

# Real Spanish Phrase Book

By Marina Diez and Ben Curtis

www.notesinspanish.com

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# **An Introduction from Ben**

When I started learning Spanish here in Spain, one of the things I most enjoyed was picking up cool phrases from the locals, and using them in my own Spanish conversations whenever I got the chance. The effect this had on the Spanish people I talked to was wonderful.

'Wow', they would say, 'you sound like a Spanish person!'

When you are trying to learn a new language, you don't get much better feedback than that!

So began a long-term interest, a mild obsession even, with collecting real, authentic Spanish phrases, those used on a day to day basis by real Spanish people in their everyday conversations, the typical Spanish phrases you'll never learn in a textbook.

A couple of years ago Marina and I decided to start documenting and classifying these phrases, with the aim of sharing them with the Notes in Spanish listeners and viewers. At last, after a very careful selection process, our 'Real Spanish Phrase Book' is ready.

We really hope you enjoy using the phrases. Slip a few into your Spanish conversations and you'll be amazed how Spanish you not only sound, but feel as well!

Ben, NotesinSpanish.com

# **Notes on Using this Book**

This book contains colloquial Spanish phrases that really are used on a day to day basis. It is by no means a complete encyclopaedia of Spanish slang, rather a careful selection of those favourite expressions that we love, use, and hear every day.

Unless otherwise specified, these phrases have come from the Spanish spoken in Spain. This means that if you rock up in Argentina, Mexico, or Peru, there's a small chance that one or two of them might cause looks of mild confusion when tried out on the locals.

Don't worry though, you won't get into any trouble, in fact the person you are talking to is likely to be so interested in hearing how a certain thing is said slightly differently in Spain, that they'll take the time to tell you their version in Columbian, Honduran or Chilean Spanish. When this happens, you end up learning even more!

And when you do get to use these phrases with Spanish people from here in Spain, we guarantee there will never be any confusion: you'll be greeted as a hero of *real* Spanish fluency!

### **Literal Translations**

Like many phrases in our own language, the literal translations of these phrases often make no sense, or seem to have nothing to do with the meaning of the phrase itself. 'Soy la leche', for example, is literally translated as 'I am the milk', though what it really means out on the street is, 'I am really cool'.

We have included a few literal translations in the book just for fun, when we find the literal meaning of each word to be interesting or just plain bizarre. Just remember though, the literal translation usually has nothing to do with the actual meaning and usage of the phrases.

## Can Anyone Use Any of these Phrases?

Most of the phrases in this book can be used by anyone of any age, and in any company.

However, one or two of the included phrases are only likely to be used by teenagers, whilst others would never be used by anyone under 30! Some are particularly rude, and you would not want to use those in front of people you didn't know too well!

Wherever any of these rules apply, we have made a note to make sure you don't go wrong. Otherwise, you can use all of these phrases whenever, and with whoever, you like.

# **Pronunciation - The Accompanying Audio**

This book is accompanied by an exclusive set of special audio files in which Marina and Ben provide you with pronunciation tips and further information about each phrase.

### Where to download the Audio

The audios for The Real Spanish Phrase Book are included in a folder called **Real Spanish Phrase Book Audios**, inside your main Real Spanish Phrase Book folder.

# Key

Each phrase is presented in the following format:

# ¡No me des la lata! - Phrase

Leave me in peace! - Meaning

Literally, 'don't give me the tin', this phrase is ideal when someone is going on and on at you about something, and you can't take it any more! - *Notes on the phrase* 

Furthermore, the phrases are subdivided under separate headings or themes, ordered alphabetically, and starting on the next page with "Addictions".

We really hope you enjoy the book!

# **Addictions**

# Estar enganchado

#### To be hooked on something

Food, tele, drugs, this phrase is used for anything you can get addicted to. E.g. *'Estoy enganchada con este libro, no puedo parar de leerlo'*, meaning, 'I'm addicted to this book, I can't put it down!'

# Tener mono de algo

#### To be really in need of, or desperate for, something

E.g. 'Tengo mono de helado', meaning, 'I'm desperate for ice-cream'. This phrase originally came from drug addicts, and was used when they were desperate for another 'fix'.

# **Bad People**

# ¡Eres un rata!

#### You are really tight, stingy, mean

Literally, 'you are a rat!' This expression is used for people that are really tight, stingy, or mean with their money. E.g. 'Juan es un rata, siempre se asegura de no dejar ni un céntimo de más', meaning, 'Juan is really stingy, he always makes sure he never leaves a cent too much'.

#### Eres un chorizo

#### You're a thief!

'Chorizo' is of course a kind of spicy sausage, but it is also used in slang for either a full-blown thief, or someone who just steals little things all the time.

### Eres un buitre

#### You are a vulture!

For people who always grab most of the free stuff first (like free food and drink at a party), or try to live off hand-outs from others.

## Es un cantamañanas

#### He's irresponsible/deceitful

*'Cantamañanas'*, literally 'sing-mornings', is used for people who don't keep their word, or brag a lot without substance.

# Ese niño da mucha guerra

#### That kid is a pain in the neck

Literally, 'that kid gives a lot of war', this phrase is used for someone that requires lots of attention, and gives you a real headache.

# **Blame**

#### **Echar balones fuera**

#### To place the blame elsewhere

E.g. 'Fue mi compañero el que cometió el error, pero como siempre, echa balones fuera, y mi jefe culpa a todo el equipo', meaning, 'my work mate made the mistake, but as usual he's placing the blame elsewhere, and my boss is holding the whole team responsible.'

# Le pillamos con las manos en la masa

#### We caught him in the act

Literally, 'we caught him with his hands in the dough'. E.g. 'Mi hijo siempre nos decía que no fumaba, pero el otro día le pillamos con las manos en la masa en un parque cerca de casa', meaning, 'my son said he doesn't smoke, but the other day we caught him in the act in a park near the house.'

Clever

¡Qué listo eres!

You're a clever one!

As well as being used as a compliment, this is also often used ironically, in a sarcastic tone

of voice, to mean 'you are too clever for your own good'.

¡Qué espabilado eres!

To kids: You're so clever! To adults: You sneaky git!

Adults say this lovingly to children when they seem clever for their age. But adults also use

it negatively with each other, when a friend exploits a situation for his or her own benefit.

For example, when your friend is quickest to take the most comfy seat for watching TV!

Dar en la diana

To get something right

E.g. 'He dado en la diana. He acertado quien era el asesino', meaning 'I guessed right. I

knew who the killer was!'

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# Has dado en el clavo

#### You hit the nail on the head

When someone makes a very astute statement about a situation, getting to the heart of the matter straight away.

# Confusion!

### No me entero de la misa la mitad

#### I don't understand a thing!

Literally, 'I don't understand half the mass', this might be used in a classroom or meeting when you feel completely lost, or can't follow someone's explanation.

# No tiene ni pies ni cabeza

#### It doesn't make sense

E.g. 'Tu redacción no tiene ni pies ni cabeza, es mejor que la repitas', meaning, 'Your essay makes no sense, you'd better repeat it.'

# **Crazy People!**

## Esa chica está zumbada

That girl is crazy

Cool kids pronounce this without the last 'd': 'zumba'o'.

# Está como una regadera

He's totally crazy

'Regadera' means watering can! We're not sure what the connection is!

# **Crying**

### Llorar a moco tendido

#### To cry non-stop

Literally to cry until snot, 'moco', flows out of your nose! E.g. 'Rocío esta llorando a moco tendido porque ha suspendido un examen', meaning, 'Rocio can't stop crying, because she failed an exam'.

# Llorar como una magdalena

#### As above, to cry non-stop

This expression refers to Santa María Magdalena, the prostitute who converted to Christianity and washed Jesus' feet with her tears.

# Damn it!

# ¡Mecachis en la mar!

#### Damn it!

Mild swearword mostly used by people over the age of 50. Ideal for when you need to swear in front of the in-laws!

# La madre que te parió

#### #@+\*!!!

Literally, 'the mother that bore you', this phrase is extremely fierce, and should only be said in front of people you know very well. Likely to be used when, for example, your brother drops your camera in the swimming pool, or the dog eats your homework. Often followed by the second part of the phrase '… que a gusto se quedó', to give the full phrase which literally means, 'the mother that bore you, how happy she felt afterwards'!

# 'Dichos' - Typical Sayings

#### En boca cerrada no entran moscas

#### Sometimes it's better to keep your mouth shut

Literally, 'flies can't enter a closed mouth'. Either said to, or by, someone who has just put their foot in it, and said something they shouldn't have.

#### Quien no llora no mama

#### If you don't ask you don't get

This phrase comes from breast feeding! Literally, if the baby doesn't cry, '*llorar*', it doesn't get to breast feed, 'mamar'. Now it is used widely to suggest that if you want something in life, you really need to go ahead and ask for it!

### En el país de los ciegos, el tuerto es el rey

If you know a bit more about something than everyone else around you, you are an expert

The literal meaning of this phrase is, 'in the land of the blind, the one-eyed man is king'.

# El mundo es un pañuelo

#### It's a small world

Literally, 'the world is a hankerchief'. Useful when you can't believe you just bumped into your ex in China!

# Más vale una vez rojo que 20 amarillo

It's better to clear things up as soon as possible, than to let them keep annoying you over and over again

For example, this is the advice you give to a friend when they tell you that someone at work is continually making their life impossible, and you think they should put a stop to the situation fast, before it keeps getting worse.

# Donde hay confianza, da asco

#### **Familiarity breeds contempt**

When your best friend gets away with treating you badly because they know you too damn well.

## Ha nacido con un pan debajo del brazo

#### The baby has brought good fortune to the family

Literally, 'he was born with bread under his arm', this is a typical phrase you might hear when a family has a lucky break (usually financial or work related) soon after a child is born.

### Estar a las duras y a las maduras

#### To be there whenever needed, in good times and bad

E.g. 'Los buenos amigos estan contigo en las duras y las maduras', meaning 'Good friends always stand by your side, even when times are tough'.

# A buenas horas mangas verdes

#### You're too late!

Literally, 'at good hours green sleeves', this phrase is used when someone arrives too late, or offers help too late, to be of any use. The phrase originates from Spain's Guardia Civil police force, who wear a green uniform, and were famous for being slow to arrive at the scene of a crime.

# **Escapology**

# Dar esquinazo

#### To avoid someone on purpose

E.g. 'Mi jefe me ha dado esquinazo, teníamos una reunión a las 9h y no ha aparecido', meaning, 'My boss is avoiding me, we had a meeting at 9 a.m. and he hasn't turned up'.

# Escaquearse de algo

#### To get out of doing something

E.g. 'Mi hermana se ha escaqueado otra vez de poner la mesa', meaning, 'My sister has got out of laying the table again.'

# Fed Up!

# ¡Ya no puedo más!

#### I've had enough!

When you just can't take something any more! This is usually shouted when storming out of the room!

# ¡No me des la lata!

#### Leave me in peace!

Literally, 'don't give me the tin', this phrase is ideal when someone is going on and on at you about something, and you can't take it any more!

# Eres un petardo

#### You're a pain/a real bore

E.g. '¡Eres un petardo! ¡Te pasas el día hablando de fútbol!', meaning, 'You are a pain, you spend all day talking about football!'

### Me tienes frito

#### You've totally worn me out

*'Frito'* means fried. You'd use this for an exhausting boyfriend or a pestering child, when you've had enough!

# ¡Qué plasta eres!

#### You are a nightmare!

Best reserved for family or close friends.

## ¡Eres un pesado!

#### You are a total pain!

Once again the essential point here is that someone has been going on and on and on at you about something for some time, before you finally tell them what a pain in the backside they are!

### Me ralla mucho

#### That really annoys me

Pretty slang this one, mostly used by those under 30! E.g. 'Me ralla mucho este profesor', meaning, 'this teacher really annoys me'.

## ¡No puedo más con ella!

#### I can't cope with her anymore!

...or with a situation, e.g. 'No puedo más con mi trabajo', meaning, 'I can't cope with this job any more'.

# ¡Qué rollo!

#### How boring!

Used when something is boring or repetitive, e.g. a movie, homework, chores...

## Es un tostón / ¡Qué tostón!

#### It's really really (really) boring!

Tostón literally means 'big toast', but in reality it's used for the most insufferably dull things you can imagine. E.g. 'Esta película es un tostón', this film is really dull. It is also commonly used at events and gatherings, for example when you are bored in a class, '¡Qué tostón de clase!', or at a conference, 'esta conferencia ha sido un tostón', meaning, 'this conference has been really dull'.

# ¡Déjame en paz!

#### Leave me in peace!

Always delivered like the crack of a whip, this phrase means 'get lost, now! I've had as much as I can take!' Ideal for when someone is going on and on at you, and you feel like you are about to explode!

# **Food and Drink**

#### Eres un catacaldos

#### You like to try a bit of everything

From 'catar', to try, and 'caldo', broth. This phrase is used to describe a person that likes to try a bit of what is on everyone else's plate, but can also be used in other situations, such as for someone that is constantly changing boy/girlfriends!

# Nos hemos ventilado el jamón

#### We've finished off all the ham

In fact you can 'ventilate' (polish off!) any kind of food, e.g. el queso... el pan... el helado...

### Esta tarta está de muerte

#### This cake is incredible

Not dead, as the phrase literally seems to imply, just dead good! This construction can be used with all foods.

## ¡Estoy que peto!

#### I'm totally full up!

A very informal phrase for when you can't eat another thing.

# Me he puesto morado

#### I've eaten a lot

This literally means, 'I've put myself purple', and is used when you have eaten a lot, and enjoyed the food.

## Nos hemos zampado todo

#### We've eaten everything!

Used at the end of a particularly good, informal meal, when there is absolutely nothing left on any of the plates!

### Me muero de hambre

#### I'm starving!

Literally, 'I'm dying of hunger.' It's also common to hear, 'me muero de sed', meaning, 'I'm dying of thirst'.

# Eres un tiquismiquis

#### You are really fussy

Not only for people who are fussy about food and hardly eat anything, but also for people who are obsessive, for example about how their clothes are folded, keeping the house tidy, etc.

# Huele que alimenta

#### It smells incredible

Literally, 'it smells that it feeds', this is THE essential points-winning phrase to use if you ever end up with a Spanish mother-in-law, boss, boy/girlfriend, etc, and they invite you around to dinner!

# **Good People**

# ¡Soy la leche!

#### I rock! I am the coolest thing on the block

Literally, 'I am the milk', this pretty informal phrase is the kind of thing you would tell your friends (if they don't know it already!) Mostly used by those under 30.

## Es un buen partido

#### He's a good catch

What you tell your best mate about their new boyfriend or girlfriend!

# Más majo que la mar salada

#### Incredibly nice

You could replace 'majo' here with other positive personality adjectives such as *bueno* (good), *generoso* (generous) and *guapo* (attractive). The literal translation in the above case is funny: 'nicer than the salty sea'! This is a phrase for the over-50's.

# Tengo para dar y regalar

#### I've got plenty to spare

For example, if someone asks you for a pencil and you have a whole boxful, you might say this as you happily give one away.

# ¡Qué piropo me has echado!

#### That's a hell of a compliment you've just paid me!

Sometimes you might hear 'piropo' replaced with 'piropazo', for an even bigger compliment!

# I Can't Believe It!

# ¡Qué barbaridad!

#### Goodness me/l can't believe it!

This is used when you see something totally excessive, e.g. '¡Qué barbaridad!, que de gente hay en el Metro', meaning, 'Goodness me, the Metro is packed!'

## ¡Qué fuerte!

#### No way!

When you hear someone has been unfaithful, or has passed an exam without doing a stroke of work all year, or has received an amazing 50% salary rise. These amazing (in a good or bad sense) and somewhat unbelievable situations are always worth a quick '¡Qué fuerte!'

### ¡Yo alucino!

#### I can't believe it!

Literally, 'I am hallucinating!', the Spanish use this informal phrase whenever they are presented with an outrageous situation. Price of bread gone up 200%? 'Yo Alucino...' Your friend tells you they are going on holiday for the 10th time this year? 'Yo Alucino...' You will often also hear 'Alucino' used alone, or in conjunction with 'con', e.g. 'Alucino contigo', meaning 'I can't believe you', or 'Alucino con el precio de la fruta...', meaning 'I can't believe the price of fruit.

## Si no lo veo no lo creo

### I'll believe it when I see it

When your expectations of something actually happening aren't all that high!

## In the Clouds

#### Este chico va a su bola / Este chico va a su aire

#### This kid does his own thing

This is used for people who are very independent and generally do what they want, when they want, and usually on their own.

#### Está en las nubes

#### She's on another planet

Literally, 'she's in the clouds', this means that she is lost in her own thoughts, or her mind is somewhere else.

### Está en Babia

#### He's lost in his own world

This phrase comes from a tale about one of Spain's ancient kings, who used to go hunting in an area in the north-west of Spain, called Babia. When people asked to see the king for advice or help, his servants would say, 'He's off in Babia', and that's the origin of the phrase we use today.

# In your element

#### Estás en tu salsa

#### You're in your element

Literally, 'you are in your own sauce', this phrase is said to someone who is obviously in their ideal situation, in their ideal place, and at the perfect time, and is very happy as a result!

### Está como un pez en el agua

#### She's really having a great time

She's in her element, literally 'like a fish in water'. Note: in English we say 'like a fish out of water' to mean the exact opposite!

### Estoy más ancho que largo

#### I'm happy and content

Literally, 'I'm feeling wider than long', this might be used in two types of situation: when you're happily lying on the sofa, relaxing on a Sunday afternoon, or when you finally get something off your chest, e.g. 'por fin me he atrevido a hablar con mi hermano del dinero que me debe, y me he quedado mas ancha que larga', meaning, 'I've finally dared to speak to my brother about the money he owes me, and I feel much better.'

## Just What I Need...

## Me viene al pelo

#### That's just what I needed!

Literally, 'it comes to my hair!' E.g. 'Gracias por dejarme los 10 Euros, me vienen al pelo', meaning, 'thanks for lending me the 10 Euros, they're just what I need right now'. You will sometimes also hear, 'Me viene como anillo al dedo', literally, 'it comes like a ring to my finger', which again means 'that's just what I needed right now'.

## **Looks Good!**

### Tiene buena pinta

#### It looks good

Literally, 'it has a good pint', you could equally answer 'tiene buena pinta' to a friend's suggestion about a restaurant, a movie, a book, or a certain dish on a menu, e.g. '¿Quieres cenar en el restaurante nuevo? - Sí, tiene buena pinta', meaning, 'Do you want to eat in the new restaurant? - Sure, it looks good'.

### Dar buen rollo

#### To give a good impression

Quite informal. E.g. 'Esta chica me ha dado buen rollo, creo que le voy a contratar', meaning, 'That girl made a good impression on me, I think I'll hire her'.

# Lying!

### Es una mentira como una catedral

#### That's a massive lie

Literally, 'a lie as big as a cathedral'!

### Me parece una trola como un castillo

#### That's the biggest lie I've ever heard

Literally, 'that seems like a lie as big as a castle'. In British English we'd call it a real 'whopper'! Note that 'trola' is a slang word for a lie.

### Me suena a cuento chino

#### Sounds like a tall story to me

I don't know what the Chinese have to do with this, but the literal translation is, 'it sounds like a chinese story to me'. Useful when someone tells you a tale that you just can't believe really happened.

## **Pissed Off**

### ¡Qué mandón eres!

#### You are really bossy!

Wife to husband... sister to brother... you get the picture!

### ¡Te voy a dar!

#### You're going to get it!

Homer to Bart Simpson... father to moody kid... girl to impossible boyfriend... Run if you hear this one!

### ¡Mueve el culo un poco, guapo!

#### Move your butt! Get on with it!

'Culo' means 'bum/butt'. The 'guapo' is optional, and means more 'mate/dude' in this context than 'sexy'.

### ¡No tengas jeta! / ¡Qué jeta tienes!

Don't be so cheeky / You are so cheeky (You've got a real nerve!)

'Jeta' is another word for 'face', in slang, but is mostly used in this expression.

### Eres un rollero

#### You're a bulls\*\*t artist

Excuse our language, but that's just the best translation there is!

### ¡Tienes más cara que espalda!

You're so cheeky! / You've got such a nerve!

'Cara' (face) is often used to denote cheekiness, so if your 'cara' is bigger than your 'espalda' (back), things must be bad!

### Eres un bocazas

#### You've got a big mouth

For those special friends that can't keep secrets...

### No me tomes el pelo

#### Stop winding me up/pulling my leg

In Spain they pull the hair, 'pelo', rather than the leg!

## **That's Great!**

### ¡Esta moto va de escándalo!

#### This bike goes like a dream!

Not scandalous at all in fact, just fantastic! Can be used for cars or food too, e.g. 'Este pescado está de escándalo', meaning, 'this fish is totally delicious'.

### Me mola mogollón

#### That is so cool / I'm really into that

'Me mola' means I dig, and 'mogollón' means loads. E.g. 'Esta chica me mola mogollón', 'I really like that girl', or 'Esta coche me mola mogollón', meaning, 'I really dig that car'. Mostly used only by those under 40.

### ¡Es una pasada! / ¡Qué pasada!

#### It's incredible / amazing

This is used to say how great something is, like a new mobile phone, a Radiohead concert, or the size of someone's new house. If you think something is really impressive, say this! Can also be used with 'de', E.g. '¡Qué pasada de hotel! Me encanta la piscina que hay en el tejado', meaning, 'What an amazing hotel! I love the rooftop pool'.

# **Timing and Meeting**

### Te veo a las tres y pico

#### I'll see you between three and four

Time keeping, in Spain at least, is not an exact science, and 'y pico' is commonly used to mean 'sometime after'.

### Lo hago en un pispás

#### I'll do that in a flash

'En un pispás' means 'in no time', so another example might be, 'Voy para allá en un pispás', meaning, 'I'll be there in no time.'

### Voy a tardar media hora larga

#### I'll take 30 to 45 minutes

... or considerably longer - depending on who says it!

### Mas vale tarde que nunca

#### Better late than never

Often used in Spain!

## Me ha dado plantón

#### She hasn't turned up

*'Plantón'* literally means 'a big plant'! You may also hear *'Me ha dejado plantado'*, once again to mean that someone has failed to show up at a prearranged meeting time.

## ¡Ya era hora!

#### It was about time!

... you showed up... you did this... you called her... etc...

## Weather

### Llueve a cántaros

#### It's pouring!

'Cántaro', means jug, or pitcher, and when it rains this hard it feels like people are pouring them all over you!

### Hace un día de perros

#### It's horrible weather today

Literally, 'it's a day of dogs', this probably means rain, wind, grey skies... you get the picture!

### Hace un día de miedo

#### What fantastic weather!

Literally, 'it makes a day of fear', in reality this is used when the sun is out, the weather is warm, and the skies are blue!

# When things go wrong...

### Me ha salido el tiro por la culata

#### My plan backfired

When things just don't go the way you intended them to. 'Tiro' literally means 'shot', and 'Culata' means 'butt of a gun'.

### Me ha pagado con la misma moneda

#### He got his own back on me

Here is another example: 'Me vendió un coche en mal estado, pero en cuanto pueda, le pagaré con la misma moneda', meaning 'He sold me a crappy car, but as soon as I can, I'll get my own back on him.'

### Estoy entre la espada y la pared

I've come to a dead end, there's nothing else I can do to solve this problem

Literally, 'I'm between the sword and the wall', this phrase is used when you seem to have run out of options.

### Tiene un as en la manga

#### He's got an ace up his sleeve

To have a plan B when it's obvious that your first course of action just isn't going to work out.

## Cubrirse de gloria

#### To really screw up

E.g. *'Está lloviendo. El hombre del tiempo se ha cubierto de gloria'*, meaning 'It's raining. The weatherman really got it wrong.'

## Work

### **Tener enchufe**

To have a useful contact that helps you get ahead of the rest

Literally, 'a plug', an 'enchufe' helps you get a job, a place on a course etc. Also, 'Estar enchufado' means 'to have good contacts'.

# Worry

### Hacer de tripas corazón

#### To make an effort to do something you don't like/to be brave

Literally, 'to make your guts into heart'. E.g. 'No me gusta volar, pero hice de tripas corazón para ir a Tailandia en avión a pasar la luna de miel', meaning, 'I don't like flying, but I made an effort to go to Thailand by plane for our honeymoon.'

### Tener el corazón en un puño

#### To be super worried about something

Literally, 'to have your heart in a fist'... in English it's usually in our mouth! E.g. 'Hace dos días que no sé nada de tu hermano, tengo el corazón en un puño', meaning 'I haven't heard from your brother for two days, I'm really worried.'

## YUK!!

## ¡Huele que apesta!

#### It stinks!

'Apestar' means to stink, so this phrase has real power to describe something extremely unpleasantly smelly!

## ¡Qué asco!

#### Urrrgh, how disgusting!

When might you use this? When you see a dead animal in the street, for a gory scene in a horror film, when you find a mouldy tomato in the fridge... for all things 'yuk!'