

Wave Expressions

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Today we talk about something found in water – waves.

Surfers are experts at riding waves in the ocean. But even if you have never been in the ocean or tried the sport of surfing, you can still ride the waves.

If you ride the wave of something, you gain from a widespread popularity or approval of something. The online dictionary Merriam-Webster defines it this way: “to experience a time when many people share a strong feeling or attitude about something at the same time.”

For example, let’s say a woman runs for office but she doesn’t have any political experience. She does, however, belong to a famous and popular political family. After she wins, many people say she rode the wave of her family’s fame.

But this expression doesn't always mean taking advantage of something in a bad way. For example, a sports team may want to ride the wave of their recent wins to keep on winning.

Catching the wave is a similar expression. If you catch the wave, you also take advantage of an opportunity. You are at the right place at the right time.

Now, sometimes we aren't riding or catching waves, but making waves instead. When we make waves, we do something that makes people notice us. Often, they notice us in a bad way. And the waves we make cause problems -- similar to waves in water making trouble for boats and swimmers.

Here's an example. If you start a new job, it is usually not a good idea to make waves. When you make waves, you create trouble and interfere with usual business operations. We can also say to rock the boat. This also means to cause problems.

We use the word “wave” in several phrasal verbs.

Let’s start by combining it with “on” and “off.”

Waving someone on is the same thing as giving them a sign to keep moving.

For example, when police officers direct traffic, they wave people on. The police are guiding drivers or walkers across roads. Waving someone on can also mean to encourage someone. If your friend is running in a race, you can wave them on to the finish line.

However, if you wave something or someone off, you cancel, dismiss, or refuse them. For example, when I offered help to the man who had fallen off his bike, he just waved me off. He either didn’t need or want my help or maybe was too embarrassed to accept it.

You can also combine “wave” with “down.” To wave down someone or something is also a signal to stop. For example, you can wave down a friend or wave down a taxicab.

And if you wave something or someone aside, you are either directing them or dismissing them. It depends on the situation.

Now, let’s hear some of these “wave” terms used in a short example.

Once, I invited a friend to a concert. The musical group was very popular. They were riding the wave of a similar but earlier rock and roll band. Many people would come to their concerts just to gather in the parking lot and listen to the music from a distance. And that is what happened during this concert.

But this venue was different than most. It was outside and did not have a barrier around it. So, people without tickets started sneaking in. Someone would find a place where they could sneak in and wave on others to do the same. As a result, the venue got so crowded that the security guards had to wave ticket-holders aside to a different entrance. And if you didn't have a ticket and hadn't snuck in, they just waved you off.

As my friend and I waited in line to enter, I warned her that the concert would be very crowded. But she waved my concerns aside. She didn't care. We went in anyway. But after the concert was over, I immediately waved down a taxi to go home. I had had enough of the large crowd.