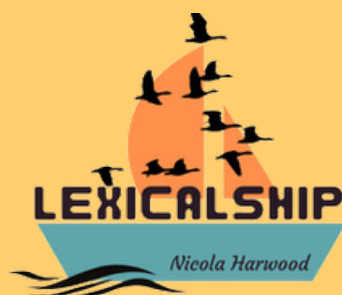




ONE WORD. THREE GAPS.

THE COLLECTION

BY NICOLA HARWOOD
AT
LEXICALSHIP.COM



WELCOME ABOARD!

If you've been following me on social media for a while, you may already know **One Word. Three Gaps.**

It started as a weekly puzzle: three sentences, three gaps and one word that somehow fits them all. What began as a bit of lexical fun quickly became one of my favourite things to create - and, judging by the messages, guesses and occasional cries of frustration I receive each week, quite a few people enjoy solving them too.

But finding the word has always been only part of the fun.

What interests me most is what comes next: the expressions hiding behind that word, the contexts they crop up in, the little details that make them sound natural, and often the stories behind how they came to mean what they do.

So that's what this collection is about.

Inside, you'll find **25 puzzles and 75 expressions**, but you won't just solve them and move on. You'll have the chance to work out meanings, dig a little deeper, put the language to use and, importantly, come back to it later to see what has stuck.

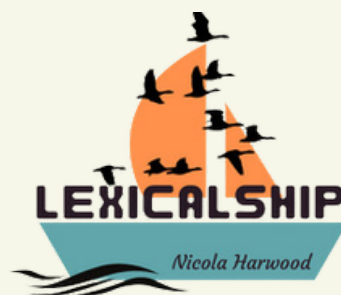
You can work through the collection on your own, dip into it whenever you fancy a lexical challenge, or use the puzzles with your learners.

However you use it, I hope there are plenty of moments when you think:

"I knew all those words. I had absolutely no idea they could do that."

Enjoy!

Nicola



HOW TO GET THE MOST OUT OF THE COLLECTION
Solve it. Work it out. Explore it. Put it to work. Come back to it.



FOR SELF-STUDY

The biggest temptation will be to race through the puzzles. Don't! You'll get much more out of them if you spread them out and give the language time to settle.

PAGE 1 - SOLVE IT

Don't rush to turn the page.

Try all three gaps before checking the answer. If you're stuck, look for clues in the grammar, collocations and context.

Once you have a theory, ask yourself: Does this word really work in all three sentences? Not sure? That's fine. The puzzling is part of the learning.

PAGE 2 - WORK IT OUT

See how much you can discover before you're told.

- Read the completed sentences and match the three expressions to their meanings.
- Before checking your answers, look again at the context. What helped you work each meaning out?
- Notice how the **same keyword behaves differently** in each expression.

PAGE 3 -EXPLORE IT

This is where you get to know the language properly.

- Read the meaning and example, then think of a situation of your own where the expression would fit.
- Pay attention to **Good to know**. This is where you'll find the details that help you use the expression naturally: register, context, patterns and restrictions.
- Use **The story behind it** as a memory hook rather than another fact to memorise. Does the story give you an image or association that might help the expression stick?
- **Pick a keeper**. Which of the three would you genuinely like to start using? Make that one your priority.

PAGE 4 - PUT IT TO WORK

Move from recognising the expressions to actually using them.

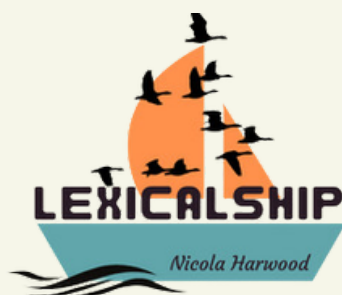
- Answer the questions out loud, not just in your head. Try to work the target expression naturally into your answer.
- Give yourself more than a one-sentence response. The longer you speak, the more chance you have to retrieve and manipulate the language.
- Have a go at the **Lexicalship Challenge**. Each one asks you to do something slightly different with the language you've just explored.

AFTER FIVE PUZZLES - COME BACK TO IT

Before you look back, find out what has stuck.

- Do the Retrieval Challenge **without revisiting the previous puzzles first**.
- Don't worry about getting everything right. The struggle to retrieve an expression is useful in itself.
- Anything you've forgotten gives you a reason to go back and meet it again.

There's no race to finish. One puzzle explored properly - and revisited later - is worth far more than five you've simply read through.



USING THE COLLECTION WITH LEARNERS

A five-minute warmer or a full lexical sequence? You decide.



WHERE COULD A PUZZLE FIT?

AS A WARMER

Show Page 1 and let learners tackle the three gaps individually, then compare ideas in pairs. Reveal the keyword when you're ready. A quick way to get everyone thinking and talking at the start of a lesson.

AS A FILLER

Got 5-10 minutes to spare? Use Page 1 as a standalone lexical puzzle. If there's time, reveal Page 2 and see whether learners can match the expressions to their meanings.

AS A COOLER

Show the puzzle towards the end of a lesson and let learners leave with something to think about. You could reveal the answer straight away - or make them wait until next time.

AS A SPEAKING ACTIVITY

Skip straight to Page 4 if learners have already encountered the expressions. Put them in pairs or small groups with selected Put it to work questions and challenge them to use the target language naturally.

AS A REVISION ACTIVITY

Return to a puzzle days or weeks later. Show only the keyword and ask learners to retrieve the three expressions, or give them the expressions and ask what they remember about meaning, context and usage.

AS A LEXICAL THREAD ACROSS SEVERAL LESSONS

You don't have to use all four pages at once. Start with the puzzle in one lesson, revisit the expressions in the next, and use the discussion questions or challenge later. One puzzle can give you several short encounters with the same language.

WANT TO GO FURTHER?

PAGE 1 - SOLVE IT

- Display the three sentences without revealing the keyword.
- Give learners a little **thinking time first**, then let them compare theories in pairs or groups.
- Encourage them to justify their guesses. What grammatical, lexical or contextual clues are helping you?
- Resist the temptation to reveal the answer too quickly. The discussion and failed guesses are part of the task.

PAGE 2 - WORK IT OUT

- Reveal the keyword and completed sentences, but **not the meanings immediately**.
- Learners match the three expressions to their meanings, using the sentences as evidence.
- Ask them which meaning was easiest/hardest to infer and why.
- Before moving on, see whether they can think of another context in which one of the expressions might occur.

PAGE 3 - EXPLORE IT

- Give each pair/group **one expression to become the expert on**. They read Meaning, Good to know and The story behind it, then explain the useful bits to the others.
- Ask learners to identify what they **wouldn't have known from the definition alone**. This directs them towards register, typical contexts, patterns and restrictions.
- Use the story behind the expression as **a memory hook**. Ask learners whether knowing the story makes the expression easier to remember.
- Hide the example sentence and ask learners to create one before comparing theirs with the one in the book.
- Ask each learner to **pick a keeper**: which expression would they most like to make part of their own English?

PAGE 4 - PUT IT TO WORK

Choose the questions that best suit your learners - **there's no need to use them all.**

Put learners in pairs or small groups and ask them to work the target expressions naturally into their answers.

Change partners and ask learners to **report something interesting they heard**, giving them another opportunity to retrieve the language.

Use the Lexicalship Challenge as an extra task, a team challenge or something learners can take away and do between lessons.

AFTER FIVE PUZZLES - BRING IT BACK

Use the Retrieval Challenges **without warning learners exactly what will come up**. Retrieval is the point, not preparation.

Let them work alone first before pooling what they remember.

Treat forgotten expressions as useful information rather than mistakes: Which ones need another encounter?

Bring one or two of those expressions into later lessons rather than immediately reteaching everything.

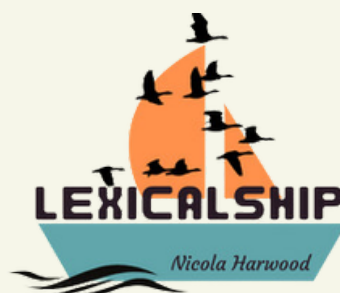
YOU DON'T NEED TO USE EVERYTHING

A puzzle can take **five minutes or become the thread running through several lessons**. Use the pages that serve your learners, leave out the ones that don't, and - most importantly - find reasons to bring the language back later.



A QUICK NOTE ABOUT SHARING

This copy is for you and your learners. You're very welcome to print or display individual pages for students you personally teach. Please don't share the complete PDF with other teachers, upload it online or reproduce it for resale. If a colleague would like to use the collection too, please point them towards the Lexicalship. Thank you for supporting my work.



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90

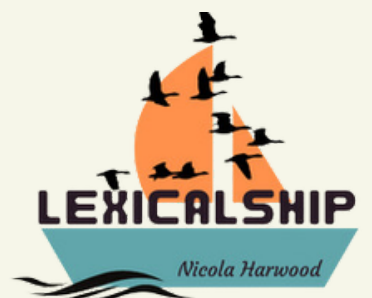
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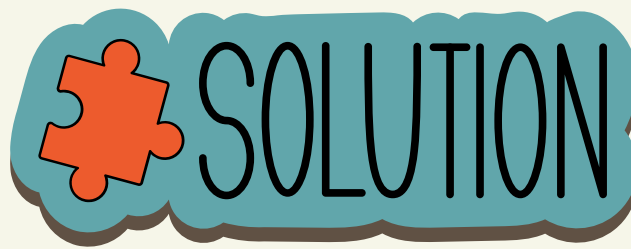


ONE WORD. THREE GAPS.

Find the single word that completes all three sentences.

1. Being comfortable with uncertainty can _____ you in good stead when plans suddenly change.
2. You covered for me yesterday, so the least I can do is _____ you a coffee.
3. Nobody here tends to _____ on ceremony, so don't wait to be formally introduced.





STAND

1. Being comfortable with uncertainty can **STAND** you in good stead when plans suddenly change.
2. You covered for me yesterday, so the least I can do is **STAND** you a coffee.
3. Nobody here tends to **STAND** on ceremony, so don't wait to be formally introduced.

Can you match each expression to its meaning?

1.  stand someone in good stead
2.  stand someone a drink/ coffee
3.  stand on ceremony

- a. bear the cost for you
- b. leave you in a favourable position
- c. insist upon formalities

STAND SOMEONE IN GOOD STEAD

Meaning

To be useful or beneficial to someone, especially in the future.

Learning to speak in public at university has **stood me in good stead** throughout my career.

Good to know

Often used for an experience, skill or quality that later proves valuable:

The story behind it

Stead is an old word meaning place or position, which survives in instead and in someone's stead. So something that stands you in good stead puts you in a good position - and, by extension, proves useful.

STAND SOMEONE A DRINK / COFFEE

Meaning

To pay for a drink or something similar for someone.

You've been driving us around all weekend - at least let me **stand you a drink**.

Good to know

Mainly British and informal, with a slightly old-fashioned feel. It's especially common with a drink, a pint or a round, but can be used for other small purchases too.

The story behind it

This use of stand dates back to the 19th century. Stand developed the sense of bearing or taking responsibility for a cost - I'll stand you a drink: "I'll pay for it."

STAND ON CEREMONY

Meaning

To behave formally or insist on conventional social rules.

We're very relaxed when we get together - nobody stands on ceremony and everyone just helps themselves.

Good to know

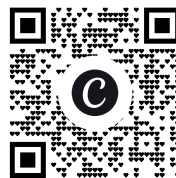
Most often used in the negative: don't/not stand on ceremony. It's commonly used to encourage someone to relax and forget about formalities.

The story behind it

Ceremony once referred not just to formal events but to the rules of polite behaviour. To stand on something could mean to insist upon it, so stand on ceremony came to mean insisting that the usual formalities be observed.

Want the story behind the language?

Scan to watch Nicola's lexical deep dive.





PUT IT TO WORK

1. STAND SOMEONE IN GOOD STEAD

What's something you learnt or experienced years ago that has stood you in good stead since?

What skill do you think would stand almost anyone in good stead these days?

2. STAND SOMEONE A DRINK

When you're out with friends, do you tend to take turns standing each other a drink, split everything exactly, or does nobody keep track?

Who last did you a favour that deserves you standing them a coffee or a drink?

3. STAND ON CEREMONY

Who are the people you don't stand on ceremony with at all?

Are there situations where you think people should stand on ceremony a little more than they do nowadays?

THE LEXICALSHIP CHALLENGE

Choose one expression and find an excuse to work it naturally into conversation this week.