



American Expression E2784 Right away

IOTS Publishing Team
International Online Teachers Society
Since 2011

“Right away” is a common English expression meaning immediately, at once, or without delay. When someone asks you to do something “right away,” they expect you to begin or complete it as soon as possible, with absolutely no unnecessary waiting. For example, a manager might say, “Please send me the report right away.” This means the report should be sent immediately rather than later in the day. The expression is widely used in everyday English.

The word “right” has several meanings in English, but in “right away,” it works as an intensifier. It adds emphasis to the idea of immediacy. “Away” can suggest movement from a point, but the phrase as a whole should not be interpreted literally. Together, the words form an idiomatic adverbial expression. Therefore, learners should understand “right away” as a complete unit meaning “immediately,” rather than trying to translate each word separately.

“Right away” is common in spoken English. Imagine that you smell smoke in your house. You might tell your family, “We need to get outside right away.” In this situation, waiting could be dangerous, so the phrase communicates urgency. Similarly, if a child is injured, a parent might say, “We need to see a doctor right away.” The expression tells the listener that action should happen with no unnecessary delay.

However, “right away” does not always describe an emergency. It can also be used for requests and actions. Someone may say, “I recognized her right away,” meaning the recognition happened immediately. A friend might say, “I’ll call you right away when I arrive.” A customer could be told, “Someone will help you right away.” In these examples, the phrase simply emphasizes that something happens quickly or promptly.

Several expressions have meanings similar to “right away.” “Immediately,” “at once,” “straight away,” and “right now” can often be used in similar situations. “Immediately” sounds more formal and is common in written instructions. “At once” can sound firm or urgent. “Straight away” is common in British English. “Right now” often emphasizes the present moment, while “right away” focuses more on beginning an action without delay.

Learners should notice where “right away” appears in a sentence. It commonly comes after a verb or at the end of a clause, as in, “She answered right away.” It can also appear near the beginning: “Right away, I knew something was different.” Another useful pattern is “do something right away,” such as, “You should apologize right away.” Because the expression is flexible, it works naturally in many everyday conversations and situations.

In conclusion, “right away” is a useful English expression that means immediately or without delay. It can communicate urgency in serious situations, prompt action in ordinary requests, or the speed with which something happens. Understanding this phrase will help learners follow instructions and respond naturally in conversation. When someone says, “Come here right away,” “Call me right away,” or “I understood right away,” the essential idea is the same: there is little or no waiting between the situation and the action.

Questions for Discussion

1. In what situations do you usually need to do something “right away”?
2. Have you ever received a message that you felt you had to answer right away? What happened?
3. What kinds of emergencies require people to take action right away?
4. Do you usually do important tasks right away, or do you sometimes put them off? Why?
5. If your friend asked you to come and help them right away, what situations would make you stop what you were doing and go?