

# Backhanded Compliments

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# English Dave.pl

Break the Barrier

## Abstract

This workshop will help participants to identify and respond to backhanded compliments whilst also learning office banter

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

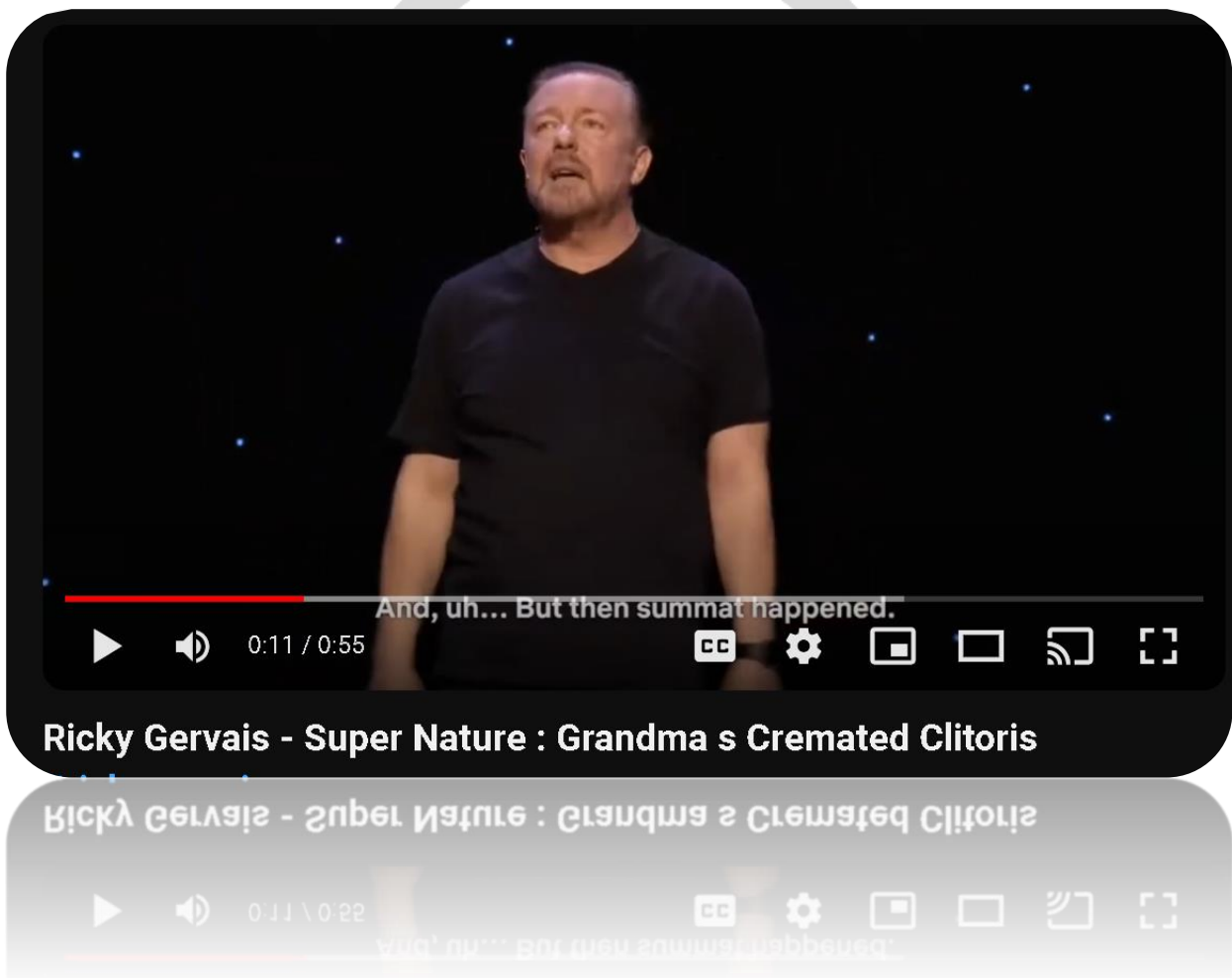
Humans are weird creatures. Adult humans are even more curious. Due to the amount of fun that we had with *Workshop 5: Sexual Harassment Words*, I decided to venture into another funny area of communication namely: *Backhanded Compliments*.

In this workshop we will look at what are compliments, their role within most societies and how to both give and receive them. We will then take a look at humour, specifically banter and how to participate with this game. Once these two basic concepts are understood, we will analyse different types of backhanded compliments in order to prepare you for the practical exercise of where you will need to give a few dodgy yet funny compliments.

Like all workshops, this is intended to be fun and educational.

Here is a warmer to get us in the right mind frame:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nGDY6vPIJZ0>



## 2. COMPLIMENT

### 2.1 DEFINITION

Most dictionaries will say that a compliment is an expression of praise or admiration in some way. Below is the definition according the Cambridge

[ <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/compliment> ]:

# compliment

*noun*

UK  /'kɒm.plɪ.mənt/ US  /'kɑ:m.plə.mənt/

Add to word list 

**C2** [C]

**a remark that expresses approval, admiration, or respect:**

### 2.2 FUNCTION

I like this table below from Wy. Dirgeyasa 2015 which shows the different reasons for complimenting. Dirgeyasa took it from Wu 2008 who looked at *Gender-Based Differences in Compliments in American Comedy TV Series Ugly Betty*.

There are also lots of research showing that it is equally beneficial to give them as receive them.

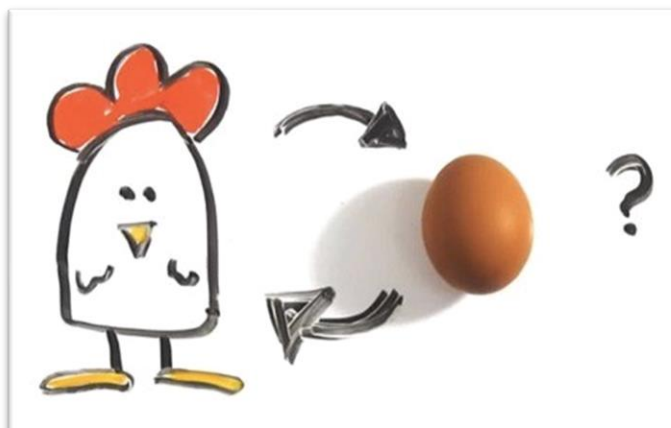


Table 1 Functions of compliments (adapted from Wu, 2008)

No	Function	Example	Explanation
1	To express admiration or approval of someone's work, appearance, taste.	<i>I like your new mobile phone.</i>	This compliment praises someone's possession and shows the admiration of the speaker.
2	To establish, confirm, and maintain solidarity	<i>I really like your dress.</i>	When a stranger comes into a group and make compliment, it can be regarded as a method to establish rapport in the group.
3	To replace gratitude, greetings, congratulations, and apologies	<i>How nice you are today!</i>	When two friend meet with each other, this utterance has the same function of the greeting as "How are you.?"
4	To soften a face-threatening act such as apologies, requests and criticisms	<i>Your dress is too much but I like your shoes.</i>	If the speaker makes some offence to the hearer, he could use a compliment to change the topic and soften the tensed atmosphere.
5	To open and sustain conversation (conversational strategy)	<i>Hi, your English is very good, when did you begin to learn?</i>	If the interlocutors are strangers, the can begin their conversation from the compliment to open the dialogues.
6	To reinforce desired behavior	<i>How nice your earnings are! Where did you buy them?</i>	These two sentences show not only the speaker's admiration, but also the speaker's strong hope to buy the same earrings.

### 2.3 TYPES

I quite enjoyed this article by Professor Susan Krauss Whitbourne PhD which outlines 9 different types of compliments with examples which you guys can go read later.

The screenshot shows the Psychology Today website interface. At the top, there are navigation links: "Find a Therapist", "Get Help", "Magazine", and "Today". Below this is a search bar for finding a therapist by city or zip. The main content area features a profile picture of Susan Krauss Whitbourne, PhD, ABPP, with the text "Fulfillment at Any Age". To the right of the profile is the article title "9 Types of Compliments and Why They Work (or Not)" under the "CAREER" category. Below the title is the sub-headline "Improve your compliments with these 9 simple tips." and the text "Posted May 11, 2013 | Reviewed by Matt Huston".

<https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/fulfillment-at-any-age/201305/9-types-of-compliments-and-why-they-work-or-not>

## 2.4 GIVING COMPLIMENTS

From my travels and periods of residence in a few places, I find that most cultures don't do a great job with both giving and receiving compliments. From my time abroad, Poland seems quite unique in its scarcity of compliments which makes me wonder if people don't know **how** or **when** to give them and on **what** you are allowed to?

## 2.5 RECEIVING COMPLIMENTS

Some cultures or nations are better than others when accepting gifts or compliments. Some of the funniest moments – and most awkward moments - I had in Poland both professionally and privately is when I gave compliments (both shallow and deep compliments) to clients or friends. It was as if they saw an alien and had no idea on how to respond! It made me wonder if they have had only a handful of meaningful compliments their whole life?

**Generally – ‘thank you’ will do in most cases.**



### 3. BANTER

#### 3.1 HUMOUR

According to Cambridge, this is a definition of humour:

<https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/humour>


# humour

*noun* UK (US **humor**)

UK  /'hju:.məʳ/ US  /'hju:.mə-/

---

**humour** *noun* (AMUSEMENT)

[Add to word list](#) 

**B1** [U]

**the ability to find things funny, the way in which people see that some things are funny, or the quality of being funny:**



#### 3.2 BANTER

According to Cambridge, this is a definition of banter:


<https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/banter>

# banter

*noun* [U]

UK  /'bæŋ.təʳ/ US  /'bæŋ.tə-/

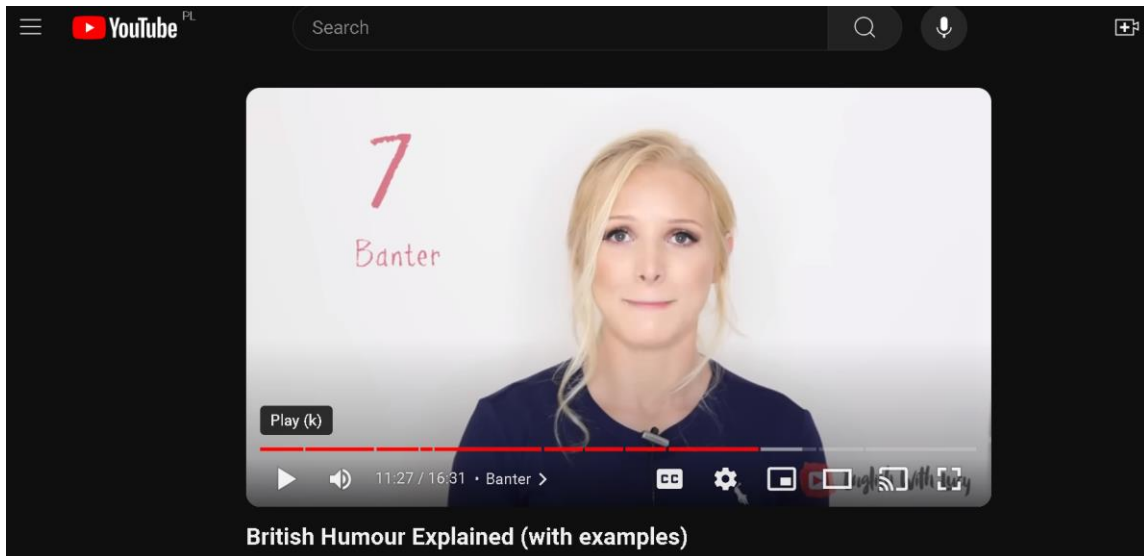
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[Add to word list](#) 

**conversation that is funny and not serious:**

### 3.3 EXAMPLES

A) For an overview of British humour and specifically banter, here is **English with Lucy** who have loads of useful English learning videos and tutorials:



[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LNFW1XcRu\\_E&t=687s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LNFW1XcRu_E&t=687s)

B) **Ricky Gervais** is a legend of comedy especially banter:



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9z2MXar19-s>



## 4. BACKHANDED COMPLIMENT

### 4.1 Backhand

PROMPT:

what can you backhand?

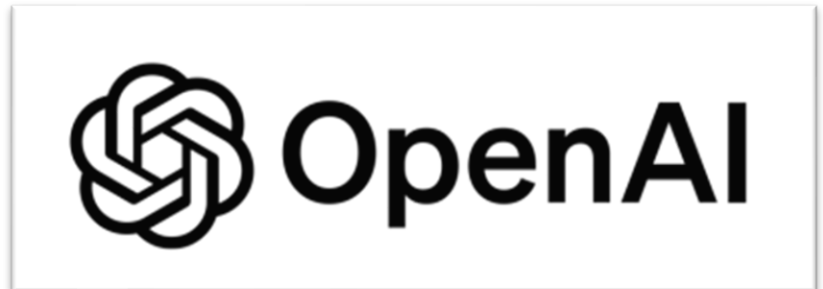
ANSWER:

In sports and everyday activities, "backhand" can refer to several actions, typically involving a motion where the back of the hand faces the direction of the strike. Here are some examples:

1. **Tennis:** The backhand stroke is a fundamental shot where the player swings the racket across their body with the back of their hand facing the ball.
2. **Table Tennis (Ping Pong):** Similar to tennis, a backhand shot involves striking the ball with the back of the hand facing forward.
3. **Badminton:** The backhand stroke in badminton involves hitting the shuttlecock with the racket on the side opposite to the player's dominant hand.
4. **Baseball/Softball:** A backhand catch refers to fielding a ball with the glove hand turned away from the body.
5. **Ice Hockey:** A backhand shot or pass involves using the back side of the stick blade.
6. **Squash:** A backhand stroke is used to hit the ball on the non-dominant side of the body.
7. **Golf:** While less common, a backhand shot in golf can refer to an unconventional stroke where the back of the hand faces the target.
8. **Volleyball:** A backhand hit can occur when the player uses the back of their hand to make contact with the ball, often in an unexpected or tricky play.

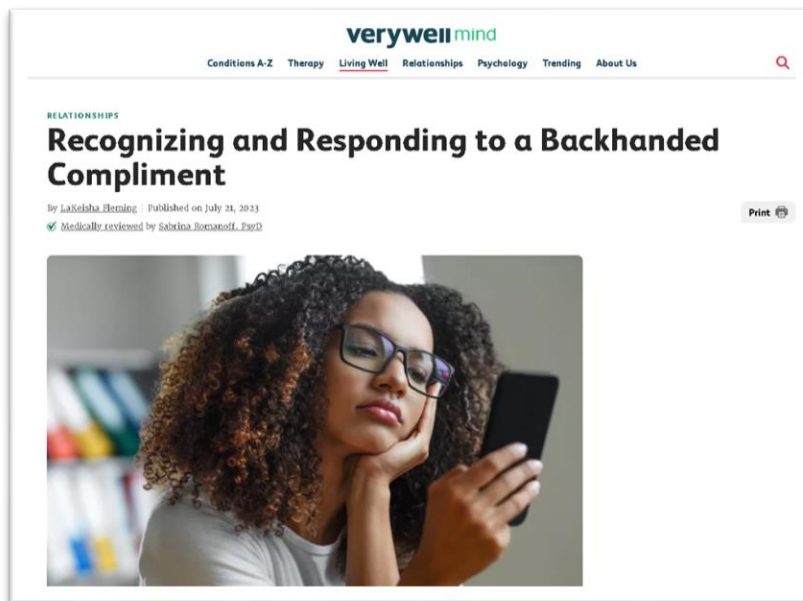
In more casual or colloquial contexts, "backhand" can also refer to:

1. **Writing:** In cursive writing, backhand refers to a style where the letters slant backward.
2. **Gesture:** A backhand slap is a striking motion with the back of the hand, typically used as a gesture of disapproval or insult.
3. **Compliment:** The term "backhanded compliment" refers to a comment that appears to be a compliment but also contains a subtle insult or criticism.



## 4.2 Identifying

- a) This article quite nicely covers a few aspects of backhanded compliments, specifically on why do people give them which seems to be a form of making someone else feel a bit smaller.



<https://www.verywellmind.com/how-to-respond-to-a-backhanded-compliment-7551500#:~:text=%E2%80%9CA%20backhanded%20compliment%2C%20also%20known,a%20subtle%20insult%20or%20criticism.>

- b) Another cool article is this one with 10 great examples:



<https://themindsjournal.com/what-is-a-backhanded-compliment-examples/>

### 4.3 RESPONDING

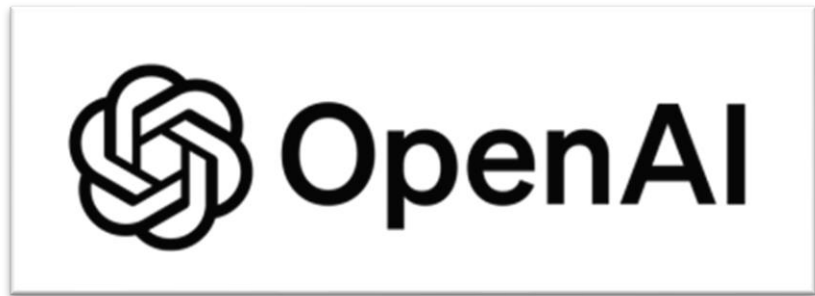
Both of the previous articles shows great ways of how to respond. Taking the examples from the latter: <https://themindsjournal.com/what-is-a-backhanded-compliment-examples/>

- **Reflect the comment:** Try mirroring their words with a twist, *"Yeah, it takes a lot of confidence to pull off this outfit, doesn't it?"* It demonstrates that you are aware of the subtext but chose to own it boldly.
- **Quote them later:** In a group, bring up the comment again casually, *"Like when you said I'm brave for my fashion choices!"* It can highlight the ridiculousness of the comment, provoking a discussion or a rethink.
- **Agree and amplify:** One of the best things you can do if you are thinking about how to respond to backhanded compliments. Agree with the comment in an exaggerated, humorous way. It shows you're confident enough to poke fun at yourself and can take their words with a grain of salt.
- **Ask for clarification:** Play the confusion card. Ask, *"What do you mean by that?"* It puts the ball back in their court and makes them think about what they've just said, possibly realizing the rudeness of their remark.
- **Question the standard:** For comments like *"You're funny for a woman,"* you might respond, *"Funny by whose standards?"* It challenges societal norms and opens up a broader conversation.
- **Use silence:** Wondering how to respond to backhanded compliments? Sometimes, saying nothing but giving a pointed look can be powerful. It's non-confrontational but sends a clear message that you heard the undertone.
- **Seek genuine insight:** If you're up for it, ask why they think that way, *"I'm curious, why would you say that?"* It can lead to an honest exchange.
- **Keep it classy:** Respond with a simple "Thank you" and move on. This keeps you above the fray and shows you're unfazed by the subtle dig, maintaining your dignity while not engaging in negativity.
- **Set boundaries:** If necessary, let the person know that their comment wasn't appreciated. A firm but polite, *"I prefer compliments without qualifications,"* can set the tone for future interactions.
- **Empathize with them:** Show understanding, *"Sounds like you've got a lot going on to think that's a compliment!"* It gently turns the tables and can be an eye-opener.

**4.4 EXAMPLES**

Prompt:  
10 backhanded compliments  
plus the explanation

Answer:  
Sure, here are 10 backhanded  
compliments along with  
explanations for each:



1. <b>"You look so good in that outfit; it really hides your flaws."</b>
- Explanation: This suggests that the person's usual appearance is flawed and needs hiding.
2. <b>"You're really smart for someone who didn't go to college."</b>
- Explanation: The compliment implies that the person's intelligence is surprising given their lack of formal education.
3. <b>"I wish I had your confidence to wear something like that."</b>
- Explanation: This implies that the outfit is questionable, and it takes confidence (or lack of awareness) to wear it.
4. <b>"You're so brave to go out without any makeup."</b>
- Explanation: This implies that the person's natural appearance is subpar and makeup is necessary.
5. <b>"It's amazing how you always stay true to yourself, no matter what people say."</b>
- Explanation: This suggests that people often have negative things to say about the person.
6. <b>"I could never pull off that look, but it really works for you."</b>
- Explanation: This implies that the look is unconventional or unattractive, but it suits the person.
7. <b>"You did a great job, considering it was your first time."</b>
- Explanation: This diminishes the person's accomplishment by suggesting it's only good for a beginner.
8. <b>"You have such a unique style; I've never seen anything like it."</b>
- Explanation: This suggests that the person's style is odd or out of the ordinary.
9. <b>"I love how you just don't care what anyone thinks."</b>
- Explanation: This implies that the person's choices or behavior might normally be judged negatively by others.
10. <b>"You're surprisingly articulate for someone your age."</b>
- Explanation: This suggests that people of the person's age are generally not expected to be articulate, making the compliment somewhat condescending.

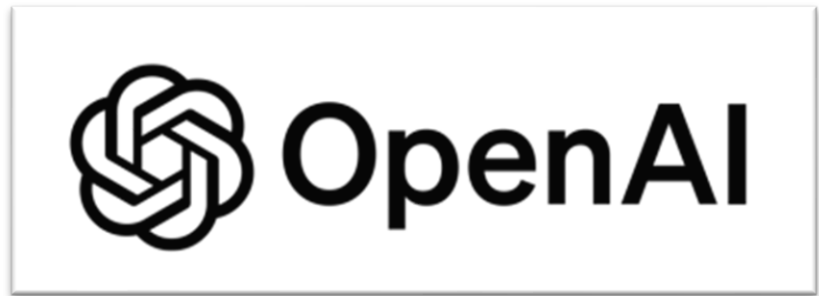
## 5. STEREOTYPES

Prompt:  
10 fun stereotypes

Answer:

Stereotypes can be harmful and perpetuate negative ideas about people based on superficial traits. However, some stereotypes are light-hearted and often used

humorously without intending to offend. Here are 10 fun and relatively benign stereotypes, though it's important to remember that they should be used cautiously and respectfully:



- 1. Canadians are excessively polite.**
  - Canadians are often stereotyped as saying "sorry" a lot and being extremely friendly.
- 2. British people love tea.**
  - It's a common stereotype that British people are always drinking tea, regardless of the time of day.
- 3. Italians talk with their hands.**
  - Italians are often depicted as using a lot of hand gestures when they speak.
- 4. Germans are very punctual and efficient.**
  - Germans are stereotyped as being extremely reliable, punctual, and efficient in everything they do.
- 5. The French are passionate about food and wine.**
  - The French are often seen as having a deep appreciation for fine dining and good wine.
- 6. Australians are laid-back and love surfing.**
  - Australians are often portrayed as easy-going and spending a lot of time at the beach.
- 7. The Irish have a great sense of humor and love to celebrate.**
  - The Irish are stereotyped as being fun-loving, with a strong culture of storytelling and celebration.
- 8. Japanese people are very tech-savvy and innovative.**
  - Japanese people are often seen as being at the forefront of technology and innovation.
- 9. Americans are overly enthusiastic and love big portions.**
  - Americans are often depicted as being very enthusiastic, loud, and enjoying large food portions.
- 10. The Dutch are very direct and straightforward.**
  - The Dutch are stereotyped as being very honest and direct in their communication, often skipping small talk.

These stereotypes can be amusing in the right context, but it's crucial to approach them with sensitivity and an understanding that they do not represent everyone in a particular group.

**6. EXERCISE**

Let's go!



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2. **Hall, A ?.** *What Is A Backhanded Compliment? 10 Examples That Show Why It's The Worst Thing Ever*  
<https://themindsjournal.com/what-is-a-backhanded-compliment-examples/>
3. **Whitbourne, S 2013.** *9 Types of Compliments and why they work (or Not)*  
<https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/fulfillment-at-any-age/201305/9-types-of-compliments-and-why-they-work-or-not>

**VIDEO**

1. Ricky Gervais > clitoris <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nGDY6vPIJZ0>
2. Lucy > humour [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LNFW1XcRu\\_E&t=687s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LNFW1XcRu_E&t=687s)
3. Ricky Gervais > graveyard <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9z2MXar19-s>