

Jack the Renaissance Man?

My grandfather was an amazing person. He could do just about anything. He was a skilled woodworker—that means, he could make things out of wood—and he could fix almost anything that broke in a house, from electrical wiring to plumbing. He made the dining room table in my parents' house, and did a lot of the electrical wiring there, too! He was a real **jack of all trades**.

We say that a person who has a lot of different skills is a jack of all trades. A 'trade' is an older word for a job, normally a job you do with your hands. If you have many different jobs in the office—maybe your *real* job is to answer the phones, but you help your colleagues with their computers and are the person that they come to with questions—you can say you're a jack of all trades. It just means you do a little bit of everything.

Sometimes, people will expand the phrase. Often you'll hear “I'm a jack of all trades, but master of none.” A 'master' of a trade is someone who's very good at it. In some trades, you have to pass a test to be considered a 'master' of your trade. When you say “I'm a jack of all trades, but master of none” you're saying you can do a little bit of everything. . . but there's nothing you're very, *very* good at.

A related phrase is a **renaissance man**. A renaissance man is something of an academic—or artistic—jack of all trades. The 'renaissance' is the name for a period in history (Michaelangelo and Raphael are famous artists from the renaissance) and, during the renaissance, it was common for an artist to not only paint, but also to play a musical instrument and maybe write. It was normal to do a little bit of everything.

Today, when we say someone is a renaissance man—or woman—we're saying that he has many different interests and talents. A person who studies history and music and art might be considered a renaissance man.

So, how is a renaissance man different from a jack of all trades? Both of them have a lot of different interests and abilities, but a jack of all trades focuses on 'practical' skills and a renaissance man focuses more on academic or artistic skills.

One day, I hope to be both a renaissance man and a jack of all trades. It's important to me that I can fix small things that break in my apartment and do some basic mechanical work on my car. But, I'm also interested in. . . well, everything. Are you a jack of all trades? A renaissance man? Or a renaissance woman? What are the different skills you have?