



---

**William:** Hello and welcome to *How To*, I'm William Kremer.

**Fi Glover:** Now, Muriel do your children complain of having too much homework?

**Muriel Gray:** Oh, not at all Fi, they really love it!

**William:** I heard that exchange on the radio this morning and I wanted to play it to you. The presenter, Fi Glover, asks her guest, Muriel Gray, if her kids complained about having too much homework.

**Fi Glover:** Now, Muriel do your children complain of having too much homework?

**Muriel Gray:** Oh, not at all Fi, they really love it!

**William:** Everyone's children complain about having too much homework! But Muriel says 'Not at all! Fi, they really love it!' When we say the opposite of the truth, or the opposite of our true feelings in order to be funny or to make a point, we call that sarcasm. Muriel Gray is being sarcastic.

**Muriel Gray:** Oh, not at all Fi, they really love it!

**William:** Some cultures don't have sarcasm; honest people always say what they mean. Believe me, Britain isn't one of those cultures. Here, people very often speak in a sarcastic or an ironic way. Indeed, some people think it's one of the main characteristics of our way of seeing the world.

Now, there are basically two rules to being sarcastic. Rule number one – say the opposite of the truth or the opposite of what you really feel. Rule number two – make sure that your conversation partner knows you're being sarcastic.

This is the difference between being sarcastic and lying – sarcasm is actually a way of showing your true feelings about something.

OK, let's hear some examples. Who is being sarcastic in this clip – the man or the woman?

**Woman:** John, the car won't start!

**Man:** Oh great! That's just what we need.

**William:** The man is being sarcastic. Listen again:

**Woman:** John, the car won't start!

**Man:** Oh great! That's just what we need.

**William:** When the woman tells him that their car won't start he says 'Oh great! That's just what we need'.

**Man:** Oh great! That's just what we need.

**William:** Notice that this man doesn't say, 'Good, that's what we need' but 'Oh great! That's just what we need!' The use of the words 'great' and 'just' adds emphasis, and so does his marked intonation – 'that's *just* what we need'. Remember that we want our conversation partner to know we're being sarcastic, and one way to do this is to exaggerate our feelings.

So - if somebody gives you some bad news, and you want to be sarcastic, don't say 'good' or 'that's good news' but really go for it, say 'Oh terrific!' or maybe 'Oh brilliant – that's great news'.

Let's listen to some more examples. These two women work in the same office with a third woman called Karen. It's ten o'clock in the morning and Karen hasn't arrived at work yet, but then she is late every day...

**Woman:** [It] looks like Karen's going to be late again.

**Woman 2:** Oh what a surprise.

**William:** The second woman says, 'Oh what a surprise' but of course it isn't a surprise at all, because Karen is late every day. Listen again.

**Woman:** [It] looks like Karen's going to be late again.

**Woman 2:** Oh what a surprise.

**William:** Now listen to this clip. The woman has just broken something.

**Woman:** Sorry, I think I've broken it.

**Man:** Oh well done! Pass it over here.

**William:** The man says 'well done' to the woman for breaking this thing.

**Man:** Oh well done! Pass it over here.

**William:** And this raises an important point about sarcasm. It's sometimes not very nice to be sarcastic to a person. You're turning another person's words or actions into a joke... so you should think, carefully, about when to be sarcastic and with whom to be sarcastic. And I repeat – it's important that the other person knows you're being sarcastic. In the next clip, you'll hear one way of making sure that someone knows:

**Woman:** I'll just have a coffee. I'm trying to lose weight, actually.

**Woman 2:** Yeah 'cause you're so fat, aren't you? No, I'm just kidding, just kidding!

**William:** The second speaker was making the point that the first speaker didn't need to lose weight by sarcastically saying 'You're so fat!'

**Woman:** I'll just have a coffee. I'm trying to lose weight, actually.

**Woman 2:** Yeah 'cause you're so fat, aren't you? No, I'm just kidding, just kidding!

**William:** She says 'I'm just kidding' which means 'I'm joking'.

So, you need to be careful how you use sarcasm, but sarcasm can be funny. This man is talking about waiting in queues, or waiting in line – something that we Brits are very famous for:

**Man:** It's a well-known fact that the British love waiting in queues. And, that's true... I mean, I do it whenever I can.

**William:** Listen again.

**Man:** It's a well-known fact that the British love waiting in queues. And, that's true... I mean, I do it whenever I can.

**William:** Now you can hear those clips again, and also hear some more examples of sarcasm on the *How To* webpage on BBC Learning English dot com. Goodbye.