. Persuading  
e.g. »Come on, Chris, you can win the race!«  
(Rising intonation)
3. Expressing impatience, urgency  
e.g. »Come on! The bus is leaving in two minutes.«  
(Rising intonation)
4. Disagreeing. Disbelief, incredulity  
e.g. »Come on! You're pulling my leg! Harry can't have got married to Elsie Arbuckle!« (Falling intonation)