

The Compliment Guys

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On the campus of Purdue University in West Lafayette, IN, Brett Westcott and Cameron Brown shout random compliments to students, faculty, and staff walking along the busy sidewalk. Each Wednesday afternoon, these two 20-year-olds stand outside the school's chemistry building, sending good wishes and greetings to all that pass by.

“I just wanted to go out and do something nice for people,” explains Brett, a civil engineering student from Illinois. He came up with the idea last year. He holds a homemade poster that says “Free Compliments.” He handed out the first compliments one day during an extra long break in between classes.

Brett says he loves giving free compliments—there's nothing else he'd rather do. When he first started, he was a little nervous because he wasn't sure how people were going to take it. But Brett says he's only had positive responses.

Soon, Cameron joined Brett for the Wednesday ritual. Both young men noticed that a lot of people were sad around campus, mostly because of the economy. They had friends who were graduating without jobs, so they decided to go out and give them something to smile about. Cameron and Brett are pretty dedicated to their Wednesday routine. Whether it's raining, sleeting, snowing, or just really cold, they always show up.

According to the duo, giving out compliments is easy. In fact, they probably give out about 1000 compliments every Wednesday. They say things like “great coat,” “I like your curly hair,” or “nice shoes.” For Brett and Cameron, everybody has something to compliment. Everybody has something good in them; it just takes a second to find it. They hope that other students on campuses around the country will follow in their footsteps and brighten people’s days.

On occasion, other students stop by to join in the fun. Or they’ll greet Brett and Cameron with high fives, handshakes, hugs, and even snacks! Producers from the Oprah Winfrey and Ellen DeGeneres shows have also taken notice. Back at school, the chemistry department chairman, Paul Shepson, is their biggest fan. He says that Brett and Cameron are always polite and never crude. For him, they’re gentlemen, but not in a “nerdy way.” And their upbeat, friendly attitudes teach a life lesson to students and teachers alike.

“The world would be a better place if people routinely took the time to notice others around them and interact in a positive way,” says Shepson. “They’ve taught me to make eye contact, smile, be kind to others, and show I care. They make me want to be a better person.”

Teacher Resources - Vocabulary

Words for Quick Discussion: *These words may need to be discussed with students as they are encountered, to help with comprehension of the passage. It is best to do this with a quick discussion while reading the text, in student-friendly language.*

crude (*adj*) to speak in a rude or offensive way

faculty (*n*) in some universities and colleges, a group of related departments

random (*adj*) things that do not follow a definite plan or pattern

ritual (*n*) an action which people regularly carry out in a particular situation

sleeting (*v*) when rain is partially frozen

upbeat (*adj*) cheerful and optimistic

Words for Further Study: *These words not only help with comprehension of the passage, they also appear more frequently in a wide spectrum of reading, especially in academic text. Therefore, further study of the meaning of these words may be beneficial. The words on this list can be incorporated into subsequent lessons.*

economy (*n*) the way a country's money, business, industry, and trade are organized

Other Resources

To read more about Brett and Cameron, visit

<http://www.purdue.edu/uns/x/2009a/090313ComplimentGuys2.html> and

<http://www.purdue.edu/uns/x/2009b/090714ComplimentsTour.html>.

Definition Source: *Collin's CoBuild Learner's Dictionary*, Concise Ed. Vol. 2.
HarperCollins Publishers, Great Britain, 2003.

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