



Working In English
by Doing Business In English™

EFFECTIVE BUSINESS ENGLISH
VOCABULARY BY
DOING BUSINESS IN ENGLISH

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Introduction

Doing Business In English has put together this booklet to help professionals develop their business English vocabulary. There are explanations of several forms of vocabulary plus links to external sites that help with general and specific vocabulary.

Business English is a specific section of the English language which can be quite different to academic English, the grammar does not change but there is a lot of additional vocabulary and ways of using it. This includes words, phrases, phrasal verbs and idioms that are specific to different business situations and sometimes sectors. This English depends on clear and precise use of this vocabulary, additionally with attention to attention to tone and cultural awareness.

Learners who can increase their vocabulary can increase their confidence and be more effective by expressing themselves more clearly and accurately. One key part of business English is the written language, in which emails, proposals, reports and presentations have a specific format, structure, and style. Writers who do not follow standard expected structure, style and tone risk the reader questioning their credibility.

Effective use of business English vocabulary has become essential for professionals globally who aim to perform in international business. Increasing capability increases opportunities for professionals because their businesses are more likely to put them forward for more engagement with clients, stakeholders and colleagues in other offices worldwide. Strong business English skills often create opportunities that might otherwise be out of reach for professionals.

It is simply not possible to learn vocabulary in a hurry but like going to a gym regularly a lot can be achieved through regular disciplined work. Many learners commit to 15-30 minutes every day on specific vocabulary learning and achieve great results over time. There is no standard way of learning vocabulary, it varies for most learners.

[How To Learn Vocabulary: 15 Effective Ways And Techniques](#)

[How to Learn English Vocabulary: 5 Best Methods · PrepScholar](#)

Effective Verbs

Not all verbs are equal, many verbs are not very specific such as 'do, make, use, get, look, take, have, and said', so they do not communicate clear meaning and leave a lot to assumption. Developing a better range of business verbs can help professionals communicate more effectively and accurately.

Verbs for when you managed or led a project;

Chaired, controlled, coordinated, executed, headed, operated, orchestrated, organized, oversaw, planned, produced & programmed.

Verbs for when you created, brought or made a project happen;

Administered, built, charted, created, designed, developed, devised, founded, engineered, established, formalized, formed, formulated, implemented, incorporated, initiated, instituted, introduced, launched, pioneered & spearheaded.

Verbs for when you saved some money, time or resources

Conserved, consolidated, decreased, deducted, diagnosed, lessened, reconciled, reduced & yielded.

Verbs for when you improved or increased sales, productivity or customer satisfaction

Accelerated, achieved, advanced, amplified, boosted, capitalized, delivered, enhanced, expanded, expedited, furthered, gained, generated, improved, lifted, maximized, outpaced, stimulated & sustained.

Verbs for when you developed, improved or changed something;

Centralized, clarified, converted, customized, influenced, integrated, merged, modified, overhauled, redesigned, refined, refocused, rehabilitated, remodeled, reorganized, replaced, restructured, revamped, revitalized, simplified, standardized, streamlined, strengthened, updated, upgraded & transformed

Verbs for when you lead, managed or supervised a team;

Aligned, cultivated, directed, enabled, facilitated, fostered, guided, hired, inspired, mentored, mobilized, motivated, recruited, regulated, shaped, supervised, taught, trained, unified & united.

Verbs for when you helped or assisted colleagues / customers / suppliers;
Advised, advocated, arbitrated, coached, consulted, educated, fielded, informed & resolved.

Verbs for when you studied or researched a topic / article / report / issue;
Analyzed, assembled, assessed, audited, calculated, discovered, evaluated, examined, explored, forecasted, identified, interpreted, investigated, mapped, measured, qualified, quantified, surveyed, tested & tracked.

Verbs for when you communicated or wrote an email / report / idea;
Authored, briefed, campaigned, co-authored, composed, conveyed, convinced, corresponded, counseled, critiqued, defined, documented, edited, illustrated, lobbied, persuaded, promoted, publicized & reviewed.

Verbs for when you oversaw, supervised or regulated a task / project / procedure;
Authorized, blocked, delegated, dispatched, enforced, ensured, inspected, itemized, monitored, screened, scrutinized & verified.

Verbs for when you achieved a goal / target / milestone;
Attained, awarded, completed, demonstrated, earned, exceeded, outperformed, reached, showcased, succeeded, surpassed & targeted.

Resources

[Business English vocabulary: 100 essential English Business verbs. Speakspeak](https://simplicable.com/en/business-verbs)

<https://simplicable.com/en/business-verbs>

[Speak like a Manager: Verbs 1 \(youtube.com\)](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=...)

[Academic Vocabulary for Essays & IELTS Writing: 15 cause and effect POWER VERBS \(youtube.com\)](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=...)

Business Adjectives

Business adjectives are words used to describe the personality, values, and unique strengths of a brand or business. These adjectives connect with emotions and help the listener or reader create both feelings and images in their minds. Effective use of adjectives has many benefits, for example they create impact, clarity, engagement, motivation and a more professional image.

Steve Jobs was a big believer in the power of adjectives and used them when presenting new projects. These adjectives were then used by the advertising, marketing, sales and retail teams, this practice has been copied by most of Apple's competitors now along with many of the world's leading companies.

Business Adjectives

Autonomous: If employees are actively encouraged to complete projects on their own without managers micromanaging, you might say that you have an autonomous workplace culture that trusts that your employees can produce top results.

Challenging: One of those words that could have either positive or negative connotations, so you should dig into the subtext. A challenging company culture, when positive, provides opportunities to develop employee skill sets and grow. When negative, it potentially creates stress through lack of communication, poor employee management, or lack of clear objectives across team members.

Collaborative: A collaborative work environment emphasizes the need to work together and share information to achieve success, as well as maximize employee knowledge and ideas. This cooperation helps employees work across department or function lines which has a net positive impact on company performance.

Demanding: A demanding organizational culture expects too much from employees and may or may not offer them the necessary resources to complete this work.

Empowering: Empowering cultures encourage employees to reach beyond their normal day to day responsibilities and stretch their capabilities.

Engaging: An engaging company culture keeps employees motivated and interested in their jobs. Strong engagement includes solid manager-employee relationships, frequent communication, a healthy work-life balance, and a feeling of belonging.

Ethical: In an ethical workplace culture, you can be sure that every manager and employee upholds their word, and that all work is conducted above board. Company values and ethics are extremely important to ensure that there is a sense of trustworthiness.

Flexible: If your company is okay with schedule changes, trying out different problem-solving approaches, or is generally not phased by big issues, you could describe them as flexible.

Formal: Most workplaces have some degree of formality - it's unavoidable in the business world. However, formal work cultures require a type of dress code, tend to be more hierarchical, and might have more structured communication norms.

Inclusive: Inclusivity might be a buzzword in recent times, but it is a critical factor of company success and employee well-being. In an inclusive workplace, employee differences are celebrated and uplifted. They promote a sense of belonging where employees from all walks of life feel valued and respected.

Innovative: Your company looks for new ways to do things and isn't afraid to go against the status quo in their quest for success. This word is usually associated with startups and technology companies.

Outdated: An outdated company culture might refer to technology, communication styles, company policies, or something else. It's important for a company to maintain consistency, but also to evolve with the times.

Performance Driven: Similar to results-oriented, a performance-driven company is motivated by team success and driving better business outcomes.

Purposeful: Many employees want to feel as though their work has an impact. A purposeful company culture connects work to the bigger picture so that employees can see how they are helping the world.

Results-Oriented: A results-oriented approach to company culture prioritizes actions and

Results-Oriented: A results-oriented approach to company culture prioritizes actions and outcomes. You need to define the results that you want to achieve with your team members and then strategically execute them.

Rigid: Rigid company culture leaves little room for improvisation and is very rules or tradition focused. Quite often there is an attitude of “this is how we’ve always done things, and this is how we will continue to do it.”

Siloed: When teams work in a silo, they lose opportunities to collaborate. A siloed work environment does not encourage sharing information between teams, probably to increase team focus, but this often has the negative effect of reducing team efficiency.

Stressful: If employees feel like there is too much pressure, not enough resources, or not enough room to blow off steam, their negative stress levels increase. Stressful culture needs to be addressed quickly to prevent employee disengagement and burnout.

Supportive: A supportive company culture actively supports its employees by supporting positive relationships and emotional wellbeing.

Transparent: A transparent company workplace culture emphasizes clear communication and sharing information. This can manifest in a variety of ways, but it demonstrates that leaders in the company care that employees understand why things are done the way that they are.

Unethical: Maybe managers take credit for their employees’ work, or maybe a team member cuts corners around certain projects if they know that no one will notice. Unethical cultures pave the way for problems down the line.

Resources

[Adjective-Adverb Online Exercises - English Grammar \(english-grammar.at\)](https://www.english-grammar.at)

[220 Words To Describe Business - Simplicable](#)

[Speak Like a Manager: 10 Adjectives + 10 Adverbs \(youtube.com\)](https://www.youtube.com)

[Speak like a Manager: Adjectives 1 \(youtube.com\)](https://www.youtube.com)

[Business Adjectives: Mastering Business Communication In 2024](#)

[Powerful Adjectives to Boost Your Business English Vocabulary](#)

Business Adverbs

Business adverbs explain how a verb is actioned, we add a words such as ‘quickly’ to the verb ‘speak’ to say ‘she speaks quickly’. As with adjectives adverbs help communicate a lot more meaning to develop more effective communication. Many non-native speakers miss adverbs and adjectives when they speak in English, instead only focusing on the basics but this prevents them communicating at the same level as they would in their native language.

Positive Adverbs List

Boldly, bravely, brightly, cheerfully, devotedly, eagerly, elegantly, faithfully, fortunately, gracefully, happily, honestly, innocently, kindly, obediently, perfectly, politely, powerfully, safely & victoriously.

Negative Adverbs List

Achingly, angrily, annoyingly, anxiously, badly, boastfully, foolishly, hopelessly, irritably, jealously, lazily, miserably, painfully, poorly, rudely, sadly, selfishly, terribly & unhappily.

List of Adverbs About Time

Always, daily, eventually, finally, frequently, generally, hourly, later, never, nightly, normally, occasionally, often, rarely, regularly, seldom, sometimes, soon, still, today, tomorrow, usually, weekly, yearly & yesterday.

List of Adverbs That Describe Speed

Briskly, casually, expeditiously, fleetingly, gradually, haltingly, hastily, hurriedly, immediately, instantly, languidly, leisurely, promptly, quickly, rapidly, slowly, speedily, swiftly & tediously.

Adverbs That Describe Sound

Audibly, deafeningly, ear-splittingly, emphatically, faintly, inaudibly, noiselessly, noisily, resonantly, resoundingly, shrilly, softly, soundlessly, thunderously, uproariously, & weakly.

Adverbs That Describe Tone

Accidentally, awkwardly, blindly, crazily, defiantly, deliberately, doubtfully, dramatically, enormously, excitedly, mortally, nervously, seriously, restlessly, unexpectedly & wildly.

Resources

[List Of 100+ Common Adverbs By Types And With Examples \(thesaurus.com\)](#)

[30 Advanced Adverbs + Examples - Espresso English](#)

[English Adverbs Related to "Business and Occupation" | LanGeek](#)

Conjunction & Linking words

Conjunctions and linking words in English are used to link or connect different parts / clauses of a sentence, they help improve the flow and coherence. In Business English they help create well-structured, complex and more meaningful sentences, establishing logical relationships between the words, clauses and/or phrases.

When you would like show an addition;

Also, as well as that, apart from this, along with, besides, further, in addition, furthermore, moreover, additionally, not only but also, then, again & finally.

When you want to show cause and effect;

As a result of, as a consequence of, because, since, consequently, therefore, thus, hence, owing to, as a result of, leads to, contributes to, brings about, results in, because of this, for this reason, comes from, results from, is due to & is caused by.

When you are making a comparison between people, tasks, projects or products;

Equally, in the same way, likewise, just as, just like, similarly, on the whole, despite this, in comparison, in contrast, similar to, in the same way & even though.

When you are making a contrast between people, tasks, projects or products;

Alternatively, conversely, differing from, even so, despite, nevertheless, unlike, on the other hand, while and whereas.

When making a concession;

Admittedly, although, however, even though, all the same, up to a point, even so, in spite of & even if.

When you would like to make a conclusion;

To conclude, briefly, to summarise, altogether, in conclusion, finally, on the whole, summarizing, overall, to sum up & evidently.

When you are wanting to explain a condition;

If, in this case, in case & unless.

When you are making a generalization;

As a rule, in general, generally, in most cases, overall, on the whole & for the most part.

When you would like to illustrate a point, idea or information;

For example, for instance, such as, in other words, to demonstrate this, to show that, namely, in this case of & as an example.

When you want to show emphasis;

Absolutely, actually, as it happens, definitely, especially, clearly, notably, significantly, in particular, importantly, indeed, in fact, to be sure, obviously, truly & undoubtedly, in reality, without a doubt and it should be noted.

When you want to share an opinion;

I think, I believe, I feel, in my opinion, in my view, as far as I know, it seems to me, in my experience, I believe that & personally I think.

When you want to persuade others;

Evidently, of course, clearly, surely, indeed, undoubtedly, certainly, for this reason & besides.

When you want to put ideas or points in order;

Before, following, previously, first / firstly, second / secondly, third / thirdly, lastly, subsequently, last but not least & first and foremost.

When you want to give the reason for something;

Because of, with this in mind, in fact, in order to and due to.

Resources

[Transition Words and Phrases to Improve Your Writing | 120+ Transition Words for Essays \(youtube.com\)](#)

[Linking Words, Connecting Words: Full List and Useful Examples • 7ESL](#)

[How To Connect Ideas In English \[with Linking Words\] \(youtube.com\)](#)

[How to use linking words in English - BBC English Masterclass \(youtube.com\)](#)

Phrasal Verbs

A phrasal verb is made up from a verb with a preposition or adverb or both, the critical issue to understand is that its meaning is different from the meaning of its separate parts. They are important in English and particularly in a native speaking environment where they are used a lot. During many professionals academic learning phrasal verbs are missed or covered very quickly, when they start working in English this can often present a major challenge.

Phrasal verbs are used less in formal business language, particularly in writing, professionals should also be aware that other non-native English speakers can struggle to understand phrasal verbs. They are used frequently in speech and for example in small talk they can be very common.

Add up to something - equals / the total value

“The output will add up to 10m units.”

Ask around - to ask many people the same question

“Bob, ask around and see if any of the suppliers have capacity for a new order.”

Back somebody up - to support / defend someone.

“A great boss will back you up when you need support.”

Bail out - to rescue somebody / a business from a difficult financial situation.

“The holding company are considering bailing out one of the subsidiary companies.”

Bottom out - to reach the lowest point before improvement happens.

“Demand will bottom out soon in line with the economy but should start to increase soon.”

Branch out – to Expand or diversify areas of expertise, interests or skills.

“The CEO has decided we will branch out into new markets to drive sales.”

Break into something – to enter with power / forcibly.

“We are making a plan to break into the European market.”

Break something down – to divide something into smaller parts.

“This is a very complex problem; I suggest we break it down into pieces that we can manage.”



Bring something up – to start talking about a new subject.

“I would like to bring something up that I believe we should consider.”

Call around – to telephone many different places and/or people.

“My boss will call around to see if he can find a supplier with available stock.”

Catch up – to get to the same point as somebody else / others.

“Your team are going to have to work much faster if you are going to catch up the milestones you have missed.”

Cheer up – to become happier.

“The customer cheered up when we presented her with the good news.”

Cheer somebody up - make someone happier.

“We arranged a night out to cheer up the team.”

Clean something up – to tidy or clean.

“We need clean up this operation in order to become more efficient.”

Close down - ending operations or trading

“The factory closed down in the recession.”

Come across something – unexpectedly find something

“I came across our competitors’ products in a new store.”

Come down with something - become ill

“My nephew came down with chicken pox this weekend.”

Come from some place / city / country - originate from.

“The new manager comes from Germany.”

Count on somebody/ something – depend / rely on somebody/something.

“We are counting on our suppliers.”

Cut back – reduce something

“The company cut back its staffing levels due to a reduction in demand.”

End up - eventually reach/get to.

“They ended up selecting a new supplier.”

Fall apart - break into pieces

“I hope the team does not fall apart under pressure.”

Fall through - not completed successfully

“The expected merger fell through due to disagreements.”

Figure something out - find an answer / understand

“We need to figure out what the customers really want.”

Fill something in - to write information in blanks, often on forms or digital platforms.

“We need to ask the customer to fill in the application form with their name and email.”

Find out - discover.

“I do not know when they will find out.”

Get something across - make something understood.

“The team wanted to get their ideas across to the stakeholders.”

Get along/on with – become able to be/work together.

“They suddenly started to get along with each other better.”

Get away with something - do something without being noticed or punished

“He thought he would be able to get away with his mistakes.”

Get something back – take ownership of / receive something you had before.

“Liz finally got her Science notes back from my roommate.”

Get back at somebody – retaliate or take revenge.

“After the terrible team meeting it was clear that there were team members who were looking to get back at each other.”

Get over something - overcome a problem.

“We really need to get over the issues we are facing.”

Get round to something - finally find time to do something

“I am not sure when will get round to answering those emails.”

Get together - meet

“Brenda, let's get together when the first milestone is achieved.”

Give something away - reveal hidden information about something.

“He is not a great negotiator, I think will give away his target price.”

Give in - reluctantly stop arguing, negotiating or fighting.

“We will have to give in on this issue, we just do not have a strong case.”

Give something up - quit a habit or something.

“We will have to give up on expecting our customer agreeing to a price increase.”

Go ahead – start or proceed

“We should get the project go ahead soon.”.

Go back - return to a place or position.

“We will have to go back on our offer, we simply cannot make the numbers work anymore.”

Go over something – review or discuss

“We need to go over the proposals in the report.”

Hold something back - hide an emotion or fact.

“I think she is holding something back in these negotiations.”

Keep something from somebody - not telling a detail.

“I think my supplier is keeping something from me.”.

Look after somebody/something - take care of.

“We need to look after the team they are close to burnout.”

Look forward to something - be excited or positive about the future.

“The team are looking forward to the launch of the new product.”

Look into something – research or investigate.

“We need to look into what has happened.”

Look something up - search for information in a reference book or digital platform.
“They asked us to look up the historical data.”

Look up to somebody - have a lot of admiration and/or respect for someone.
“The team look up to their teamleader.”

Note down – write something down in order to remember it.
“I asked them to note down our specific requirements.”

Put something together - assemble
“We need to put together a plan of action.”

Run out of – use up the supply of something.
“We have run out of resources for that project.”

Shop around - compare prices or availability.
“We need to shop around to see what deals are available.”

Step down – resign from or leave a position.
“He has decided to step down from the position of Chairman.”

Stick to something – carry on doing something and limiting to one thing.
“We need to stick to the goals agreed at the start of the year.”

Take on - accept responsibility or task.
“We will take on new responsibilities as part of the reorganization.”

Take over – assume or take control and/or responsibility for something.
“The new manager will take over some of Bob’s tasks.”

Think something over – consider in detail.
“We will have to think over there proposals.”

Weigh up - carefully consider the costs and benefits of a situation, proposal or decision.
“We need to weigh up the alternatives.”

Work something out – resolve an issue or make a calculation.
“There are many issues, we will have to work something out as soon as possible.”

Business Phrases

A learning curve

The process of learning, sometimes from trial and error. A steep learning curve, which means learning quickly to meet the expectations of a specific job or task.

Example: *"There was a steep learning curve when I started my new job."*

A long shot

From sport when a player is trying to shoot from a long distance, so there is a lower chance of success.

Example: *"Securing the price we need is a long shot."*

A zero-sum game

A situation in which wins so the other person or someone else must lose.

Example: *"I don't think this is a zero-sum game. If the customer wins, we win too."*

Back to the drawing board

To start something again from the beginning.

Example: *"We need to get back to the drawing board and create a new plan."*

Behind the scenes

Something that is away from public view.

Example: *"We do not know what is going on behind the scenes?"*

Between a rock and a hard place

A situation in which there is no easy way out or good solution, meaning the outcome will not be ideal whatever choice is made.

Example: *"We are between a rock and a hard place, I do not know what to do."*

Bring to the table

What can possibly be offered.

Example: *"Let's see what they bring to the table and then decide."*

By the book

When something is done strictly in accordance with the rules.

Example: *"They have managed this by the book despite all the issues."*

Call it a day

When the work has been completed for the day or a decision has been made to finish.

Example: *"I am exhausted, let's call it a day."*

Cut corners

Taking shortcuts by using the cheapest, easiest and/or quickest way to do something.

Example: *"I have to ensure the team does not cut corners on this project."*

Draw a line in the sand

Make final conditions that cannot be changed

Example: *"We have to draw a line in the sand so they will see that this is really our final offer."*

Drill down into

To investigate and explore something in more depth.

Example: *"We need to drill down into the forecasts, I feel we are missing something."*

Go down the drain

Effort, work and/or money is lost or wasted.

Example: *"The project was cancelled, all our work has gone down the drain."*

Go the extra mile

To apply more effort and/or more than is expected.

Example: *"We will have to go the extra mile to complete this on time."*

Going forward

Action that will start immediately and continue into the future.

Example: *"Going forward, we will agree prices quarterly."*

From day one

From the beginning

Example: *"From day one the milestones looked challenging."*

From the ground up

To build or make something from nothing.

Example: *"Creating a successful product from the ground up is rewarding."*

Get down to business

Indicates when it's time to start focusing on the actual topic/work.

Example: *"Let's get down to business, we have a lot to discuss today."*

Get off the ground

To get a plan or project started.

Example: *"We need to get the project off the ground immediately."*

Get your foot in the door

Create an opportunity to be seen or be considered for an opportunity.

Example: *"We have a plan to get our foot in the door with some new customers."*

Hands are tied

When action is not possible because of authority, regulations and rules.

Example: *"Sorry, I would like to help but my hands are tied."*

It's not rocket science

Something that is not very hard to understand.

Example: *"I cannot understand why they are taking so long to understand the process, it's not rocket science."*

Jump through hoops

To have to try very hard, sometimes in a particular way.

Example: *"The customer is very demanding; they keep making us jump through hoops."*

Level playing field

Equal conditions, rules and/or expectations.

Example: *"I do not feel the supplier is treating us fairly, all we asked for is a level playing field."*

Number crunching

Analyzing numbers.

Example: *"We will do some number crunching and then submit our findings."*

Put your cards on the table

Be completely honest and open

Example: *"The negotiations are stuck, I wish both sides could put their cards on the table."*

Reach out

To get in contact with someone.

Example: *"We need to reach out to all the key accounts to secure new appointments."*

The big picture

To see the overall view of something or the situation as a whole, not at the details.

Example: *"Let's take a few minutes to see the big picture."*

The lion's share

The largest part of something.

Example: *"They want the lion's share of the business, so they will offer a low price."*

To corner the market

Control of enough of the market to be able to change the market conditions and/or price.

Example: *"Zerco Ltd has grown so quickly that it has cornered the market."*

To get someone up to speed

To update someone on a current situation, giving them all the necessary information to complete a task.

Example: *"Please let me know when I can get you up to speed on the new customer."*

To think outside the box

Think creatively, often considering unconventional ideas that are not common.

Example: *"We are not making any progress, we will need to think outside the box now."*

To learn the ropes

Learn the basics of a job or task.

Example: *"We have 3 new staff who are being on-boarded, they need to learn the ropes."*

Up in the air

When everything is uncertain or unknown.

Example: *"Everything is up in the air, nobody knows what to do."*

Business Idioms

A ballpark figure - an approximate number or estimate.

“Please can you provide us with a ballpark figure of the number of customers last month?”

A tough nut to crack - a difficult person or problem to deal with or resolve.

“This new buyer is a tough nut to crack.”

Ahead of the curve - more advanced, capable or innovative than the others.

“Apple is always ahead of the curve in mobile experience.”

Ahead of the pack - to be more successful than the competition.

“If we stay ahead of the pack, we will become very profitable.”

Back to square one - start something over again because a previous attempt failed.

“To make this product work effectively, we have to go back to square one immediately.”

Back to the drawing board - to start something again because a previous attempt failed.

“The stakeholders rejected our proposal, so it’s back to the drawing board.”

Ballpark figure / number – an inexact estimate.

“I can give you a ballpark figure today, 8 new machines will create 6,000 units per day.”

Behind the scenes - activities that occur out of public view.

“Bob, there is a lot of hard work going on behind the scenes to improve results.”

Big picture - everything that is involved with a particular situation.

“They are only focused on the minor details, so now have lost sight of the big picture.”

Blue sky thinking - creative thinking that is not limited by current beliefs, practices or assumptions.

“Bob, I really think we need some blue sky thinking to solve this problem.”

Break even - to neither make a profit nor a loss.

“The figures suggest we need to sell about 3,000 more units to break even next year.”

By the book - to do something specifically to the law or rules.

“We are very disciplined Martine, we do everything by the book.”

Change of pace - a shift in the level activity.

“We need a change of pace, otherwise we will deliver late.”

Circle back - to return to a previous issue or topic.

“I think we should circle back to the first topic as still think that we do not have clarity.”

Clear the air - to resolve any misunderstandings, disagreements or tension.

“Please understand we need to clear the air before we restart the negotiations.”

Cut to the chase - to get to the point without wasting anytime.

“Gill, let’s cut to the chase and try and agree a price.”

Cut-throat - competition that is aggressive.

“Competition in this market is really cut-throat.”

Dot your I’s and cross your T’s – disciplined attention to every detail.

“Please make sure you dot your i’s and cross your t’s before sending the proposal.”

Down the line - in the future.

“I think this difficult decision will bring significant returns down the line.”

Drag one’s feet - to delay or be slow in doing something.

“Team we can not drag our feet this week, customers are complaining.”

Easy come, easy go - something gained easily is then also lost easily.

“I must be honest I lost 350 dollars at the casino last week, sadly that’s life – easy come, easy go.”

Face the music - to confront the consequences of your actions.

“Team, we have to face the music and acknowledge our errors.”

Fast track - to speed up a process.

“Our boss believes we should fast track this project.”

Fill someone in - to provide someone with necessary information.

“Neil, can you fill me in on the details of the meeting please?”

Game plan - a plan or strategy to create success.

“Sarah, please explain, what is your game plan for opening new markets?”

Get the ball rolling - to start something.

“We need to get the ball rolling with the key account sales drive.”

Go the extra mile - to do more than what other people expect to achieve something.

“Our maintenance team went the extra mile and the customer is now delighted.”

Go through the roof - to rise or increase something to a very high level.

“Sales have gone through the roof since we added more products to the offer.”

Grey area - something that is not clearly defined, not black or white.

“Graham, I think this is a grey area and we need to move forwards very carefully.”

Hit the ground running - to start something and then move forwards at a fast pace.

“We need to hit the ground running with this merger.”

In a nutshell – to use as few words as possible.

“In a nutshell, we need to deliver 150 machines by 15th August to secure the customer.”

In full swing - at a stage when the level of activity is at its peak.

“The team event is in full swing and it looks like it is going well.”

In the driver’s seat - to be in charge or in control of a situation.

“Following the team’s selection of Sally as the leader, she has been the driver’s seat.”

In the loop – to be informed and involved in a particular matter.

“Please keep us in the loop about any changes to the product launch.”

Keep your eye on the ball – to stay focused on the main objective.

“We need to keep our eye on the ball and not get distracted.”

Learn the ropes – to learn the basics of something.

“They said it will take a few months for us to learn the ropes.”

Make a killing - to achieve significant financial results / success.

“Microsoft made a killing with their AI product.”

Miss the boat - to miss out on an opportunity.

“We need to act fast, or we’ll miss the boat on this investment.”

Move the goalposts - to change the rules or targets in a way that makes a task more difficult, complex, longer and/or require more resources.

“Sadly every time we meet their expectations, the buyer moves the goalposts.”

No strings attached - without any conditions or obligations.

“The supplier offered us a better service contract with no strings attached.”

No-brainer - something that is really obvious or easy.

“We agreed accepting the new price was a no-brainer.”

Not going to fly - not going to work or be accepted.

“I do not think that explanation will fly with the customer.”

On the same page - in agreement or understanding with others about something.

“Let’s make sure the customer and our team are on the same page before we talk about a new contract.”

Out in the open - something that is exposed, public knowledge and not secret anymore.

“She said we need to get these issues out in the open to move forwards.”

Put all one’s eggs in one basket - to rely on only one solution to create success.

“Please manage the risk, do not put all your eggs in one basket.”

Put the cart before the horse - to do or think about things in the wrong order.

“Planning the celebration party before securing the order is putting the cart before the horse.”

Raise the bar - to set higher standards or expectations.

“The CEO believes the new product range will raise the bar.”

Read between the lines - to understand a hidden meaning, message or the truth.

“Graham, I think you should try to read between the lines to really understand what the customer is saying.”

Red tape – the official rules, regulations and processes that can seem excessive and unnecessary at times.

“The Boss said that we need to cut through some red tape to deliver the project on time.”

Rock the boat - to do or say something that will upset people and/or cause problems.

“Please don’t rock the boat, this customer being happy is critical for our bonus.”

Roll up your sleeves - to prepare to work hard

“Team, it’s time to roll up our sleeves, get moving and complete this job.”

Safe bet - something that will definitely happen.

“Investing in this company is a safe bet currently.”

Same boat - to be in the same difficult situation as someone else / others.

“I think we are all in the same boat, rising cost prices and customers who refuse to pay more.”

See eye to eye - to see and agree with somebody on something.

“Sadly, they do not see eye to eye on how to develop the product range and business.”

See something through - to continue until something is completed.

“I think you have to see through the process until the end.”

Sever ties - to end a relationship or agreement with someone or a business.

“She decided to sever ties with Zerco Ltd due to the late delivery issues.”

Shoot something down - to criticize or reject something such as an idea or proposal.

“The boss shot down our product development ideas.”

Sit on the fence - to either be undecided or not take sides.

“The manager is sitting on the fence, no decision or indication of what he wants.”

Small talk - casual conversation about everyday non-controversial topics.

“I suggest you make some small talk for 20 minutes before discussing the new service agreement proposal.”

Smooth sailing - when success is achieved without difficulties or disruption.

“After we learnt how the customer operates, it was all smooth sailing.”

Stand one’s ground - to not change one’s opinion, perspective or position.

“The customer starting pushing for a discount and earlier delivery dates, but I stood my ground as I knew I had no room to negotiate further.”

Step up to the plate - to proactively or reactively take responsibility or initiative.

“The Boss was explaining that she expects more staff to step up to the plate given the tough market we are trading in.”

Take it offline - to discuss something privately and/or at a later date.

“I think we should discuss this offline, please let me know when would be convenient.”

Take the bull by the horns - to directly confront a difficult problem or situation directly.

“I think that we today need to take the bull by the horns and resolve this dispute.”

Talk someone into something - to persuade and convince someone to do something.

“He had talked us into launching the products early.”

Talk someone out of something - to persuade or convince someone not to do something.

“She managed to talk Bob out of raising the price.”

The ball is in your court – something becomes your responsibility to take action on.

“Lynne has completed steps 1 to 3, so the ball is now in your court Sam.”

The elephant in the room - an obvious important problem or issue that people avoid discussing.

“Sorry everyone but I feel we must address the elephant in the room - the teams simply are not collaborating and sharing data as we require.”

The eleventh hour - at the last possible moment.

“They decided not to sign the contract at the eleventh hour which was a real shock.”

Think outside the box - to think of creative and innovative, often unconventional solutions instead of common ones.

“It became clear that they would need to think outside the box to solve the problem.”

Time is money - time is valuable and wasting time is equivalent to losing money.

“We need to review the machine layout in the factory because time is money.”

Time's up - time for something or someone has finished.

“They believe the supplier's time's up, its performance simply was not good enough.”

Twist someone's arm - to persuade someone to do something.

“You will have to twist his arm to get him to agree to the new delivery dates.”

Up in the air – something is uncertain or undecided.

“Sadly there has not been any progress, all plans are still up in the air.”

Up to speed – to be fully informed and up-to-date with the latest information or developments.

“George please get all members of the new team up to speed on the customer requirements and how they like communication.”

Uphill battle - something that is difficult or challenging to achieve because of obstacles and problems.

“I think convincing the customer to accept new prices will be an uphill battle.”

Upper hand - to have more control and power, or an advantage over others.

“The customer has the upper hand, I know they have been approached by several new potential suppliers.”

Word of mouth - something is shared or done by people talking about something or telling people about something.

“I think this new business is getting new customers by encouraging its happy customers to share their experiences with them by word of mouth.”

Business Collocations

Collocations are common in all forms of English and often cause misunderstanding. Effectively being able to use English collocations related to business develops communication skills. Effective use of collocations helps learners sound more confident, fluent and clearer.

There are 7 types of collocations made from combinations of verbs, nouns and adjectives:

- 1 Noun + noun: Market strategy
- 2 Noun + verb: Project kick off
- 3 Verb + noun: Agree conditions
- 4 Verb + expression with preposition: Run out of steam
- 5 Verb + adverb: Persuade gradually
- 6 Adverb + adjective: Completely unaware
- 7 Adjective + noun: Negative outcome

Phrasal verbs are different to collocations, phrasal verbs are made up of a verb plus a preposition which often changes the meaning from that of the original verb. For example.

Collocation - I bought a container of grain from a dealer.

Phrasal verb - Try to get the upper hand in the negotiations.

Collocations with break

They broke the rules that had been set by the association.

The Director broke the news of the layoffs to the team.

I hope our competitor does not break the record for sales of apples.

My boss broke the ice with a great joke when the new customer visited us.

I really wanted my colleague to break his habit of looking nervous with new suppliers.

Collocations with catch

We will catch a train after leaving the airport.

I tried to catch the buyer's attention at the conference.

Les caught a cold and was working from home.

The warehouse manager caught the thief who had been taking products.

I caught the end of the meeting and the team seemed very motivated.

Collocations with come

We came early to show commitment to the process.

The product came complete with great packaging.

The Directors came to terms with the reality that growth was highly unlikely.

She came directly to our meeting avoiding a supplier meeting.

I hope they will come on time as we have a lot to cover.

Both parties in the negotiation were coming close to an agreement.

Collocations with the noun contract

The Legal Department will draw up a new contract for trade with Europe.

The CEO will sign the contract.

I do not believe that it is ever good to agree a first offer when negotiating a contract.

The Headhunter called and told Jenny that the company will offer her a contract.

The team are bidding on several contracts and we will see what happens soon.

Collocations with the noun deal

The CEO has done a deal with the supplier.

The Purchasing Team will negotiate a new deal with the supplier.

Please let's agree a deal on the price for this service.

We closed the deal after long negotiations, now we can plan next year.

We have been working on an exciting deal with a key supplier.

Collocations with do

We will do business with that supplier.

Belinda does the bookkeeping for the company.

I was unhappy because I had to do some paperwork.

We asked them to do us a favour.

The Team are trying to do a deal that will mean they hit their sales target.

He is doing the debugging.

Bob did the best job he could.

The company did due diligence.

Collocations with get

Harry was worried the customer would get angry about the price increases.
I got a shock in the product presentation when I saw the new features.
I got lost and was late for the presentation.
My colleague is getting married this year.
I went to the party and got drunk.

Collocations with go

Bill went abroad to look for new sources.
Small businesses went out of business.
The account manager has gone missing and we cannot get any help.
We must go online to access the database.

Collocations with have

We will have a meal together.
They will have a meeting on Thursday.
We had a partnership that worked well.
She will take a break from the training.
He had lunch on his own.

Collocations with keep

They asked us to keep in touch.
The manager has kept control of the problem and we should be ok.
Jeff asked us to keep a promise that we waited a week before talking to his competitor.
The advisor asked the customers to keep calm and wait for the market to improve.
We kept Bill's place in the programme despite him being on sick leave.

Collocations with made

I asked him to make an effort to improve customer service.
Laura made an appointment with her coach to discuss the issue.
Graham made many mistakes sadly that damaged his reputation.
We made a lot of money by launching that product just when the market opened up.
It was a long day but we made progress.
The team wanted to make a difference and help the company grow.
Finance have to make some calculations before giving their approval.
The sales forecast is not good, I think the company will make some cutbacks.
We met the bank and they will hopefully make us a loan of 500,000 Euros.

Collocations with manage

Jane manages two tech teams focused on app development.

We often have discussions and disagreements; some colleagues have trouble managing their feelings on some big issues.

We need to manage our expectations during the visit by the customer.

Susan is always managing at least 3 projects at any one time.

Collocations with the verbs operate and run

The taxi company operates / runs an airport drop off / pick up service.

The company operates/runs a bottling business in Newcastle.

The company operates/runs 365 days per year 24 hours a day.

My company operates/runs production facilities in 3 countries.

The economy is in downturn, so we are operating / running with a focus on cost efficiency.

Great Tour Ltd operates/runs a bus tour service in The North of England.

Collocations with pay

I asked the team to pay attention to the problems.

Jane paid the price requested by the supplier but will look for an alternative supplier.

The waiter asked that we pay cash rather than used credit cards.

We will have to pay interest on the loan.

It was a quick visit, we paid our requests and then left.

Collocations with save

We can save money through process improvements.

He saved space in the office for new staff.

I saved Michelle a seat in the conference room.

Lets save the data to a hard drive then back up to the cloud.

New machines saved energy being wasted in the factory.

Collocations with take

They took a chance of the new supplier delivering on time.

The companies took a break from the negotiations.

I thought we should take a rest from marketing.

I will take an exam to complete my studies.

Jane took her place at the meeting table.

She took a chance with a new member of staff and it worked.

Others

Business Verb + Noun Collocations

Annual report – the team are reading the annual report of the company.

Attract investors – we are trying to attract investors in advance of the IPO.

Brand name – Marketing professionals enjoy creating new brand names.

Build trust – we are trying to build the trust our key customers have in us.

Business model – they are creating a new business model.

Chair a meeting – the CEO will chair a meeting on the sales plan.

Customer service – after visiting the shop Graham realized the customer service was poor.

Dead on time / right on time – he arrived dead on time / right on time thankfully.

Discontinue a product – sales had slowed down so the company discontinued the product.

Flexible hours – my team like the flexible hours they have been working.

Full-time employee – HR are looking for a new full-time employee to join the sales team.

High / low demand – high demand for product A followed a drop in demand for product B.

International market / domestic market – our products are performing well in international markets where as in domestic markets sales are dropping.

Join forces – we will join forces with another team on this project.

Loyal customers – we are trying to develop more loyal customers by improving service.

Market forces – professors are studying market forces that dominate the economy.

Market leader – Directors tell us we are becoming a market leader.

Meet a deadline – the project team were working hard to meet a deadline.

Price war – after the product launch there was a price war between the market leaders.

Product launch – I am looking forward to the product launch.

Sales figures – every Monday we review the sales figures as a team.

Save money / time – we need to start saving time and money.

Strategic plan – the CEO demanded that we formulated an effective strategic plan.

Strong competitor – the team believe a new strong competitor will enter the market soon.

Suffer losses – when demand dropped and margins were squeezed we suffered major losses.

Tight deadline – last year we were continually facing tight deadlines.

Short-term / Long-term plan – every year we create a new short-term plan that helps us implement the long-term plan.

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