



Noises and exclamations in English

Without looking below, listen to your teacher read out words. When you are sure what they have in common, put up your hand and guess. Each person or group only gets one guess per list.

- titter/ chortle/ giggle/ guffaw/ ha ha/ hee hee/ tee hee/ chuckle/ snicker/ snort
- yuck/ retch/ eww
- whee/ purr/ hooray/ yippee
- atishoo/ sniff/ ouch/ ow/ cough/ groan/ wheeze/ moan/ gargle
- sigh/ sniff/ howl/ whine/ grumble/ bawl/ weep/ boo hoo/ groan/ moan
- scream/ shriek/ gulp
- boo/ oh/ bang/ gasp/ wow
- munch/ crunch/ chomp/ gulp/ sip/ slurp
- choo choo/ varoom/ whirr/ squeal/ brrm/ skid/ squeal/ honk
- caw/ coo/ cuckoo/ gobble/ hoot/ squawk/ tweet/ twitter/ cockle doodle doo/ cluck/ quack
- squirt/ ooze/ gulp/ bubble/ splash
- hiss/ purr/ meow
- woof/ bow wow/ bark/ snarl/ pant/ yap/ whimper/ howl/ whine
- neigh/ clip clop/ whinny
- boo hoo/ rattle/ raspberry/ gaga/ burp
- hey/ oy/ psst/ hiss/ ahem
- erm/ umm/ er
- tut tut/ hiss/ boo
- whoops/ whoopsy daisy/ oops
- smack/ thwack/ pow/ thump/ wham
- boom/ bang/ pop
- snore/ sniff/ snort/ snicker
- slip/ slide/ slither/ slurp
- zzz/ snore/ yawn
- mutter/ mumble/ grumble/ shh/ hush/ shush/ hiss/ whisper/ psst

Write a word or phrase next to each line to represent what they have in common, e.g. "laughing" for the first one.

After checking your answers, test each other in pairs.

Discussion questions

- Which of the sounds and exclamations above make no sense to you, e.g. because you think the real sound is very different?
- Are there any which are closer to the real sound in your own language? Are there any which make more sense in English than in your L1?
- What other differences do you know in other countries and languages?
- How can you explain the differences in different languages?
- How useful and interesting do you think this topic is for language learners?

Do the exercises below on this kind of language in everyday English and see if you change your mind about the last question above.

Sounds in common English expressions

What words and expressions based on sounds do the following explanations represent?

1. This is the name for a very popular microblogging service, and the verb for using that service. Its name comes from the sounds that small birds make, which is also an expression for idle chit chat.
2. This is an informal way of saying “remote control”. It comes from the sound of an electric spark or laser gun.
3. This is a euphemism for having a baby
4. The advertising slogan for Kellogg’s Rice Krispies, from the sound they are supposed to make when milk is added to them
5. This nickname for table tennis comes from the sound that the balls make as they bounce
6. This is the sound that a computer mouse makes, and has become a verb meaning to choose an icon or link
7. Cheap plastic sandal whose name comes from the sounds they make as you walk in them
8. This metal fastener’s name comes from a sound denoting speed
9. This was an advertising slogan to persuade people to use their seatbelts
10. This is a nickname for a pager. Its name comes from the sounds that electrical devices make
11. This is the sound of a car colliding with something. It is now used for when a computer program completely stops working and so the computer has to be rebooted.

Match the words and expressions below to the explanations above.

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- A) Flip flops
- B) Snap, crackle and pop
- C) Twitter/ Tweet
- D) Click
- E) Zip
- F) Beeper
- G) Zapper
- H) Ping pong
- I) Crash
- J) The pitter patter of tiny feet
- K) Clunk click every trip



Answer key

- titter/ chortle/ giggle/ guffaw/ ha ha/ hee hee/ tee hee/ chuckle/ snicker/ snort – **laughter**
 - yuck/ retch/ eww – **disgust**
 - whee/ purr/ hooray/ yippee – **happiness**
 - atishoo/ sniff/ ouch/ ow/ cough/ groan/ wheeze/ moan/ gargle – **illness**
 - sigh/ sniff/ howl/ whine/ grumble/ bawl/ weep/ boo hoo/ groan/ moan – **unhappiness**
 - scream/ shriek/ gulp – **fear**
 - boo/ oh/ bang/ gasp/ wow – **surprise**
 - munch/ crunch/ chomp/ gulp/ sip/ slurp – **eating and drinking**
 - choo choo/ varoom/ whirr/ squeal/ brrm/ skid/ squeal/ honk – **transport**
 - caw/ coo/ cuckoo/ gobble/ hoot/ squawk/ tweet/ twitter/ cockle doodle doo/ cluck/ quack – **birds**
 - squirt/ ooze/ gulp/ bubble/ splash – **liquid**
 - hiss/ purr/ meow – **cats**
 - woof/ bow wow/ bark/ snarl/ pant/ yap/ whimper/ howl/ whine – **dogs**
 - neigh/ clip clop/ whinny – **horses**
 - boo hoo/ rattle/ raspberry/ gaga/ burp – **babies**
 - hey/ oy/ psst/ hiss/ ahem – **getting people's attention**
 - erm/ umm/ er – **pausing for thought**
 - tut tut/ hiss/ boo – **showing disapproval**
 - whoops/ whoopsy daisy/ oops – **accidents**
 - smack/ thwack/ pow/ thump/ wham – **hitting things**
 - boom/ bang/ pop – **explosions/ weapons**
 - snore/ sniff/ snort/ snicker – **sounds made through the nose**
 - slip/ slide/ slither/ slurp – **slipping and sliding**
 - zzz/ snore/ yawn – **sleep**
 - mutter/ mumble/ grumble/ shh/ hush/ shush/ hiss/ whisper/ psst – **quietness**
1. This is the name for a very popular microblogging service, and the verb for using that service. Its name comes from the sounds that small birds make, which is also an expression for idle chit chat. – **Twitter/ Tweet (C)**
 2. This is an informal way of saying “remote control”. It comes from the sound of an electric spark or laser gun. – **Zapper (G)**
 3. This is a euphemism for having a baby – **The pitter patter of tiny feet (J)**
 4. The advertising slogan for Kellogg's Rice Krispies, from the sound they are supposed to make when milk is added to them – **Snap, crackle and pop (B)**
 5. This nickname for table tennis comes from the sound the balls make – **Ping pong (H)**
 6. This is the sound that a computer mouse makes, and has become a verb meaning to choose an icon or link – **Click (D)**
 7. Cheap plastic sandal whose name comes from the sounds they make – **Flip flops (A)**
 8. This metal fastener's name comes from a sound denoting speed – **Zip (E)**
 9. This was a slogan to persuade people to use seatbelts – **Clunk click every trip (K)**
 10. This is a nickname for a pager which comes its sound – **Beeper (F)**
 11. This is the sound of a car colliding. It is now used for when a computer program completely stops working and so the computer has to be rebooted. – **Crash (I)**