



American Expression E2807 Run across

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The phrasal verb “run across” is a common English expression that means to meet, find, or discover someone or something unexpectedly. It describes an encounter that happens by chance rather than through deliberate planning. For example, if you say, “I ran across an old friend at the supermarket,” you mean that you met your friend accidentally. Although the verb “run” often suggests physical movement, “run across” usually does not mean that anyone is actually running.

One important use of “run across” involves meeting people unexpectedly. Imagine walking through a crowded shopping mall and suddenly recognizing a former classmate. You could say, “I ran across my former classmate yesterday.” This sentence emphasizes that the meeting was unplanned. Similarly, someone might say, “We ran across our neighbors while traveling in Japan.” Such encounters can feel particularly surprising when they happen far from home. In these examples, “run across” has a meaning similar to “bump into” or “come across.”

Another common use concerns finding objects, information, or materials by accident. You might explain, “I ran across an old contract while organizing my desk.” Likewise, a student researching history might say, “I ran across an interesting article about ancient Rome.” The expression suggests that the discovery occurred during another activity, not necessarily because the person was searching specifically for that item.

Its basic structure is subject, run across, and object. The present tense is “run across,” while the past tense is “ran across.” The past participle is “run across,” as in “I have run across that expression before.” Because this phrasal verb is inseparable, the object normally follows “across.” For example, “I ran across my teacher” is natural, but “I ran my teacher across” does not express the intended meaning.

The expression can appear in questions, negative sentences, and different time frames. You might ask, “Have you ever run across this problem before?” when seeking advice from a colleague. A negative example is, “I have never run across such a difficult situation.” For future possibilities, someone could say, “If I run across the missing report, I will contact you.” These examples show how the phrase works in professional conversations as well as informal discussions.

It is helpful to distinguish “run across” from related expressions. “Come across” is extremely similar and often interchangeable when describing accidental meetings or discoveries. There is also a literal meaning of “run across,” as in “The child ran across the street.” Context tells listeners whether the speaker means physical movement or an unexpected encounter.

In conclusion, “run across” is a practical phrasal verb for describing accidental meetings and unexpected discoveries. It adds a sense of chance to everyday communication and helps speakers explain how they encountered people, objects, information, or situations. Remember the forms “run across,” “ran across,” and “have run across,” and place the object after the complete expression. Practicing sentences about real experiences will make the phrase easier to remember. When you unexpectedly meet someone or discover something interesting, “run across” can communicate that experience naturally and clearly.

Questions for Discussion

1. Have you ever run across an old friend or classmate in an unexpected place? Where did it happen, and how did you react?
2. Have you ever run across something valuable or interesting while cleaning your house or organizing your belongings?
3. What would you do if you ran across a famous person while walking down the street?
4. Have you ever run across an unexpected problem at work? How did you handle the situation?
5. Have you ever run across useful information by accident that helped you solve a problem or make an important decision?