



American Expression E1179 I call dibs

IOTS Publishing Team
International Online Teachers Society
Since 2011

The phrase "I call dibs" is an informal and often playful expression used to claim ownership or priority over something, particularly in situations where multiple individuals desire the same thing. It's a lighthearted way of staking a temporary or informal claim, typically in a social or casual setting, and it can apply to a wide range of situations and objects.

When someone says, "I call dibs," they are essentially declaring their right to have or use something before anyone else. It's a form of reserving or securing something, even if it's not a formal or legally binding claim. This expression is commonly used among friends or acquaintances when there is competition or desire for a particular item or opportunity, such as the front seat in a car, the last slice of pizza, or the chance to choose a movie to watch.

The phrase "I call dibs" is believed to have originated in the United States in the 20th century, possibly stemming from the children's game of "dibs" or "dibstones," where players claim ownership of certain objects or roles. Over time, it has become a widely recognized and accepted way to resolve minor disputes or establish order in social situations.

The concept of "calling dibs" operates on a basic principle of fairness and courtesy. By declaring "dibs," individuals seek to prevent conflicts or arguments by establishing a clear order of preference. It acknowledges the principle of "first come, first served" and allows people to take turns or make decisions in a more organized and equitable manner.

While "calling dibs" is often used for tangible items, it can also extend to intangible opportunities or privileges. For instance, someone might say, "I call dibs on choosing the next game we play," indicating their desire to have the first say in a group decision. In this context, it signifies not just ownership but also the right to make a choice or decision.

The phrase "I call dibs" is frequently used in informal and social settings, such as among friends or family members. It adds an element of fun and camaraderie to interactions, as it's often accompanied by laughter or good-natured banter. However, it's worth noting that the expression is not typically used in formal or professional situations, where more structured decision-making processes are in place.

In conclusion, "I call dibs" is a playful and informal expression used to assert ownership or priority over something, particularly in situations where multiple individuals are interested in the same item or opportunity. It reflects a desire to establish order and fairness, prevent conflicts, and make decisions in a lighthearted and agreeable manner. This phrase adds an element of fun to social interactions and is widely recognized and accepted in casual settings.

Questions for Discussion

1. Can you share a memorable or amusing experience from your life where "calling dibs" played a role in resolving a friendly dispute or deciding who gets a particular item or opportunity?
2. How does the use of the phrase "I call dibs" contribute to the dynamics of a social group or gathering, and what are some common situations where this expression is used to maintain order or fairness?
3. In what ways does "calling dibs" serve as a social convention for managing minor conflicts or making decisions in a fun and informal manner? Can you think of examples where it has diffused tension or made a situation more enjoyable?
4. Are there cultural or regional variations in how "calling dibs" is used or understood? Do different groups or communities have their own unique ways of expressing ownership or priority in social settings?
5. How does the concept of "calling dibs" relate to the broader principles of fairness and cooperation in social interactions? Can you discuss instances where this playful expression reflects the importance of equitable decision-making among friends or peers?