



American Expression E0077 Beggars can't be choosers

IOTS Publishing Team  
International Online Teachers Society  
Since 2011

The expression "Beggars can't be choosers" is a proverbial phrase that suggests that individuals who are in a position of extreme need or dependency should not be selective or demanding about the assistance or resources they receive. It conveys the idea that when one is in a vulnerable or desperate situation, they should be grateful for any help they receive rather than expressing preferences or making demands.

The origin of the phrase is uncertain, but it has been used in various forms throughout history. It reflects a common understanding that those who rely on the generosity of others should not expect to have control or influence over what they receive.

The phrase is often used to remind individuals that when they are in a position of dependence or seeking assistance, they should be grateful for any support they receive, regardless of its quality or suitability. It implies that in situations of need, one should not be picky or overly selective, as beggars—those who rely on the generosity of others—do not have the luxury of choice.

The expression can be applied in a wide range of contexts. It can relate to financial assistance, where individuals who are in dire economic circumstances should be appreciative of any help they receive, even if it is not exactly what they desire. It can also apply to situations where individuals rely on the kindness of others for basic necessities such as food, shelter, or clothing.

Additionally, the phrase can be relevant in relationships or interactions where one person is heavily dependent on another. It suggests that the person in a position of dependency should not be overly demanding or critical of the assistance or support they receive, but instead should show gratitude and appreciation.

However, it is important to note that the phrase should not be used to justify or perpetuate mistreatment or exploitation of vulnerable individuals. It is meant to encourage humility, gratitude, and realistic expectations in situations where one is relying on the generosity of others.

In summary, "Beggars can't be choosers" is a proverbial phrase that highlights the idea that individuals who are dependent on the assistance or resources of others should not be selective or demanding. It emphasizes the importance of gratitude and humility in situations of need, suggesting that one should be appreciative of any support received rather than expressing preferences or making demands. While the phrase encourages realistic expectations and gratitude, it should not be used to justify mistreatment or exploitation of vulnerable individuals.

#### Questions for Discussion

1. How do you interpret the phrase "Beggars can't be choosers" in terms of personal responsibility and gratitude? Do you think there are situations where it is appropriate to express preferences or make choices even when relying on the generosity of others?
2. How does the concept of dependency influence our perception of the phrase? In what ways can power dynamics and the availability of resources impact the ability of individuals in need to exercise choice or voice their preferences?
3. Are there any potential ethical concerns or limitations to the idea conveyed by the expression? How can we ensure that individuals in vulnerable positions are treated with dignity and respect while also recognizing the realities of limited resources or assistance?
4. Can you think of real-life scenarios where the phrase "Beggars can't be choosers" applies? How do you think society can strike a balance between promoting self-sufficiency and providing support to those in need without undermining their agency or dignity?
5. How can the principle behind the expression be applied in a compassionate and empathetic manner? What steps can individuals and communities take to support those in need while also promoting empowerment and self-determination?