

Microspeak: lift up

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Today's Microspeak is the verb phrase "lift up". Here's a citation:

| [After a long detailed discussion.] I want to lift up a little and talk about why this is important.

I didn't know what this intransitive sense of *lift up* meant, and there wasn't too much context here to work from, so I hunted around for other citations. The vast majority of uses were transitive, with the unsurprising meaning of "to raise". But buried among the results were a few intransitive uses:

| It was useful to sit down and lift the discussion to the Western Europe level, not just the Germany level. This is a good way to lift up to take a broader view.

From context, it appears that *lift up* means "to take a higher-level view". The next example seems to confirm this sense:

| Don't start by going into detail about the new offering. Lift up a level and start by discussing how the new offering fits the overall strategy.

The word *level* is not a direct object of *lift up*; it's telling you how much to lift up, not what to lift up. The implication is that you are lifting *yourself*: When you *lift up*, you are taking a higher-level view of the situation to see how the pieces fit together.

The final citation I could find takes a somewhat different approach to the phrase *lift up*:

| A team might be heads-down executing on their plan and can't lift up to consider what to do next.

This contrasts *lift up* with *heads-down*,¹ and suggests that the implied direct object is *head*: The team is so focused on executing their plan that they can't lift up *their heads* to consider what to do next.

It appears that *lift up* means different things depending on context. It could mean to *shift the discussion to a higher-level topic*, or it could mean to *disengage momentarily from an all-consuming task*.²

¹ The metaphor for *heads-down* is students hard at work, hunched over their desk, so that their heads are buried in their books and they are consequently unaware of their surroundings.

² Interestingly, the first and last citations both came from the same person, suggesting more strongly that *lift up* has multiple valid interpretations, and you need to pick the intended one from context.

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