



American Expression E2811 Run out

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The phrasal verb “run out” commonly means that a supply of something becomes completely used up or unavailable. It can also describe time, opportunities, or agreements reaching their end. For example, “We ran out of milk” means there is no milk left. Although “run” usually suggests movement, this expression often concerns shortages or endings rather than physical running. Understanding its different uses helps English learners communicate clearly in ordinary situations, especially when explaining practical problems, unexpected delays, and the need to replace essential items before important activities can continue without unnecessary interruption.

The most familiar pattern is “run out of” followed by the thing that is no longer available. Someone might say, “I ran out of cash while traveling,” or “The printer has run out of paper.” These sentences identify the missing resource. The subject is usually the person or organization experiencing the shortage, although machines can also be subjects. The expression is useful at home, in offices, and while shopping.

“Run out” can appear without “of” when the subject is the supply itself. Compare “We ran out of coffee” with “The coffee ran out.” Both describe the same shortage, but the grammatical focus changes. In the first sentence, “we” experience the problem. In the second, “the coffee” is what becomes exhausted. You can also say, “Our supplies are running out,” to warn that only a small amount remains.

Time is another important context. “We are running out of time” means that little time remains to finish something. A teacher might say this near the end of an examination, or a manager might say it before an approaching deadline. “My patience is running out” similarly suggests that someone’s willingness to tolerate a situation is nearly exhausted. These uses make the phrase especially expressive in urgent conversations.

The expression also describes something reaching its scheduled end. For instance, “My contract runs out next month” means the contract expires then. A passport, membership, or warranty can run out as well, although “expire” is often more formal and precise. In another literal use, “The dog ran out of the house” simply means the dog moved from inside to outside. Context distinguishes this movement from the idea of depletion.

Grammatically, the main forms are “run out,” “ran out,” and “run out.” We say, “Tickets run out quickly,” “Tickets ran out yesterday,” and “Tickets have run out.” The continuous form, “running out,” indicates that a shortage is approaching. Notice that “run out of” is followed by a noun or noun phrase, not an infinitive. For example, “We ran out of ideas” is correct and natural.

In conclusion, “run out” is a versatile expression describing exhausted supplies, limited time, expiring arrangements, and sometimes movement outward. Remember the difference between “We ran out of water” and “The water ran out.” The first highlights who lacks something, while the second highlights what disappeared. Practice with everyday examples involving money, food, deadlines, and contracts. Doing so will help you recognize the phrase quickly and use it accurately in conversation.

Questions for Discussion

1. Have you ever run out of money while traveling or shopping? How did you handle the situation?
2. What would you do if you suddenly ran out of essential supplies, such as food, water, or medicine, during an emergency?
3. Have you ever run out of time while completing an important assignment or project? What caused the delay?
4. How do you usually prepare to prevent running out of important items at home or in the workplace?
5. Have you ever experienced a situation where your patience ran out because of someone’s behavior? How did you respond?