

# Lesson 32: Common Interjections

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Everyday spoken English contains lots of little expressions like **wow**, **oops**, **aww**, **ooh**, **huh?** **oh**, and **cool!** - each of these interjections serves to express a particular emotion or attitude. Listen to the conversation and then try the quick quiz to identify the function of each of the exclamations in the dialogue.

**Connie:** Hey Laura, how are your kids doing these days?

**Laura:** Really well - Erica's doing great in school, and Kevin just got a full scholarship to university.

**Connie:** Wow! Good for him! What school?

**Laura:** Colgate University. His first choice was Middlebury College, but he actually missed the application deadline.

**Connie:** Oops. So how are you feeling about Kevin going off to college?

**Laura:** Well, you know, this is a natural part of him growing up, and he's ready, but... I'll definitely miss him at home.

**Connie:** Awww.

**Laura:** So what's new with you? Don't you have a trip coming up?

**Connie:** Yeah, my company is sending me to India for a three-month assignment!

**Laura:** Oooh, how exciting! When do you leave?

**Connie:** In about two weeks. But I don't have a place to stay when I get there, so I'm desperately trying to find one.

**Laura:** Huh? Shouldn't the company have arranged that for you?

**Connie:** Well, they did, but it was a luxury apartment and the rent was being deducted from my salary - so I told them I'd rather find my own place.

**Laura:** Oh. What'll you be doing there, work-wise?

**Connie:** Giving training seminars for the local staff, helping them develop their customer service center... uhhh, what else... probably giving some English classes too.

**Laura:** Cool! I hope you have a great time; be sure to post lots of pictures.

**Connie:** I will!

## Quick Quiz

*Identify the Function of Each Interjection in the Conversation*

**1. "Wow!" expresses...**

- a) Happiness
- b) Jealousy
- c) Surprise

**2. "Oops" means...**

- a) it was an accident
- b) it's a terrible event
- c) I don't like that

**3. "Oooh" means...**

- a) I can't wait for it to happen
- b) That's interesting/intriguing
- c) That's scary/dangerous

**4. "Huh?" expresses...**

- a) asking for information
- b) confusion
- c) disapproval

**5. "Oh" (in the context of this conversation) means...**

- a) I approve.
- b) I'm disappointed.
- c) I understand.

**6. "Cool!" means...**

- a) Congratulations!
- b) That's difficult!
- c) That's great!

*Answers are at the end of this lesson text.*

How did you do? Were you able to figure out what the words mean from the context of the conversation? Here are a number of common interjections in English, with their meanings and examples of how to use them.

## **aha!**

Use this when you suddenly make a discovery, or find out some information that you had wanted to know.

"The remote control's not working, I wonder why... **aha!** There aren't any batteries in it."

## **ah / oh / huh / ok**

All of these can be used to say "I understand" – to show that you're listening to what the other person is saying. Note that "huh" used in this way is different from "huh?" which you'll learn later in this lesson.

"Sorry, you can't register for the new course. The deadline has passed."

"**Oh.** Could you tell me when the next course will start?"

"Huh" is usually used for mild surprise.

"Did you know that technically, tomatoes are fruits?"

"**Huh.** I always thought of them as vegetables."

## **aww**

This is used both to show sentimental approval – for example, "Awww, what a cute puppy!" and to say "That's too bad" – for example, if your friend comments that his son lost his favorite toy, you could say "Awww, I'm sure he was sad about that."

## **aw / ah / oh**

These expressions are used at the beginning of a sentence to express mild protest:

"I'm not so sure I want to go waterskiing..."

"**Aw**, it'll be fun! Everyone else is going!"

"Guys, I think we should turn the music down, it might bother the neighbors."

"**Oh**, don't be such a party pooper. It's not even that late."

*party pooper = someone who doesn't want other people to have fun*

## boo

This is used to express disapproval. People also yell "Booooo!" at sports games to express their disapproval of the other team, or of a player's mistake.

"I can't go on the trip this weekend. I have to work."

"**Booo!** I really wish you could go."

## brrr

This expression means "it's cold" – "It's five degrees below zero outside – **brrrr!**"

## drat! / rats!

These exclamations express disappointment/annoyance. They are milder and more innocent forms of words like "damn!" or "crap!"

"Oh, **drat!** I just deleted an important file by accident."

"Rats!" is usually used in response to something disappointing:

"By the time I went to the supermarket, it was already closed."

"**Rats!** Well, I guess we'll have to wait till tomorrow to do the shopping."

## duh

This is a sarcastic expression that means "that's obvious (and you're stupid for not realizing it)." It's rather rude:

"I just bought this computer and it won't even turn on!"

"You need to plug it in – **duh!**"

## huh?

When used in response to another person's statement, it expresses confusion, as in the conversation between Connie and Laura. When used at the end of your own statement, it functions as a question tag:

"This line is really long. I guess we'll be waiting for a while, **huh?**"

*"huh?" at the end means "...won't we?" or "...isn't that right?"*

## hmmm / um / uh

All of these are used for pausing and hesitating. "Hmmm" is the most pensive, for topics that you really do need to think about a little before responding; "um" and "uh" are quicker and more casual.

"If you could go back in time, what would you do differently?"

"**Hmmm...** I probably would've studied harder in school; I didn't really pay attention in any of my classes!"

"Excuse me – is there a bus stop around here?"

"**Uh,** I think there's one on 42<sup>nd</sup> Street."

## hooray! / hurrah! / huzzah! / woohoo! / yay!

These are all used for celebrating and expressing happiness:

"**Woohoo!** I just got free tickets to a World Cup game!"

You can also use them in response to someone else's statement:

"The boss says we can all leave work early today."

"**Yay!**"

## ick / yuck / eww / pew

Use these words to express disgust. The expression "pew" is specifically used for disgusting smells.

"**Pew** – something in the refrigerator really stinks. Oh look – it's some rotting meat."

"**Yuck** – that must have been in there for months. It's already turning green!"

## meh / eh

These expressions show indifference – when you don't care or don't have a strong opinion about something.

"Where do you want to go for dinner? There's a Japanese restaurant and a Mexican restaurant in this area."

"**Eh**, anything's fine with me. It's up to you." (= *you decide*)

## oooh

As you saw in the dialogue, "oooh" can express interest or admiration. Depending on the context, it can also mean "that's bad" – it depends on how you say it.

"My brother and I went mountain biking for the first time last weekend."

"**Oooh**, how was it?"

"Well, I loved it, but he crashed into a tree and broke his arm."

"**Oooh**, that must have hurt."

## oops / whoops

Use these expressions in response to a small accident or small mistake:

"**Oops**, I sent the e-mail without the attachment. Here's the file you need."

## ow / ouch

We say these when we get hurt:

"**Ow!** I just slammed my finger in the door!"

You can also use "ouch" as a casual response to a description of a situation that hurt someone else:

"Sally's boyfriend broke up with her on her birthday."

"**Ouch**. That was pretty mean!"

## pff / pfft / pssh

These sounds are used to say "that's nothing" – to express the fact that you are not impressed. They are rather sarcastic and rude.

"I can run a mile in 8 minutes."

"**Pff** – I can run a mile in *six* minutes."

## phew / whew

These are also more of a sound than an actual word. Use them to express relief:

"I hadn't studied for the test at all, but then I found out that the teacher moved it to next week – **whew!** Now I have more time to prepare."

## psst

We use this sound to get someone's attention when we want to whisper or speak to them very quietly.

"**Psst** – your fly is unzipped!"  
(*the "fly" is the zipper on your pants/jeans*)

## sheesh / jeez / geez

These exclamations express exasperation or annoyance.

"I was on the phone for 2 hours, but I still couldn't resolve the problem with my credit card bill."

"**Geez** – that's ridiculous. You'd think such a big company would provide better customer service."

## shh / shush

These sounds are used to tell someone to be quiet. "Shh" is gentler than "shush."

"**Shhh**, the movie's starting." (*so stop talking!*)

## shoo!

This is an informal expression used to tell children or animals to go away.

"The dogs always come in the kitchen when I'm cooking – **shoo!**"

## uh-oh / oh no

These expressions show concern about something bad that has happened or is happening – for example, "**Oh no** – we don't have any milk!" or that might (or will) happen in the future, for example: "**Uh-oh**, the weather forecast says it's going to rain this weekend – the festival's probably going to be canceled."

## wow / whoa / yikes

All of these words express surprise. “Wow” can be used for good or bad surprises; “yikes” is more typically used for neutral or bad surprises; and “whoa” can also be used for disbelief.

“I’m planning to hike across the United States.”

“**Yikes** – that’s quite a long distance!”

“It’s going to cost \$300 to change the flight.”

“**Whoa!** Are you sure? On the airline’s website it says the fee is \$150.”

You’ve finished Lesson 32! Now take the quiz to see how well you learned the different interjections – choose the best response for each situation.



# Quiz: Lesson 32

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1) "Check out my new shoes!"  
"\_\_\_\_\_, those are awesome!"

- A. Hooray
- B. Ooooh
- C. Sheesh

2) "\_\_\_\_\_! You had to wait five hours to see a doctor? That's absurd."

- A. Rats
- B. Uh-oh
- C. Yikes

3) "\_\_\_\_\_, I just spilled my coffee."

- A. Brrr
- B. Whoops
- C. Yuck

4) "I'm not gonna go to the holiday party. I have a bad headache."  
"\_\_\_\_\_, well, we'll miss you!"

- A. Awww
- B. Hmmm
- C. Phew

5) "Should we make the text on this poster blue or black?"  
"\_\_\_\_\_... does it really matter?"

- A. Meh
- B. Ow
- C. Whoa

6) "I don't understand why you're so mad about my comment. \_\_\_\_\_, can't you take a joke?!"

- A. Drat
- B. Geez
- C. Psst

**7)** "The concert is on Friday the 10th."

"\_\_\_\_\_? That doesn't make sense; the 10th is a Thursday."

- A. Duh
- B. Huh
- C. Uh

**8)** "\_\_\_\_\_, it's starting to rain and I don't have an umbrella."

- A. Eww
- B. Oh no
- C. Wow

**9)** "Where on earth are my sunglasses?!?"

(5 minutes later) "\_\_\_\_ - they were in the car."

- A. Aha
- B. Pew
- C. Uh-oh

**10)** "\_\_\_\_! You just stepped on my foot!"

- A. Boo
- B. Ouch
- C. Pffft

**11)** "\_\_\_\_ - my doctor just called and said all my blood exams were normal."

- A. Ah
- B. Phew
- C. Shush

**12)** "There's a dead spider in the bathroom - \_\_\_\_\_!"

- A. ick
- B. pssh
- C. shoo

## **Lesson 32 Quick Quiz – Answers**

1.C 2.A 3.B 4.B 5.C 6.C

## **Lesson 32 Quiz – Answers**

1.B 2.C 3.B 4.A 5.A 6.B 7.B 8.B 9.A 10.B 11.B 12.A