

Stephen Keeler

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What are friends for?

I don't like **to admit** it, but I've been **feeling a bit down in the mouth** this week. Perhaps I'm **missing** New York, or maybe it's the changing season – the days are getting shorter (it gets dark here around seven thirty) and it's cold now when I go for my early morning run in the park. The leaves are **turning** yellow and they will soon begin to fall. I've also just received my **credit card statement** for August and realise how much money I spent in New York (ouch!). Then my sister **was rushed into hospital** for an emergency operation yesterday. Oh, yes, and my girlfriend and I just broke up (so I suppose I should say my **ex-girlfriend**). It's not been a good month. Advice and **tips**, please.



But then I went online and read your comments on my previous column, and they **cheered me up** enormously. It was like reading a letter from an old friend. And **what are friends for?** So thank you.

I laughed **aloud** when I read Kirsti's (France) comment. I hope my New York friends didn't read it! Gaga (Georgia) was wonderfully **concise**. I laughed aloud again.

No, Anh, (Vietnam) I wasn't bitten by insects (or anything else!) in Central Park. Thank you all for your concern. Iza, from Poland, may be right: perhaps I was lucky not to have been mugged. Antonis, from that lovely Greek island, Crete, used a nice word: **grumpy**. Personally, I am never grumpy [and if you believe that you'll believe anything – Lucy].

Yes, Ana (Poland), the cat survived me, and I survived the cat. Monica (Brazil), like Lucy, also thinks I'm not safe to be left alone, but I love the way she ended her comment with 'Take care and behave yourself'. In fact, many of you have sent good wishes in very **affectionate** ways: 'Thanks and God bless' (Anil Ray), 'Cheers' (Jill Huang, Beijing) and 'Good luck boy' (Analu Lima, Brazil). I even got some virtual Brazilian kisses (Adriana) to brighten up a **chilly** London autumn day.

Excuse me for a second, that's the phone.

Well, I've just had some good news about my sister. Her operation was successful and, after a long period of total rest, she should recover completely. And then I received an unexpected (small) cheque in the post. **Things are looking up.** Lucy took me to an excellent Indian restaurant last night for my birthday. And I've saved the best till last: Lu got the grades she needed to take up her place at university! Thank you all for asking. We didn't stop partying for a week! Right now we're packing her books and clothes into a huge **trunk** ready for our trip to Scotland at the end of the month. I'll take photos of where Lucy will be studying to show you in October.



Meanwhile, many thanks, take care and please keep writing to me.

Best wishes,

A handwritten signature in cursive that reads "Stephen".

Some useful words and expressions

to admit

to accept something is true which you would rather was not true; to acknowledge something, reluctantly

feeling a bit down in the mouth

sad

missing

If you miss (or are missing) a place, you feel sad because you are not there.

turning

changing to

credit card statement

a printed document you receive each month which tells you how much money you have spent using your credit card, and how much must be repaid

was rushed into hospital

was taken into hospital suddenly and very quickly for emergency treatment

ex-

former; if you are divorced, your former wife or husband can be called your 'ex-wife' or 'ex-husband'; in colloquial English you can refer to a former partner as 'my ex-' (for example: 'I bumped into my ex- at the pub last night.')

tips

suggestions

cheered me up

made me feel happier

aloud

the opposite of silently

what are friends for?

what is the purpose of friends?

concise

brief and direct

grumpy

bad-tempered, miserable and cynical (and, by the way, Lucy is completely wrong!)

affectionate

demonstrating fondness; showing caring friendliness

chilly

rather cold and (feeling) unpleasant

Things are looking up.

Things are getting better.

trunk

a strong case or box for storing things or transporting things on a journey

Focus on tenses

Re-read the first paragraph. How many different tenses have I used? Can you find examples of the Present Simple, the Present Perfect Continuous, the Present Continuous, a Future structure, the Present Perfect, the Past Simple and the Past Simple in the Passive Voice? As you identify each tense structure make sure you understand why I used it (try translating into your mother tongue if you need help understanding tense selection: this can help even if your mother tongue doesn't have 'tenses').

Word groups

I described an autumn day as 'chilly'. How many other English words do you know which describe low temperatures? Use a good dictionary to help you distinguish between 'cool', 'chilly', 'chilled', 'cold' and 'icy' and then try the same activity with 'mild', 'warm', 'humid', 'hot' and 'heated'. Use each of these ten words to complete the sentences below. Use each word only once.

- a) Take care when driving because it's freezing and the roads are _____.
- b) We had some pleasantly unseasonable _____ weather in January this year.
- c) My new car has a _____ driver's seat which will be very welcome in the winter months.
- d) I'm very _____. I need a hot drink.
- e) You should always keep chocolate in a _____ place.
- f) Champagne should always be drunk _____.

- g) My room isn't _____ enough. Can you turn up the heating?
h) Be careful not to burn your mouth, the coffee is very _____.
i) If you want to grow tropical plants in a greenhouse you will need to keep the atmosphere very warm and _____.
j) If you're feeling a bit _____ maybe you should put on an extra sweater.

ANSWERS: a) icy b) mild c) heated d) cold e) cool f) chilled g) warm h) hot i) humid j) chilly