

A guide to the exquisite art of moaning

**the
Joy
of Moaning**

By Dick Stroud



AN ANTIDOTE TO GLOOM



Welcome to the world of moaning

Moaning, a word of seven characters that describes a universe of complexity. This first glimpse of the subject will leave you wanting more.

Has there ever been a better time for moaners? The reliable subjects of politics, generational conflict, turbulent financial markets, house prices and the weather are always there and a constant source of complaint. Of course, there is always English sport. Our cricket, football and rugby teams provide short periods of pride and aeons of disappointment. We have only been waiting half a century for England footballers to win a major championship. Hip hip hooray for the Lionesses. If you are an American reading the last sentence look it up online.

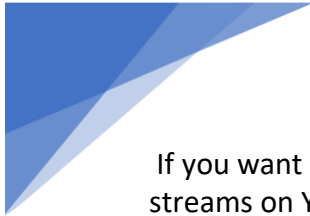
Just when anger over Brexit and certain American politicians was waning (a little) along came the nasty little SARS-CoV-2 virus to create a heap of new subjects for experts, 'experts' and charlatans to endlessly debate. Overnight we all became amateur virologists expounding 'the truth' about masks, vaccinations, lockdowns, testing and the stream of Greek-lettered variants. Each topic intersects with politics and the behaviour of politicians, adding yet more to the mountain of moaning material. Did XYZ politicians make the right or wrong decision, did they do it at the right time and for the right reasons? Did they follow the rules they had made? Were the rules necessary in the first place? Can you even remember what the rules were? Undoubtedly, you will know the answers to all these questions.

Then there are the latest topical subjects of climate change, wokeness, identity politics and all forms of 'inequality' with their idiotic/incisive views to defend/attack. All of these provide a 24/7 source of global news stories and social media chatter creating an infinite amount of moaning fuel.

So many things to like and hate and we have yet to mention the timeless bedrock topics of angst – work, relationships, neighbours and, of course, people who walk their dogs without poo bags.

It's impossible to compare the moaning potential of different eras but I sense the early 2020s will be recorded as a premier cru vintage. What is certain is that there has never been a time when we could reinforce our prejudices with such an unlimited supply of news, curated to our exact requirements.

There is nothing more satisfying than plunging into a pool of opinions that strengthen our biases. *The Guardian* and *New York Times* are dependable sources for 'the left', providing a daily dose of new moaning topics, as do *The Telegraph* and *WSJ* at the other end of the political spectrum. MSNBC is the main source of news for Democrats; Fox News for Republicans.



If you want enriched moaning material you can satisfy your needs with filtered news streams on YouTube, Facebook, TikTok, Instagram, Pinterest, Substacks and the zillions of podcasts.

The technological wonders of social media are to be thanked for the more invidious and extreme sources of biased chatter that create a warm and cosy bubble of opinions, never threatening our prejudices with ample ammunition for the next moan.

Rejoice, you have more things than ever to moan about and a free and inexhaustible source of 'facts' to keep the subjects burning bright. Alas, this abundance of gloom comes at a heavy price. Marinating in despair might energise the experienced moaner but, for many, it's a problem, a big problem. Levels of global happiness have plummeted, creating a surge in mental health problems. I tackle this thorny subject in Chapter 7 (*Moaning in unhappy times*).

Before we delve into the nitty gritty, let's start by investigating the basic question of why we moan.

We're human, we moan

Here's a little test for you. Think of all the words that can be substituted for 'moaning'. To get you started the five most popular are complaining, grumbling, carping, whining and whinging. Don't take too long; you will have another chance to exhibit your vocabulary skills.

Extending the list to ten isn't difficult and if you're a Scrabble or Wordle fan, you can easily double that number. That's a lot of words to describe an activity, especially one with such a dubious reputation.


Reputedly the Eskimos have 50 words for 'snow' because of its importance in their lives. That's a lovely story but alas something of a myth. For whatever reason, we English speakers have numerous words for expressing displeasure. Each word describes a subtle variant. For example, maundering is a more introspective, low-energy form of moaning. Moaners don't want to be thought of as carpers, who are overly critical and impossible to please.

Now list words that are the antonym (opposite) to moaning.

I bet it's harder than you thought?

You have probably come up with words like forgiving, approving, praising and accepting. These are all passive and anaemic words that don't have the intensity and emotion of whinging or whining. If the number of words in the English language reflects the popularity of the activity they describe, then moaning and its variants beat its antonym hands down.

The more I looked the more convinced I became that we, well certainly Brits, are instinctive moaners. Ultra-lefties and those making Atilla the Hun look a softie, all moan a lot – probably about similar things. This doesn't mean they're unhappy or morose. They might be trying to make sense of the chaotic world, using it as a kind of therapy to release tension.



Moaning is a wonderful, unthreatening type of ‘small talk’. Complaining about the weather, public transport and the rubbish on the TV is how we kickstart conversations.

In the next chapter, *Putting moaning under the microscope*, we’ll investigate its multitude of uses and benefits.

False assumptions about moaning

I haven’t completed a comprehensive search but found references to moaning as far back as the mid-1600s when the butt for the complaints was – surprise, surprise – the House of Commons. At the same time, Shakespeare had Ursula ‘carping’ in *Much Ado about Nothing*.

Over time, the popularity of words has changed, with carping declining and whinging surging in popularity from 2000 onwards. Our understanding and reaction to moaning keeps evolving.

It was West Ham’s most renowned fan, Alf Garnett, in the TV series *Till Death Do Us Part*, who was responsible for the contemporary image of an obsessive moaner. Then came the game-changer of linking ‘grumpy’ and ‘old’ – starting with the US film *Grumpy Old Men* (1993) followed a decade later by UK TV programmes, stage shows and books with the same name. *Grumpy Old Women* wasn’t far behind. These shows employed a simple (and inexpensive) format of TV personalities, looking miserable, staring at the camera and moaning.


Let’s dispense with the notion that moaning is a transitory blip in human evolution – it’s hardwired into our DNA. If we are not doing it ourselves, we get enjoyment from watching others.

Grumpy characters might be amusing and make good entertainment, but they have perpetuated the prejudices and become lodged into the received wisdom about moaners. These notions have crystallised as facts, but they are wrong, wrong, wrong.

Notion 1. *Moaners are unhappy.* Search for an image or emoji portraying moaning and you are presented with miserable-looking faces. The mouths are pointing down, they are scowling and looking angry. Characters in the ‘Grumpy Old’ TV programmes and films were always grimacing and annoyed. Never a smile, giggle or laugh.

Sometimes this is true, but a good quality moan elevates you to a position where you gaze down on the silly and naïve, with their daft ideas. Perhaps feeling sympathy for their foolishness, but laughter is the most common emotion. Knowing you are right, and they’re deluded, is mighty empowering. Gloating is not an admirable reaction, but it’s good fun.

Notion 2. *Men moan whereas women listen and fester.* Picture this situation. The man is grumbling about the same subject that he grumbled about yesterday, the day before and for as long as the woman can remember. She long ago stopped listening and radiates boredom, wishing she was anywhere but there. This is the stereotypical relationship between the moaning man and weary female partner. A regular scene in *Till Death Do Us Part* was Alf moaning and Elsie, his wife, moping.



But hold on a minute. Where's the evidence supporting this much-repeated mythology? We will look at the research, but the simple answer is men and women could compete on equal terms in the moaning Olympics. I have no idea how all this will work out in our sexually neutral, self-determined times. Others can wrestle with that question.

Notion 3. *Moaning is an affliction of ageing.* Ha ha ha, you must be joking. Are teenagers bundles of unbridled optimism, positive thinking and goodwill? Do life's woes and shattered dreams transform them into replicas of their parents or worse still their grandparents, perpetually festering, never having a good word to say about anybody or anything? It's another one of those assumptions lacking a thread of evidence.

Are the young relentlessly cheerful – methinks not? Instead of labelling their incessant whining for what it is – moaning – we use excuses like 'it's all part of growing up' or 'it's their hormones' or worse of all 'they are so sensitive'. Stuffed with the illusionary self-confidence of 'going to uni' they prattle (a childish form of inconsequential moaning) about every subject under the sun.

For some reason, ageism hasn't joined the other 'isms' in that protected state of being a critical word where one fears to tread. Linking moaning and old is wrong. At a minimum, it deserves a trigger warning, perhaps a Twitter 'pile-on' and for repeated offences the 'cancellation' of the author!

Different types of moaners


Was the ancient Greek maxim 'know thyself' first used in the context of moaning? We will never know, but this phrase perfectly describes the first step moaners should take to better use their moaning time. At last count, there were 64 terms describing sexual behaviour and orientation. Today's young must wrestle with questions about being Demisexual, Gynesexual, Bicurious, Libidoist, Asexual plus another all the other exotic-sounding variants. Crumbs, life was so much easier in the 1960s.

By comparison, moaners are a more homogeneous bunch, fitting into one of ten categories.

The 'Live and Let Live' is very different from the 'Mega Moaner' who grumbles indiscriminately, not requiring feedback or confirmation, the stereotype used for the grumpy old film and TV series. The former is far more sensitive and aware of others' opinions. Once they have found a topic of agreement their moaning is as intense as any other.

Most people exhibit the characteristics of one or more moaning types. Over time the 'One Trick Pony', the person who habitually moans about a narrow range of subjects, can develop into a 'Mood Hoover'. These people don't so much moan as frame everything in a negative light that can rapidly infect the attitude of friends and colleagues. This book contains a lexicon of moaning types, descriptions of their characteristics and hints to improve their moaning quality.

Like all behaviours, taken to the extreme, moaning has undesirable consequences for both the individual and those around them. Each moaning type has its own danger signals and



possible treatments. Early intervention is key – all the more reason to read Chapter 5 (*What type of moaner are you?*)

Secrets of a good moan

An important part of the formula for a perfect moan is having a partner or group of friends who are of compatible moaning types. Ideally, these moaning buddies share your views and desire to moan. If their opinions are very different you risk the moan turning sour and becoming an argument. A quiet unchallenging acceptance is OK but only if they conceal signs of boredom.

A period of moaning should be empowering and enjoyable. If you end up feeling more in control of life and having spent at least 50% of the time laughing it has been a success.

When you or your moaning partner becomes angrier, feeling more helpless, then something has gone wrong. Another unwanted outcome is when either of you exceeds your moaning threshold. This is a sign of having different moaning intensity and duration levels. Later, I investigate the dynamics of these problems (plus plenty more) and provide solutions.

Most people moan in a disorganised way. For instance, it's unlikely you match moaning topics to moaning partners – you should. I bet you don't have measures of moaning intensity – you should. You probably don't have 'red alerts' or define 'sandbox' subjects to ensure the moan doesn't become an argument – you should. If you feel that a period of moaning is like a cold and unpleasant shower rather than a long warm bath, luxuriating in confirmation bias, then Chapter 6 (*Moan like a professional*) is for you.

Let's get on with it

Self-help books usually have a couple of thought-provoking ideas and a few simple instructions that will transform the reader's life.

The Joy of Moaning is no exception. It turns on its head the notion that moaning is undesirable behaviour, something to be avoided and scorned. It delves into the detail of why we moan and most importantly provides a guide for doing it better. When you understand its intricacies, you are in control and with control comes a sense of empowerment. And we all want to be empowered.

Hopefully, the book should be fun to read but its messages are serious. You will be the judge of how serious.

Let's start by plunging into the details of what moaning is all about and put moaning under the microscope.