

WEEKLY ENGLISH PRACTICE

Have You Ever Flopped (perhaps in flip-flops)?

03/02/22 / Keyword: flop

The word flop has several different meanings. For example, Boris Johnson has famously floppy hair. ECP coach Rob Hextall explores some other examples

A flop loved by everyone

One of the worst performances on American Idol, the reality TV show where ordinary people get to showcase their artistic talents, was also one of the most popular. When William Hung [auditioned](#) by singing Ricky Martin's 'She Bangs', the panel of judges unanimously **pilloried** him. Simon Cowell said, "That's one of the worst auditions we've had this year". But William didn't care that he had been a big **flop**. He simply smiled and replied, "I gave my best and I **have no regrets** at all".

Initially, he was laughed at, but for some reason, perhaps because of his happy smile and innate optimism, his **flop** became an internet phenomenon and his performance went viral. Soon, this 'failure' was [recording albums](#), appearing on chat shows, and even appearing in concerts with Janet Jackson and Maroon 5. People loved his flat, **out-of-tune** singing and imitated his **awkward** dancing. Nobody thought he was talented, they just loved that, when faced with ridicule, he simply smiled back and said, "I gave my best and **I have no regrets** at all."

The White House 'flip-flop scandal'

Far from being **flops**, the Northwestern University women's [lacrosse](#) team were **hailed** as an incredible success story. Lacrosse is North America's oldest organised sport and was modified by European settlers from a centuries-old game played by the indigenous people of what is now Canada. It is played with a stick that has a net which is used to catch, carry and throw the ball. The Northwestern University team was only created in 2001 but in an incredibly short time they grew to dominate the sport and were US national champions for 5 consecutive seasons between 2005 and 2009.

In 2005, the team was invited to the White House in recognition of their achievement, but the visit was a bit of a **flop**, as members of the team were criticised for wearing flip-flops when posing for the official photo with the then president George W. Bush (see page 2). Again, the story went viral. Apparently, at formal events if you are a woman, wearing **open-toed** sandals is fine, but wearing flip-flops - even if you are a champion athlete - is considered "inappropriate" and "disrespectful". What was the response of the woman to this essentially sexist "scandal"? To **turn up** to every high profile interview that they were invited to in coordinated and colourful flip-flops!

Science shows that flopping is just part of the game

Footballers are often accused of diving - deliberately falling over (or exaggerating a fall) in an attempt to **deceive** the referee and be rewarded a foul or penalty. The equivalent in basketball is known as 'flopping'. In 2012, flopping became a major issue in the NBA with both fans and team

Is this basketball player flopping or getting punched?



Photo © Robert Hextall

Useful vocabulary

flop: a completely unsuccessful performance (or performer)

to flop: to be completely unsuccessful; to fail totally (*for other definitions see page 2*)

to pillory: to ridicule publicly

to have no regrets: to not feel bad about a past action

out-of-tune: incorrect intonation

awkward: not smooth or graceful

to hail: to praise enthusiastically

open-toed: not covering the toes

to turn up to: to appear or arrive

to deceive: to make a person believe something that is not true

handful: a small amount or number

to knock over: to collide with something and cause it to fall to the ground

Let's chat about flopping!

1. Do you like watching talent shows on TV? Why (not)?
2. Describe how well (or badly) you sing and dance.
3. Have you ever watched or played lacrosse? How do you think it is played?
4. Is wearing flip-flops to formal events "inappropriate" or "disrespectful"? Why (not)?
5. What do you think about diving and flopping?
6. Describe a moment when you failed or flopped.

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2nd October	5th March
6th November	2nd April
4th December	7th May
5th February	4th June



The Northwestern University women's lacrosse team poses in the White House with President George W. Bush (holding two lacrosse sticks)

flop | flɒp | verb
(**flops, flopping, flopped**) [no object]

1 [with adverbial] fall, move, or hang in a loose way: *his blond hair flopped over his eyes.*

• sit or lie down heavily and suddenly, especially when very tired: *Liz flopped down into the armchair.*

• Basketball informal deliberately fall or stumble in order to give the appearance of being fouled by an opponent: *everyone watching the game believed James flopped.*

2 informal (of a performer or show) be completely unsuccessful; fail totally: *the show flopped in London.*

floppy | 'flɒpi | adjective (**floppier, floppiest**)
tending to flop or hang loosely: *his dark floppy hair.*

belly flop | 'bɛlɪ flɒp | informal noun
a dive in which a person hits the water flat on their stomach or abdomen.

flip-flop | 'flɪpfloʊp | noun
1 a light sandal, typically of plastic or rubber, with a thong between the big and second toe.

owners complaining about the flagrant, theatrical behaviour of a **handful** of players. Mark Cuban, the billionaire owner of the Dallas Mavericks, decided to employ a team of scientists - specifically biomechanics researchers - to get conclusive, scientific proof that players were cheating.

After over a year of recreating and simulating on-court impacts, the researchers came up with some interesting **conclusions**. Basically, if your feet are firmly planted on the ground, it is really easy to **knock** you **over**. So most 'flops' are in fact inevitable falls. What turns a fall into a flop is if you unnecessarily flap and flail your arms as you fall - the natural instinct would be to use them to break your fall and to help you regain balance. However, they noted, exaggerating the movement of your arms doesn't necessarily mean that it wasn't a foul in the first place... A foul is a foul, even if the player is guilty of histrionics.

For Mark Cuban, this whole experiment about flopping was basically a **flop** in itself. He'd hoped to get concrete, scientific proof that showed that flopping was deliberate cheating, but in the end, the science showed that, in fact, it is much easier than we thought to **knock** a player **over**. Flapping your arms as you fall might be flopping, but not all flopping is cheating.

Written by ECP coach Rob Hextall after listening to this podcast by Radiolab.

Look at the definitions of the word 'flop' on the left

1. Do you have floppy hair? Or anyone you know? Describe an object that is floppy.
2. Do you ever flop down into an armchair, onto the sofa or into bed? When?
3. Have you ever done a belly flop? If so, did it hurt or leave a red mark on your skin?
4. Do you wear flip-flops? When?