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40 Business English Idioms

TO BOOST YOUR PROFESSIONAL COMMUNICATION



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What are Idiomatic Business Expressions?

Business idioms are figurative expressions or phrases that are commonly used in the context of business and commerce. They often carry a meaning beyond their literal interpretation and are understood within the business community as shorthand for complex concepts, situations, or actions. These idioms can be used in various aspects of business communication, including meetings, negotiations, presentations, and everyday interactions.

Understanding and using business idioms effectively can help convey messages more vividly, establish rapport, and demonstrate fluency in business English.

Below, you'll discover 40 common idiomatic expressions frequently employed in business contexts.

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Bite the bullet: To face a difficult situation or make a tough decision, often with courage or determination. Example: "When faced with a difficult situation, she decided to bite the bullet and confront her fears head-on."

Back to the drawing board: To start over or go back to the beginning, typically because the previous plan or attempt was unsuccessful. Example: "The initial marketing campaign didn't yield the expected results, so the team had to go back to the drawing board and rethink their approach."

Call it a day: To stop working or end an activity for the day. Example: "After a long day of meetings and deadlines, it's time to call it a day and head home."

Break the ice: To initiate or facilitate a conversation or interaction in a social or professional setting. Example: "At the networking event, he tried to break the ice by asking about common interests."

Go the extra mile: To put in additional effort or work beyond what is required or expected. Example: "She always goes the extra mile to ensure customer satisfaction, even if it means working late."

Big picture: Refers to the overall perspective or larger context of a situation, issue, or plan, rather than focusing on specific details. Example: "While it's important to address individual tasks, we need to step back and consider the big picture to ensure our business strategy aligns with our long-term goals."

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Think outside the box: To think creatively and innovatively, often by considering unconventional solutions or approaches. Example: "When redesigning our website, we decided to think outside the box by incorporating interactive elements and personalized user experiences."

Get the ball rolling: To initiate or start a process or project. Example: "Let's schedule the initial team meeting to get the ball rolling on the new project."

Hit the ground running: To begin a new task or project with great enthusiasm and energy, often achieving immediate progress. Example: "The new employee joined the team and immediately started contributing; she really hit the ground running."

Bring Something to the Table: To contribute valuable skills, ideas, or resources. Example: "His experience in marketing really brings something to the table during team meetings."

Touch base: To briefly communicate or reconnect with someone, usually for the purpose of exchanging information or maintaining a connection. Example: "I'll touch base with the marketing team tomorrow to discuss the campaign progress."

In the red: To be in a financial deficit or to operate at a loss. Example: "Despite cost-cutting efforts, the company remained in the red due to declining sales."

Cut to the chase: To get to the main point or focus on the essential aspect of a situation without wasting time. Example: "Instead of beating around the bush, let's cut to the chase and discuss the critical issues."

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Turn the tables: To reverse a situation, often by gaining an advantage or shifting the balance of power. Example: “The underdog team managed to turn the tables and win the championship against the reigning champions.”

Close the deal: To finalize or complete a business transaction, negotiation, or agreement. Example: “After weeks of negotiations, they finally closed the deal with the international distributor.”

Keep your eye on the ball: To remain focused on the main objective or goal, without being distracted by peripheral matters. Example: “Amid distractions, it’s crucial to keep your eye on the ball and focus on our quarterly targets.”

Bottom line: The ultimate result or conclusion, often referring to the final financial outcome or the most important factor to consider. Example: “The bottom line is that our profits have increased by 20% this quarter.”

Throw in the Towel: To give up or surrender, especially after facing significant challenges or setbacks. Example: “Despite their best efforts, the startup had to throw in the towel and close down due to financial constraints.”

Put All Your Eggs in One Basket: To invest or risk everything in a single venture, often without considering potential risks or diversification. Example: “Investing all your savings in a single stock is risky; it’s like putting all your eggs in one basket.”

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Square the circle: To attempt to solve a seemingly impossible problem or reconcile conflicting interests or goals. Example: "Trying to convince both parties to agree on the budget was like trying to square the circle."

Hit the nail on the head: To accurately identify or describe the main point or issue. Example: "When she said our marketing strategy lacked focus, she really hit the nail on the head."

Read between the lines: To understand or interpret the hidden or underlying meaning behind someone's words or actions. Example: "In negotiations, it's essential to read between the lines to grasp unspoken concerns."

Burn the midnight oil: To work late into the night, especially to meet a deadline or complete a project. Example: "She's dedicated; she often burns the midnight oil to prepare for important presentations."

Get down to business: To focus on the task at hand or start discussing important matters without delay. Example: "Enough chitchat; let's get down to business and discuss the project details."

Run it up the flagpole: To present an idea or proposal for consideration or approval. Example: "Before implementing the new policy, we'll run it up the flagpole for feedback from the team."

Elephant in the room: Refers to an obvious or glaring issue or problem that everyone is aware of but avoids discussing. Example: "The company's declining market share is the elephant in the room that needs to be addressed during our strategy meeting."

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Blue-Sky Thinking: To brainstorm or generate ideas without any constraints or limitations, often focusing on creative or innovative solutions. Example: "During the brainstorming session, they encouraged blue-sky thinking, allowing ideas to flow freely."

Keep Someone in the Loop: To ensure that someone is informed or included in the communication or decision-making process. Example: "Make sure to keep the client in the loop by providing regular project updates."

Break the bank: To spend an excessive amount of money, often beyond one's means or budget. Example: "Hiring more people would break the bank; it's way beyond our budget."

Dot your i's and cross your t's: To pay attention to small details or ensure that everything is correct or in order. Example: "Before submitting the report, make sure to dot your i's and cross your t's to avoid errors."

Swim upstream: To go against the current or challenge the status quo, often in pursuit of one's goals or principles. Example: "In a conservative industry, she decided to swim upstream by advocating for sustainable practices."

Jump on the bandwagon: To join or support something that has become popular or successful. Example: "The trend caught on, and many companies decided to jump on the bandwagon by offering subscription services."

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By the Book: To do something strictly according to the rules or guidelines. Example: "Our company policies require us to follow procedures by the book."

Game Plan: Refers to a well-thought-out strategy or plan of action. Example: "Before launching the product, we need a solid game plan for marketing."

Get Down to Business: To focus on the task at hand or start discussing important matters. Example: "Enough chitchat; let's get down to business and finalize the contract."

A Lot on My Plate: Refers to being very busy with numerous responsibilities. Example: "David currently has a lot on his plate as his boss is on vacation."

Ahead of the Pack: To be more successful than others doing the same thing. Example: "Our company invests in cutting-edge technology to stay ahead of the pack."

Back to Square One: To start over or return to the beginning due to a setback. Example: "We went back to square one after wasting two full days on the failed project."

Behind the Scenes: Refers to the background work or hidden efforts that contribute to a result. Example: "The success of the event was due to the hard work behind the scenes."

Ballpark figure: Refers to an approximate or rough estimate, often used when discussing numbers or financial projections. Example: "We need to provide the investors with a ballpark figure for our projected revenue next quarter."

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