The important thing about spitball I think is that there is no guarantee of quality to the idea. It’s just like well what about this one. You know, just kind of like throwing something out. It’s an attempt to maybe a shot in the dark even but desire to get things moving.

Right. You personally don’t care about whether the idea is a good idea or a bad idea. You’re just putting your ideas out there, just to get the ball rolling, to get things started, to try and come up with some good ideas. One thing I wanted to mention is that we almost always use this expression in a set phrase. I’m just spitballing here. I’m just spitballing here. I guess you could use it in other ways, right?

I was trying to think about that. The only thing I could come up with was “I might just be spitballing here” so basically it’s exactly the same thing.

Right, so almost always, there might be a slight variation to this but…

No, not often.

Well, should we give some examples with this expression, to spitball?

Let’s hop into it.

“Ok guys. Management wants us to develop a new sales strategy by the end of the week, that means we’re on a tight deadline. Does anybody have any ideas?

Ok. I’m just spitballing here but what about a social media advertising campaign? It could be very effective.

I like it. I like it. This is great!”

In this example, the marketing department of a big company has been asked to develop a new sales strategy so we heard them holding a business meeting to brainstorm and come up with some ideas. One of the team members suggests a social media advertising campaign. She says “I’m just spitballing here” before she introduces the idea so everyone knows that she’s casually introducing the concept to everybody. It’s a sudden and impulsive idea, it’s one that just comes off the top of her head, not something she’s been thinking about for a long time.

Yes. Ok. Very good. Let’s move on to the second example.

“Spring break is coming up. What should we do?

I’m not sure. Ok. How about this? I’m just spitballing here but what about Toronto? It could be a cool chance to spend some time in the big city.

Toronto? In March? If we’re gonna go somewhere for spring break, it’d better be some place warm.”

In this example, two university students are talking about their upcoming vacation, spring break. They’re trying to decide where they should go. One of the students suggests Toronto by saying “I’m just spitballing here but what if we go to Toronto?”. So again, because he warns his listener that he is spitballing, we know that the idea is off the cough, that it’s impulsive and was made without a lot of prior thought. Let’s move on to expression number two. Morag, could you let us all know about expression number two?

I can. Expression number two is to toss an idea around. To toss an idea around which is a phrasal verb. Is there a back and forth part of this?

Yes. So when you toss an idea around, you are considering an idea with maybe multiple people, you are talking with multiple people. Is this a good idea? Is this a bad idea? What do you think about this? What do you think about that? You are weighing your options. You are trying to decide which is the best idea and I think you usually do this with multiple people. Right? You don’t toss an idea around by yourself.

I don’t think you tend to. But you probably could. My gut feeling was that, it was with other people but you could probably say that you’re just tossing an idea around if you would think about it for a little bit and then put it aside and then think about a different concept, to like a different part of it. You know it’s like looking at different sides.

Yes I agree. Now that you’ve mentioned that, it does make sense. You /\*-\*know. For example, if your friend asked you “Oh next year what are you gonna do? Are you gonna go travelling or are you gonna get a job?”. You could say “Oh I’m not sure, I’m tossing a couple of ideas around”, you know, you’re trying to make a decision.

I’m tossing an idea around, you know. If it’s by yourself, you’re not constantly thinking about it.

So yes absolutely when you toss an idea around, you’re just trying to determine or decide if that idea is good and worth pursuing or if it’s bad and shouldn’t be followed. As we’ve mentioned, you could do it with a group of people in a meeting setting or even just personally trying to make a decision. You can toss an idea around. We should also mention that there’re a few different ways to use this expression. You can actually substitute the word toss for kick. So you can kick an idea around. Or you can even throw an idea around. And these all mean the same thing. Toss, kick, throw an idea. They’re used interchangeably.

For some reason in English, being physically violent towards ideas is the way that you figure out if they’re ok.

I think probably toss an idea around is most common but personally I like to say kick an idea around. It sounds a little more casual, a little more my style.

I think I might say knocking an idea around.

Oh yeah you could knock an idea around too.

That one I think is probably more in UK, sounds like knocking something around or knocking something about is a little bit more, a little bit less Canadian.

Totally valid still, good expression. Alright so whether you’re knocking an idea, tossing an idea or kicking it, it’s all good. And I think it’s time for a couple of examples. So let’s get right to them.

“Marion and I are thinking about moving out of the city, settle down in a small town.

Really? Even though I’ll be sad to see you guys go, I think it’s a great decision. Do you know where you’ll go?

We’ve been tossing a few ideas around but we haven’t made a choice yet.”

So in this example, we hear a man talking to his friend about wanting to leave the city for a quieter life in the country or in a smaller place. He says that he and his wife haven’t made a decision yet about where they want to move but that they’re still tossing a few ideas around. So in other words, they’re thinking about several options about where they might want to go and haven’t chosen anything at this point.

Morag, it’s our final example. Let’s go!

“Oh man! Sometimes when I watch the news I get so depressed.

I know. Me too. Just seems like there’re so many problems but no solutions.

I know. There’re so many people who toss ideas around about how to solve our problems, but there’re not enough people who take any steps to actually do something.”

In our final example, two friends discuss watching the news and how depressed it makes them feel. They’re both sad that so many people toss ideas around about how to fix the world’s problems but no one offers any real solutions. We see this a lot on the news, right, and especially on my social media feeds.

Mine, too.

So in the world there’re a lot of politicians, a lot of experts, a lot of so-called know-it-alls who talk about doing great things, they put forward ideas about how to solve problems but at the end of the day, not too many problems actually get solved. They toss the ideas around but don’t act on them.

Right yea and sometimes it’s just way more complicated.

Yea, tossing the idea around is the easy part, right?

Right, yea, you’re like I’d like to do this. And he’s like well here are all the reasons why that’s very difficult.

Just the way it goes I guess.