



American Expression E0215 Don't count your chickens before they hatch

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"Don't count your chickens before they hatch" is a well-known proverb that provides a cautionary note of wisdom about presumptions and overconfidence. The phrase essentially tells us not to assume or predict outcomes prematurely or to rely on a favorable result before it has actually come to pass. It serves as a reminder that our plans, hopes, and dreams are always at the mercy of circumstances that are often beyond our control.

The saying originates from an agricultural context, particularly chicken farming. When a hen lays eggs, it is common to anticipate the arrival of chicks. However, not all eggs are guaranteed to hatch into healthy chicks. Various factors might intervene, such as the egg being infertile, the incubation conditions not being met, or the chick not being healthy enough to break the eggshell. Consequently, if a farmer plans and acts based on the number of eggs, assuming all of them will hatch into chickens, he or she might end up disappointed and ill-prepared for the actual outcome.

In broader terms, this proverb can be applied to virtually all facets of life. For instance, in business, an entrepreneur may have a promising idea for a start-up and may start spending money on expansion plans, expecting success. But the proverb warns that until the business is up and running and generating profits, it's unwise to assume it will undoubtedly be successful. Market dynamics, customer preferences, competition, and countless other factors can impact the success of a business. Therefore, counting on profits before they are realized is akin to counting chickens before they hatch.

In personal life, it could refer to planning a day at the beach assuming the weather will be sunny, only to have it rain, or assuming that you'll get a job offer after a promising interview, only to be disappointed. Similarly, in academic scenarios, it warns students not to presume they have passed an exam before seeing their results, no matter how well they think they've performed.

The phrase "don't count your chickens before they hatch" serves as a healthy reality check. It advises against letting optimism cloud judgment and cautions against relying on uncertain future outcomes. Instead, it promotes prudence, caution, and contingency planning, urging us to wait for events to unfold in their own time and not let expectations get ahead of reality.

However, this proverb does not encourage pessimism or discourage ambition and dreaming big. The message it conveys is about maintaining a balance between optimism and realism. While it's important to have goals and strive for them, it's equally important to be mindful of uncertainties and potential setbacks that may arise along the way.

To summarize, "Don't count your chickens before they hatch" is a reminder that the future remains uncertain until it manifests. It's a timeless piece of wisdom that encourages patience, humility, and foresight, helping us to avoid the pitfalls of overconfidence and premature expectations. It tells us that it's fine to anticipate and plan for the future, but always with an awareness of the unpredictable nature of life.

#### Questions for Discussion

1. Can you provide an example from your own life or a real-world situation where "don't count your chickens before they hatch" could apply? How could the outcome have been different if a more cautious approach was taken?
  2. How can the lesson from this proverb be balanced with the need for optimism and ambition? Is there a risk that it could discourage risk-taking and innovation?
  3. In what ways can businesses, particularly startups, heed the warning conveyed in "don't count your chickens before they hatch" without stifling their growth and development?
  4. How might this proverb be relevant in today's fast-paced, technologically-driven world, where there's often a push for quick results and immediate gratification?
  5. How can educators and parents impart the wisdom of this proverb to young people, especially in the context of setting realistic expectations for academic performance and career aspirations?
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