

LEARN ENGLISH WITH MUSIC

I Want It That Way

Backstreet Boys

COMPLETE LEARNING WORKBOOK

Go beyond the song

Ambiguity, desire and polished late-1990s pop English.

18 verified learning cards / Level B1 / guided practice

SECTION 00

Your learning journey

Watch first, explore second, practise from memory and finish with the complete card library.

1 WATCH	Follow the official lyric video and synced cards.
2 EXPLORE	Study language, extended vocabulary, culture and sound.
3 PRACTISE	Complete the guided challenges without looking back.
4 REVIEW	Use the final 18-card library by category.

Three sources of value

Song language gives you patterns to reuse. **Extended vocabulary** helps you discuss the themes and music. **Context** helps you understand cultural references and form your own interpretation.

Lyrics on video

[Open the lyric video used for this lesson](#)

Listen, read and return to the workbook whenever you want to explore a language point in greater depth.

SECTION 01

Map the song

Track how simple declarations become emotionally complex through correction and unresolved reference.

STAGE	LEARNING LENS
Opening	Identify the speaker, situation and first useful pattern.
Development	Track the main contrast, image or relationship problem.
Hook	Notice how repetition changes emphasis and memory.
Late return	Retrieve earlier language under new vocal or narrative pressure.

Listening challenge

For each stage, write one word for the sound and one for the speaker's emotional position. Then explain which language choice helped create that impression.

SECTION 02

Language Lab

Move beyond the quick cards: compare structures, notice register and learn how to avoid common mistakes.

LANGUAGE POINT	GO DEEPER	USE IT WELL
that way, this way and the way	Way can name manner, route or preferred behaviour. Demonstratives point to a shared idea, even when the noun is abstract.	Compare: Do it this way. I like the way you explain it. Why does he act that way?
cause, reason and result	Because introduces a cause; that is why introduces a result; the reason why introduces an explanation as a noun phrase.	Keep the logical direction clear: I left because I was tired / I was tired, so I left.
heartache, heartbreak and a broken heart	Heartache is emotional pain; heartbreak is devastating disappointment; a broken heart is the person-centred metaphor.	Heartache can be uncountable or countable in literary use; heartbreak is usually uncountable.
hear, listen and sound	Hear is perception; listen to is deliberate attention; sound + adjective describes an impression.	I heard the song. I listened to it. It sounded familiar.

SECTION 03

Extended vocabulary: go beyond the lyrics

This bonus language expands what you can say about the narrative, emotion, performance and production.

to yearn (for someone)	verb	To feel an intense, often painful longing or desire for someone or something. <i>After months apart, she found herself yearning for a simple phone call.</i>
heartache	noun	A strong feeling of sadness or grief, especially caused by lost or difficult love. <i>The breakup left him with more heartache than he expected.</i>
restless	adjective	Unable to stay still, relaxed, or satisfied because of anxiety or unresolved feelings. <i>She spent a restless night replaying the conversation in her head.</i>
farewell	noun	An act of saying goodbye, especially before a departure. <i>They shared a quiet farewell at the gate before her flight boarded.</i>
to ache	verb	To feel a continuous, dull pain - often used to describe deep emotional longing. <i>His chest ached every time he thought about what he'd said.</i>
bittersweet	adjective	Causing feelings of both pleasure and pain, or happiness and sadness, at the same time. <i>Graduation was bittersweet - exciting, but sad to leave everyone behind.</i>
to drift apart	phrasal verb	To gradually become less close to someone over time, without a single dramatic cause. <i>They used to talk every day, but after college they slowly drifted apart.</i>
longing	noun	A strong, persistent feeling of wanting someone or something. <i>There was a quiet longing in her voice whenever she mentioned home.</i>
to hold on	phrasal verb	To keep believing, waiting, or persisting despite difficulty or uncertainty. <i>Just hold on a little longer - things will get easier.</i>
torn	adjective	Deeply troubled by having to choose between two conflicting feelings or options. <i>She felt torn between staying for the job and following him abroad.</i>
to confide in someone	verb	To trust someone enough to share a secret or a private feeling with them. <i>He confided in his sister about how confused he really felt.</i>
heartfelt	adjective	Sincere and deeply felt, coming genuinely from one's emotions. <i>She gave a heartfelt apology that surprised everyone in the room.</i>

SECTION 04

Idioms and expressive English

Use these additional expressions to discuss the song's situations and themes in natural English.

to have a change of heart	extension	To change your opinion or feelings about something, often reversing an earlier decision. <i>He was ready to walk away, but he had a change of heart at the last minute.</i>
to wear your heart on your sleeve	extension	To show your emotions openly instead of hiding them. <i>She's never been good at pretending - she wears her heart on her sleeve.</i>
it's now or never	extension	Used to say that this exact moment is the only chance to act, with no second opportunity. <i>If you want to tell her how you feel, it's now or never - she's leaving tomorrow.</i>
to read between the lines	extension	To understand a hidden or implied meaning that isn't stated directly. <i>He didn't say he was upset, but if you read between the lines, it was obvious.</i>
to go separate ways	extension	To end a relationship or partnership and continue on individual paths. <i>After years of touring together, the bandmates decided to go their separate ways.</i>

Make the language yours

Complete the exercises later in the workbook to check meaning, structure and register.

SECTION 05

Pronunciation as performance

A sung voice is not a neutral accent sample. Listen for concrete features, then compare theatrical delivery with everyday speech.

The flapped T in 'want it'	In casual American speech, a 't' between two vowel sounds turns into a quick tap of the tongue, almost like a soft 'd'. That's why the song's hook line, built around 'want it', comes out sounding closer to 'wanna-dit' rather than a crisp British 't'.
Fully pronounced, rhotic R's	Unlike British singers, the Backstreet Boys pronounce the 'r' in every word where it appears - in 'heart', 'here', 'your' - giving the vowels a rounder, longer quality that's a clear marker of General American pronunciation.
Stretched vowels on the big belted notes	On the sustained, harmonized notes in the chorus, diphthongs like the 'ay' in 'way' and 'day' get pulled out and slightly flattened - a stylistic choice typical of late-90s American vocal-group ballads, designed to maximize power on the held note.
Softened consonants at the end of harmonized phrases	When all five voices blend together on a phrase ending, final consonants like 't' and 'd' are often softened or barely released, so the harmony stays smooth instead of sounding clipped.

Three-pass shadowing

1. Tap only the stressed beats.
2. Reproduce the phrase slowly and clearly.
3. Contrast a natural spoken version with the musical performance.

SECTION 06

Context and creative choices

Discover the cultural and creative decisions that shaped the song, then listen again with this context in mind.

"I Want It That Way" was released on April 12, 1999, as the lead single from Backstreet Boys' third studio album, *Millennium* (Jive Records, May 18, 1999). The track was written by Max Martin and Andreas Carlsson and produced by Martin together with Kristian Lundin at the legendary Cheiron Studios in Stockholm, where the group recorded it in November 1998. *Millennium* went on to debut at number one on the Billboard 200 and has sold roughly 24 million copies worldwide, cementing the Backstreet Boys as one of the defining pop acts of the era.

On the Billboard Hot 100, the single peaked at number six, staying on the chart for eight non-consecutive weeks - a surprisingly modest showing in the US for a song now considered one of the best-selling and most recognizable pop singles of all time. Internationally the response was far bigger: it reached number one on the UK Singles Chart and topped the charts in more than twenty-five countries, including Germany, Austria, Italy, New Zealand and Switzerland, and it remains the group's signature song.

The song is almost as famous for its lyrics as for its melody. Because the label felt the original chorus was too abstract, an alternate version with reworked lines was recorded in January 1999 with input from producer Robert John "Mutt" Lange. That rewritten take was ultimately shelved in favor of the original - the version fans know - though it later leaked online and was officially included on the 2025 *Millennium 2.0* reissue. Co-writer Andreas Carlsson has openly joked that the lyrics "make absolutely no sense," and band member Kevin Richardson has said much the same, adding that Max Martin's English was still limited at the time the song was written.

The music video, directed by Wayne Isham, was filmed on April 1-2, 1999, at Los Angeles International Airport, using the Tom Bradley International Terminal and an adjoining hangar as its backdrop. The five members appear in coordinated all-white outfits amid a sea of travelers, evoking themes of parting and reunion that echo the song's emotional pull. The video won the Viewer's Choice award at the 1999 MTV Video Music Awards after earning four nominations, and it passed one billion views on YouTube in November 2021.

At the 42nd Annual Grammy Awards in 2000, "I Want It That Way" picked up three nominations - Song of the Year, Record of the Year, and Best Pop Performance by a Duo or Group with Vocals - losing all three to Santana's "Smooth." It has since been certified 3x Platinum by the RIAA for three million units sold in the US. More than two decades on, it is still regularly cited as one of the greatest boy band songs ever recorded, a staple of 90s nostalgia playlists and karaoke nights alike.

SECTION 07

Practice zone

Complete every activity without looking back, then use the answer key to correct your work independently.

A. Extended vocabulary in context

1. Choose the best term for this meaning: *To feel an intense, often painful longing or desire for someone or something.*
to yearn (for someone) / heartache
2. Choose the best term for this meaning: *A strong feeling of sadness or grief, especially caused by lost or difficult love.*
heartache / restless
3. Choose the best term for this meaning: *Unable to stay still, relaxed, or satisfied because of anxiety or unresolved feelings.*
restless / farewell
4. Choose the best term for this meaning: *An act of saying goodbye, especially before a departure.*
farewell / to ache
5. Choose the best term for this meaning: *To feel a continuous, dull pain - often used to describe deep emotional longing.*
to ache / bittersweet
6. Choose the best term for this meaning: *Causing feelings of both pleasure and pain, or happiness and sadness, at the same time.*
bittersweet / to yearn (for someone)

B. Retrieve the expression

7. Which expression matches this meaning: *To change your opinion or feelings about something, often reversing an earlier decision.?*
8. Which expression matches this meaning: *To show your emotions openly instead of hiding them.?*
9. Which expression matches this meaning: *Used to say that this exact moment is the only chance to act, with no second opportunity.?*
10. Which expression matches this meaning: *To understand a hidden or implied meaning that isn't stated directly.?*

C. Accuracy check

11. Correct the form: **I listened the song carefully.**
12. Choose the careful form: **The contrast lead to a new meaning / leads to a new meaning.**

SECTION 08

Answer key

Check each answer and return to the Language Lab when a form or distinction is still unclear.

1. to yearn (for someone)
2. heartache
3. restless
4. farewell
5. to ache
6. bittersweet
7. to have a change of heart
8. to wear your heart on your sleeve
9. it's now or never
10. to read between the lines
11. I listened to the song carefully
12. The contrast leads to a new meaning

Review again

Cover the answers and repeat the activities after a few days. A delayed second attempt is a better test of learning than immediate rereading.

SECTION 09

Complete 18-card library

Use this compact summary for quick revision or return to the video cue when you want to hear a point again.

Vocabulary / 4 cards

VOCABULARY / VIDEO 0:18

deeply: an adverb of degree

Deeply intensifies an emotion or attitude. It is natural with feel, care, regret and believe, but not interchangeable with very in every context.

VOCABULARY / VIDEO 0:54

that is why

That is why introduces a result or explanation. Compare that is because, which introduces the cause.

VOCABULARY / VIDEO 1:33

deep down inside

Deep down refers to a private belief or feeling beneath the surface. Inside reinforces the internal, emotional location.

VOCABULARY / VIDEO 2:09

ain't: highly informal negation

Ain't is a non-standard negative form used for several auxiliaries. It carries strong social and stylistic meaning and is unsuitable for formal writing.

Grammar / 7 cards

GRAMMAR / VIDEO 0:09

I am yours: possessive pronouns

Yours replaces a noun phrase such as your partner. Unlike possessive adjectives, mine, yours, his, hers, ours and theirs can stand alone.

GRAMMAR / VIDEO 0:24

my first thought

First is an ordinal adjective. English normally uses a possessive or the before an ordinal: my first thought, the first time.

GRAMMAR / VIDEO 0:33

want + object + complement

Want can be followed by a noun or by someone + to-infinitive. Here want it uses it as the object and that way explains the desired manner.

GRAMMAR / VIDEO 1:09

such a strong desire

Use such + a/an + adjective + singular noun. Compare so strong a desire, which is grammatical but much more formal.

GRAMMAR / VIDEO 1:21

no matter the distance

No matter + noun or question word means the result does not change despite that factor: no matter the distance, no matter where.

GRAMMAR / VIDEO 1:57

I do not want to hear

Want takes a to-infinitive when the same subject performs the next action: I want to hear. Add an object when another person acts: I want you to hear.

GRAMMAR / VIDEO 3:06

when I hear you say

After when, English uses present simple for a repeated situation. Hear can take an object plus a bare infinitive: hear you say.

Idioms / 3 cards

IDIOM / VIDEO 0:45

not a thing but a heartache

Not ... but ... corrects the listener: the speaker rejects one label and replaces it with a more emotionally accurate one.

IDIOM / VIDEO 1:03

my heart is on fire

Be on fire is a metaphor for extreme passion, energy or success. Context determines whether the fire is emotional or literal.

IDIOM / VIDEO 2:21

nothing but a mistake

Nothing but means only or simply. It often gives a judgment extra force: It was nothing but a mistake.

Culture / 2 cards

CULTURE / VIDEO 2:33

ambiguity as a pop hook

The song never defines that way precisely. The unresolved pronoun makes the chorus memorable and lets listeners supply their own meaning.

CULTURE / VIDEO 3:18

repetition creates collective memory

The final repeated hook uses minimal new language. Its learning value is retrieval: recognise the same structures faster under fuller vocal layering.

Pronunciation / 2 cards

PHONETICS / VIDEO 1:48

want it: consonant-to-vowel linking

The final /t/ in want links into the vowel in it. In singing it may sound smoother than two carefully separated words.

PHONETICS / VIDEO 2:48

chorus retrieval: stress the contrast

In the late chorus, content words such as want, way, heartache and mistake receive the strongest beats. Function words compress between them.

Keep learning

[Return to the synced learning experience.](#)