

Stop Saying “Very Bad”: Awful, Dreadful or Appalling?

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Key words & expressions · English

8 learning entries

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

1

awful

DEF

Extremely bad or unpleasant.

The broadest of the three core alternatives; natural in many everyday contexts.

The traffic was awful this morning.

We had awful service at the restaurant.

2

dreadful

DEF

Extremely bad, unpleasant or difficult to endure.

Often sounds slightly more emphatic or traditionally British than awful.

The weather was dreadful all weekend.

I made a dreadful mistake in the report.

3

appalling

DEF

Shockingly bad, especially because it causes moral disapproval or strong criticism.

Use it when bad is not strong enough because the situation is unacceptable.

The working conditions were appalling.

There was an appalling lack of communication.

4

unpleasant

DEF

Not enjoyable, comfortable or agreeable.

More restrained than awful; useful when you want to sound measured.

The conversation became unpleasant.

We had an unpleasant journey home.

5

difficult to endure

DEF

So unpleasant or painful that it is hard to continue experiencing it.

A reusable descriptive phrase for noise, pain, weather or a stressful situation.

The heat became difficult to endure.

The constant noise was difficult to endure.



6

moral disapproval

DEF

A negative judgement based on what you believe is right or acceptable.

This explains why appalling is stronger than a simple description of poor quality.

Her reaction expressed clear moral disapproval.

The report caused widespread moral disapproval.

7

a strong negative reaction

DEF

An intense response of dislike, shock or criticism.

A useful collocation for explaining how powerful language affects a listener.

The decision caused a strong negative reaction.

Appalling communicates a strong negative reaction.

8

an appalling lack of something

DEF

A shockingly serious absence or shortage of something important.

A high-value collocation used for communication, care, judgement, evidence and planning.

There was an appalling lack of preparation.

The case revealed an appalling lack of care.

