

How to Buy Time When Speaking English: 4 Natural Expressions

English learning resource · EN

Full episode script · English

102 lines

Study task: Listen again and notice the expressions you studied.

Martin, ask me a difficult question.

All right.

What is one thing you would change about your life?

I...

Wait...

My mind has gone completely blank.

Take your time.

That is easy for you to say.

Everyone is waiting for my answer.

Then do not stay silent.

Show them that you are thinking.

How?

Use an expression that keeps the conversation alive.

An expression that says, "I have not finished.

Please do not rescue me."

Exactly.

Welcome to Your English Toolbox and the first episode of our new weekly series, Everyday Useful Expressions.

I am Martin.

And I am Julia.

In this series, we will teach you practical English that you can use immediately in real conversations.

Each episode will focus on one everyday situation.

We will explore ready-made expressions that natural speakers use again and again.

Today, we are learning how to buy time when you need to think.

Our first expression is: Let me think.



Let me think.

This is neutral and useful in almost any conversation.

Someone asks, "When can you finish the report?"

"Let me think.

Friday afternoon should be possible."

It tells the other person that you are preparing an answer, not ending your turn.

Our second expression is: Give me a second.

This is more informal.

Use it with friends or colleagues.

"Where did I put my keys?"

"Give me a second.

I think I saw them in the kitchen."

It means, "I need a short moment."

Can it sound too direct?

Sometimes.

You can make it softer: "Just give me a second, please."

A warm tone makes it friendlier.

Expression number three: How can I put this?

We use it when an idea is difficult to explain.

Or when we want to choose our words carefully.

Imagine that a friend asks what you think of their new haircut.

And I do not like it.

You might say, "How can I put this?"

I think your previous style suited you better."

It gives you time and prepares the listener for a delicate answer.

It is useful in meetings and sensitive conversations.

"How can I put this?"

The project needs a clearer direction."

Our fourth expression is: What I mean is...

We use this when our first explanation was not clear, or when the listener misunderstood us.



For example: "I do not want to cancel the plan."

What I mean is, perhaps we should choose another day."

You are repairing your message.

Fluent speakers do not always create perfect sentences immediately.

They rephrase and continue.

Exactly.

Let us compare all four expressions.

"Let me think" gives you a neutral thinking pause.

"Give me a second" asks informally for a short moment.

"How can I put this?" helps you prepare a difficult or delicate explanation.

And "What I mean is..." helps you clarify your message.

Time for a quick challenge.

Choose the most natural expression before I answer.

Situation one.

A colleague asks which day is best for your next meeting.

You need to check your schedule.

Let me think.

Situation two.

Your friend asks where their phone is.

You need a moment to remember.

Give me a second.

Situation three.

Your manager asks for your honest opinion about a problematic project.

You want to be diplomatic.

How can I put this?

Final situation.

Someone has misunderstood your suggestion, and you want to explain it again.

What I mean is...

Excellent.

Now answer aloud: What would you like to improve about your English?



Begin with one of today's expressions.

A thinking expression makes you sound calmer and gives your brain time to find the English you know.

On the episode page at yourenglishtoolbox.com, you will find these four expressions with explanations, translations, examples and practice.

But this new series goes one step further.

Every episode page will include five additional expressions that are not taught in the audio.

You can study them and practise using all nine in the same situation.

Today's podcast is the lesson, and the website is the extended practice.

You will find the direct link in the episode description.

Now, Julia, let us return to my original question.

The thing I would change about my life?

Exactly.

How can I put this?

Take your time.

I would like fewer difficult questions from my podcast partner.

That was diplomatic.

I had time to prepare it.

See you next time, friends.

Goodbye.

