**Passing phases and fleeting glimpses: words that mean ‘brief’**

[**https://dictionaryblog.cambridge.org/2019/05/22/passing-phases-and-flee**](https://dictionaryblog.cambridge.org/2019/05/22/passing-phases-and-flee)

This post looks at words and phrases that describe things that end after a short time. A very common adjective for this is [**brief**](https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/brief). A brief activity or period of time does not last long:

*We had a brief phone conversation.*

*For a brief period she taught in the US.*

Less common adjectives that are still useful and which mean ‘lasting only a short time’ are [**ephemeral**](https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/ephemeral), [**fleeting**](https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/fleeting) and [**momentary**](https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/momentary). ‘Fleeting’ and ‘momentary’ describe a *very* short time:

*Fashion is by definition ephemeral.*

*He caught a fleeting glimpse of her as she walked past.*

*There was a momentary hesitation before she spoke.*

Something that is [**passing**](https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/passing#cald4-1-2-2) lasts only a short time and is therefore unimportant:

*It was nothing* – *just a passing phase.*

[**Short-lived**](https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/short-lived), meanwhile, usually describes a feeling or experience that ends after a short time:

*His enthusiasm for the subject was fairly short-lived.*

*She’d had one or two short-lived relationships.*

[**Temporary**](https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/temporary)is a very common word to describe things that are brief. A situation or arrangement that is temporary is intended only for a short period:

*This is only a temporary solution to the problem.*

*He’s found a temporary job.*

An adjective with a very similar meaning is [**short-term**](https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/short-term):

*Most of these people are employed on short-term contracts.*

*The bank only offers short-term loans.*

There are also a number of words used to describe situations that are not meant to be permanent. A [**stopgap**](https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/stopgap) is a temporary arrangement that is in place until a better arrangement is found:

*Hostels are used as a stopgap until permanent accommodation is found.*

An arrangement or plan that is intended for a short period and is likely to change may be described as [**provisional**](https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/provisional):

*These dates are only provisional.*

*The country was ruled by a provisional government until new elections could be held.*

Similarly, a [**caretaker**](https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/caretaker#cbed-1-2-1) government/manager is doing the job of government/manager until a permanent one is in place:

*A caretaker manager will be appointed until the end of the season.*

The adjective [**interim**](https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/interim) is used in the same way:

*An interim government was set up to oversee the transition.*

A [**pop-up**](https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/pop-up#cald4-2-1-1) shop/restaurant/gallery is one that is intended to operate for only a short period, often using a building that was previously empty:

*Chefs often use pop-up restaurants to test out new ideas.*

Such a place is sometimes also referred to simply as a [**pop-up**](https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/pop-up#cald4-2-2-3):

*It’s just a pop-up – it’s closing in December.*

Of course, there are also idioms that describe things that are brief. Something that is successful only once and for a very short period may be described as [**a flash in the pan**](https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/a-flash-in-the-pan?q=flash+in+the+pan):

*She’s determined to prove that her team’s success is no flash in the pan.*

A phrase that is sometimes said of something that lasts only a short time is [**here today, gone tomorrow**](https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/here-today-gone-tomorrow?q=here+today%2C+gone+tomorrow):

*Sadly, like so many independent shops in this area, it’s here today, gone tomorrow.*