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Staring down the barrel

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“President Trump has been calling some people a ‘nutjob’. What does it mean?”

“The word has the same meaning as ‘nut case’. When you call someone...”

“I think I know what ‘nut case’ means. It means crazy, doesn’t it?”

“That’s right! When you call someone a ‘nutjob’ or a ‘nut case’, what you’re suggesting is that the person is mad or mentally imbalanced. It’s used in informal contexts to show disapproval. ‘Nutjob’ can be written as one word or two.”

“I see. A lot of people in my class avoid Roshni because they think she’s a nutjob.”

“It’s probably because she keeps to herself! I’ve talked to Roshni, and she’s definitely not a nutjob. Many people in my office think our new Manager is a real nutjob.”

“Gopi was telling me about him. He sounds like a real nutjob, all right. I believe he wants everyone in the company to work seven days a week. What a silly idea! Who would...”

“I wouldn’t rubbish the idea, if I were you. Our company, as you know, is...”

“Rubbish the idea? Does ‘rubbish’ in this context mean ‘criticise’?”

“That’s right. When you rubbish someone’s idea, you criticise it. You make it clear that the idea is trivial or worthless. It’s also possible to rubbish people.”

“I see. It wasn’t much of a debate. The two candidates merely rubbished each other.”

“That’s what most politicians do nowadays. Americans, by the way, say ‘trash’ instead of ‘rubbish’. The Minister trashed the idea that he had a Swiss bank account.”

“The media rubbished/trashed the team for its poor performance.”

“A few minutes ago, you said that I shouldn’t rubbish your new manager’s idea of working seven days a week. Why would you want to work seven...”

“The company is in trouble. We’re staring down the barrel of...”

“Staring down the barrel? What are you talking about?”

“The expression ‘staring down the barrel’ is mostly used to suggest danger. It means that something bad is likely to happen.”

“But what is this barrel you are looking at?”

In trouble

“It’s the barrel of a gun.”

“Staring into a gun? That would mean that someone is pointing a gun at you. If that’s the case, you’re definitely in very serious trouble.”

“That’s right! That’s why the expression is associated with danger. In fact, the original expression was ‘staring down the barrel of a gun.’”

“I guess this means that the expression can’t be used for anything positive.”

“No, it can’t. It’s always associated with negative things. If the market doesn’t pick up, our company will be staring down the barrel of bankruptcy.”

“Really? Can I say, we were looking down the barrel of defeat when we lost our sixth wicket with only 50 runs on the board?”

“Sounds good. Our client is planning to sue us. You know that most people get nervous when they stare down the barrel of a lawsuit.”

“I know! If your company is in urgent need for a loan, why don’t you..”

“It is not ‘need for a loan’, but ‘urgent need of a loan’. When you mean ‘require’ it is always ‘need of’. For example, your scooter is in need of a wash.”

“Your company is in desperate need of cash.”

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I shook my family tree and a bunch of nuts fell out. – Unknown

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