



American Expression E0524 Lay it on thick

IOTS Publishing Team  
International Online Teachers Society  
Since 2011

"Lay it on thick" is a colorful and commonly used idiom in the English language, typically employed to describe an exaggerated or excessive display of flattery, praise, or emotion. When someone "lays it on thick," they are using excessive and insincere compliments or emotions to manipulate or impress others, often with the intention of gaining favor or achieving a particular goal.

The phrase's origin can be traced back to the early 19th century when the expression "lay it on" first emerged, meaning to apply something liberally or heavily. Over time, the addition of "thick" intensified the meaning, emphasizing the excessive and over-the-top nature of the behavior.

In social interactions, laying it on thick can be seen as insincere or ingenuine. For instance, imagine a person trying to impress their boss with excessive flattery and compliments in an attempt to get a promotion. They might continuously praise the boss's leadership skills, creativity, and intelligence, often going beyond genuine admiration to the point where it becomes obvious that they are trying to manipulate the situation.

Similarly, in romantic contexts, someone may lay it on thick by showering their love interest with extravagant gifts, grand gestures, and over-the-top declarations of affection, which can come across as insincere or overwhelming.

The phrase is not limited to personal relationships and can also be applied in professional settings. In a job interview, a candidate might lay it on thick by exaggerating their qualifications and achievements to make themselves appear more desirable to the employer. However, if their claims are unfounded or misleading, it can harm their credibility and chances of getting the job.

While laying it on thick is often associated with negative connotations of insincerity or manipulation, there are situations where it is used humorously or playfully. In comedic contexts, for example, a character may lay it on thick in a way that is obviously exaggerated for comedic effect, providing amusement to the audience.

However, it is crucial to be mindful of the impact of laying it on thick in different situations. Excessive flattery or emotional manipulation can lead to discomfort, mistrust, or even resentment among those on the receiving end. It is essential to strike a balance between genuine praise or emotions and over-the-top displays to maintain authenticity and healthy relationships.

In conclusion, "lay it on thick" is an idiom that describes an exaggerated and insincere display of flattery, praise, or emotion, often with the intent to manipulate or impress others. The phrase's origin harkens back to the notion of applying something liberally or heavily, with the addition of "thick" intensifying the meaning to denote excessiveness. While it can be used humorously in certain contexts, laying it on thick is generally seen as ingenuine and can have negative consequences in personal and professional relationships. Striving for authenticity and balanced expressions of praise and emotions is essential to maintaining trust and healthy connections with others.

#### Questions for Discussion

1. Have you ever encountered someone "laying it on thick" in a social or professional setting? How did you react to the excessive flattery or emotional display? What impact did it have on your perception of that person?
  2. In what situations do you think people are more likely to resort to "laying it on thick"? Is it primarily to gain favor or achieve specific goals, or are there other reasons behind this behavior?
  3. "Laying it on thick" can sometimes be seen as a form of manipulation. How can we differentiate between genuine compliments and insincere flattery? What are some red flags that might indicate someone is being disingenuous?
  4. Humor and playful exaggeration are often used in comedic contexts, where "laying it on thick" is intended to be funny. How do you distinguish between humorous exaggeration and manipulative behavior when it comes to this idiom's usage?
  5. Reflecting on personal experiences, have you ever caught yourself "laying it on thick" to impress someone or achieve a specific outcome? What were the reasons behind your actions, and what did you learn from that experience? How do you approach authenticity in your interactions moving forward?
-