



American Expression E2374 If it's not one thing, it's the other

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The phrase "If it's not one thing, it's the other" is a common idiom used to express frustration over a series of ongoing problems or challenges. It conveys the feeling that life, or a specific situation, is full of continual difficulties—just when one issue seems to be resolved, another one arises. The phrase often highlights a sense of inevitability that problems will persist, regardless of efforts to solve them.

This idiom reflects the human experience of dealing with complications that seem to come in succession. Whether it's at work, at home, or in daily life, people often encounter situations where solving one problem leads directly to another. The expression captures the fatigue or exasperation that comes from managing these unending issues. It is commonly used in informal conversations and is often said with a resigned tone, as if to acknowledge that life's challenges are part of an ongoing cycle.

The idiom is not necessarily tied to major life events but is often used for smaller, everyday frustrations. For example, someone might say, "If it's not one thing, it's the other" when dealing with a day full of minor inconveniences, such as a flat tire followed by a late meeting. The phrase expresses the feeling that no matter how hard someone tries to stay on top of things, something else will always go wrong.

At its core, this phrase taps into the unpredictable nature of life. Despite planning or preparation, unforeseen problems can arise. The saying suggests that life rarely goes perfectly smoothly and that we should expect hurdles along the way. Although the phrase is often used in a negative or exasperated context, it also reflects a kind of acceptance of life's imperfections. In a sense, it acknowledges that challenges are inevitable and that learning to manage them is part of the human experience.

While the phrase often conveys a sense of frustration, it can also be used humorously or lightly. Some people use it in a playful way to mock the minor annoyances that pile up during the day. In this context, it becomes a way of shrugging off life's small challenges and maintaining a sense of humor about them.

In conclusion, "If it's not one thing, it's the other" is an idiom that reflects the ongoing nature of life's challenges. It captures the feeling of being overwhelmed by problems that seem to occur one after another, often with little relief. While it often conveys frustration, it also serves as a reminder that life is full of unpredictability and that dealing with difficulties is a universal experience.

Questions for Discussion

1. How does the phrase "If it's not one thing, it's the other" capture the experience of dealing with everyday problems?
2. Can you think of a time in your life when this idiom perfectly described a series of challenges you faced?
3. How can adopting a humorous or lighthearted approach to this phrase help in managing daily frustrations?
4. In what ways does this idiom reflect the unpredictable nature of life, and how can we best cope with that uncertainty?
5. Do you think this phrase encourages acceptance of life's challenges, or does it reflect a more negative view of continuous problems?