

Lesson 26: Arguing & Swearing

Yesterday you learned how to disagree politely – but what if the disagreement turns into a real argument? Listen to this conversation between Christine and Tara, who share an apartment, to learn some of the common phrases used for arguing:

Conversation #1 – Arguing

Christine: Hey Tara. When are you gonna clean up the bathroom? I've asked you to do it a zillion times.

Tara: Maybe when you quit bugging me about it.

Christine: What's your problem? Other people use that bathroom too, you know - and your makeup and stuff is all over the place.

Tara: Well excuuuuuse me for not being perfectly organized like you.

Christine: Don't talk to me like that. It's a simple request: just clean up the damn bathroom.

Tara: Do it yourself!

Christine: What did you just say to me?

Tara: I said, if it's SO important for the bathroom to be clean, why don't you do it yourself. You're always on my case about something, and you never shut up.
(you're always on my case = you're always annoying me / telling me to do something)

Christine: Yeah, well, that's because you never help out. The kitchen is a mess, too.

Tara: Oh sure. Blame it all on me. You use the kitchen way more than I do.

Christine: You know what? I'm not gonna waste my breath arguing with you. When I get back from yoga class, the kitchen and bathroom had better be clean - or else.

Tara: Whatever.

Conversation Vocabulary & Phrases

Christine starts by reminding Tara to clean the bathroom and saying “I’ve asked you to do it a zillion times” – this is a way to express frustration and call attention to the fact that despite many requests, Tara has not done what was asked. “Zillion” is not a real number, it just means “a huge number.” We have two similar phrases:

- **“I’ve asked you to do it a zillion times.”**
- **“I’ve told you a zillion times.”**
(ex. “I’ve told you a zillion times not to throw your dirty clothes on the floor!”)

Tara then replies that maybe she’ll clean the bathroom when Christine stops **bugging** her about it. The word “bugging” or “nagging” means to remind somebody in an annoying way.

- **“Quit bugging me!” / “Quit nagging me!”**
- **“Quit bothering me!”**
(*“bothering” means annoying in general, not necessarily reminding about something*)

The dialogue has two argumentative phrases that begin with “What”:

- **“What’s your problem?”**
- **“What did you just say to me?”**
(*used when you can’t believe the rude thing the other person said*)

Tara says “Excuse me” in a very sarcastic way. Sometimes the attitude you have and the way you pronounce a word/phrase makes a difference in its meaning or function. Compare these situations:

- **“Excuse me**, do you know what time it is?”
- **“Excuse me** for not being perfectly organized like you.”
- “Hi! How are you?”
“Fine, thanks! ”
- “You’re a liar. You can forget about our agreement; the deal’s off!”
“Fine! I wouldn’t want to do business with an idiot like you, anyway.”
- “Would you like a cup of tea?”
“Yes, please.”

- “Why are you signing up for a marathon? You couldn’t run a mile if your life depended on it.”
“Oh **please** – I’m in WAY better shape than YOU.”
- “Could you please clean up the kitchen?”
“**Oh, sure!**”
- “The kitchen’s a mess, too.”
“**Oh, sure.** Blame it all on me.”

Later in the dialogue, Tara says “you never shut up” – the expression “**Shut up!**” is a rather rude way to tell someone to be quiet.

Finally, Christine says that the kitchen and bathroom **MUST** be clean by the time she comes home – **or else**. Ending a sentence like this, with “or else” expresses a threat which is not directly spoken or defined. It means there will be some negative consequence if the other person doesn’t do what you say.

For example, a mother might say to her son: “Finish your homework now – or else.” That means if he doesn’t finish his homework, there will be some negative consequence – the mother will take away his video games, or not let him go to a party, or make him do extra chores. The threat is not directly stated, but it will be something bad!

Tara responds by saying, “**Whatever.**” This is a rude way to say you don’t care about what the other person is saying, and you aren’t interested in listening.

Now you know how to argue in English! But if the argument gets *really* bad, then you might want some of the stronger words in the next section of this lesson.

Swearing in English

In this section, I’m going to explain some of the most common swears (“bad” words) in English and how they are used. Even if you don’t want to use swear words yourself, it’s still useful to recognize them and understand them when you watch movies or hear other people talk.

Most of these swear words have less offensive versions, which are used to substitute the word if you don’t want to speak quite as strongly, or if you don’t want to offend anyone.



Damn

- **“Damn!” / “Dammit!” / “Goddammit!”**
Used as an exclamation of anger/frustration/annoyance
- **“I was late for work because my damn car wouldn’t start.”**
Used as an adjective to give negative emphasis.
- **“I don’t give a damn.”**
This means “I don’t care at all.”

Less offensive version: **darn**

Hell

- **“Go to hell!”**
Used to insult the other person
- **“What the hell... (happened? / is going on? / were you thinking?)”**
Use “hell” in a question when you are asking the question angrily. You can also use other question words: “Where the hell have you been?” “Why the hell is it taking so long?”

Less offensive version: **heck**

Ass

This is a slang word for “butt.” However, it’s also used in insults:

- **“He’s an ass.” / “He’s an asshole.”**
Used to describe a stupid or mean person

There are some other ways to use the word “ass” which are strong, but not insulting – describing something as “badass” means it was cool and awesome. Describing someone as a “hard-ass” means a person who follows and enforces rules very strictly.

Piss / Shit

These are slang words for urine and feces, which can also be used in swearing:

- **“Piss off!”**
A rude way to say “go away!”
- **“I’m pissed off!”**
This means “I’m really angry.” A less offensive way to say this is “I’m ticked off!”
- **“Bullshit.”**
This means “that’s a lie.”
- **“It’s / He’s a piece of shit.”**
This means an object (or a person) is completely worthless
- **“I have a shitty cell phone.”**
The adjective “shitty” means something is terrible, it has bad quality

“Shit” can also be used in place of “stuff” or “things,” for example: **“I’m moving this weekend, so I have to pack up all my shit.”**

There are also some positive ways to use the word “shit” – if you say **“He really knows his shit”** – that means the person is very smart/knowledgeable. If you say, **“That party was the shit!”** it means that the party was great – different from saying “That party was shit (or shitty).” (meaning the party was terrible).

Even in the cases where “shit” doesn’t have a negative connotation, you should still avoid talking like this in formal situations!

Bitch

- **“She’s such a bitch!”**
Used as an insult for a woman or girl who is mean or annoying. You can also use the adjective “bitchy” to describe someone’s unpleasant personality or behavior.
- **“There’s nothing you can do about the situation, so stop bitching about it.”**
“Bitch” can be used as a verb to mean “complain”
- **“My teacher bitched me out for coming to class late.”**
To “bitch someone out” means to yell at and criticize the person

Cunt / Pussy / Cock / Dick

Both “cunt” and “pussy” are slang for vagina, and “cock” and “dick” are slang words for penis. Calling a woman a “cunt” is extremely offensive.

- **“You’re such a pussy.”**

Calling a man a “pussy” means he is weak and cowardly. The less offensive way to say this is “You’re such a chicken.”

- **“You’re a dick.”**

This is an insult for a man – it means he is mean, selfish, inconsiderate, etc.

Fuck

This is one of the most versatile swear words in the English language. There are many different expressions, but here are some of the most common.

“Fuck you” and **“Go fuck yourself”** are very offensive things to say to somebody at whom you are angry. You can also say **“fuck that!”** to express your anger at a situation.

The word “fuck” can be used as an adjective or an adverb, to give a stronger and ruder emphasis to the sentence:

- **“I got fired from my fucking job.”**
- **“That’s fucking stupid.”**
- **“I don’t fucking care.”**

“Fuck” is also used in even stronger versions of other expressions:

- **What the heck...? / What the hell...? / What the fuck...?** (strongest)
- **Oh, shit!** (strong) / **Oh, fuck!** (stronger)
- **Piss off!** (strong) / **Fuck off!** (stronger)
- **“I don’t give a damn/shit.”** (strong) / **“I don’t give a fuck.”** (stronger)

Finally, there are some phrasal verbs with the word “fuck”:

- **Fuck someone over** = Take advantage of someone in a horrible way
“Credit card companies fuck people over with their high interest rates.”

- **Fuck around** = Act silly, misbehave, not do work
“Hey guys, stop fucking around and help me move this furniture.”
(less offensive version = mess around, goof around)
- **Fuck up** = Make a mistake (less offensive version = mess up)
“I fucked up – I printed the wrong phone number on my business cards.”

You’ve finished Lesson 26! Today’s speaking task is to leave a message telling me about an argument you’ve had. What were the reasons for the argument? Who was it with? How did you resolve it? [Click here to record your response.](#)