

## MODULE I: IDIOMS AND CORPORATE VOCABULARY

## I. Idioms

- **Above and beyond the call of duty:** If a person does something which is above and beyond the call of duty, they show a greater degree of courage or effort than is usually required or expected in their job.  
"The fire-fighter received a medal for his action which went above and beyond the call of duty."
- **Back-room boys:** The term back-room boys refers to people who do important work but have no contact with the public.  
"Back-room boys don't always receive the credit they deserve for their work."
- **Cream of the crop:** The expression cream of the crop refers to the best people or things in a particular group.  
"As usual, the cream of the crop of this year's graduates were offered the best jobs."
- **Dead wood:** The term dead wood refers to people or things that are no longer considered useful or necessary.  
"The new manager wants to reduce costs by cutting out the dead wood."
- **Duty bound:** If you are duty bound to do something, you are required to do it as part of your obligations.  
"Teachers are duty bound to report a pupil's absence from school."
- **Earn while you learn:** The expression earn while you learn refers to the possibility of earning a salary while in training.  
"Become an apprentice and get paid while in training. Earn while you learn!"
- **Firing line:** Someone who has been in the firing line is in a position to be criticised because of their responsibilities or the position they hold.  
"The managing director of the bank has been in the firing line since the fraud was discovered."
- **Get the axe:** If someone gets the axe, they lose their job.  
When a company is restructured, the unskilled employees are often the first to get the axe."
- **Golden handcuffs:** The term golden handcuffs refers to a large sum of money or a generous financial arrangement granted to an executive as an incentive to stay in their job, or to ensure long-term cooperation after their departure.
- **Glass ceiling:** This term refers to a discriminatory barrier perceived by someone that prevents them from rising to positions of power or responsibility.  
"Ashim knew he would never break the glass ceiling and rise to a senior management position."
- **Number cruncher:** This is a humorous way of referring to someone who is an accountant or who is very good at working with numbers and calculations.  
"She's a number cruncher who perfectly understands the organisation's financial situation."
- **Learn the ropes:** If you learn the ropes, you learn how to do a particular job correctly. "He's bright. It won't take him long to learn the ropes."
- **Paid peanuts:** If you are paid peanuts, you have a very low salary or are paid very little for the work you do.  
"Raj has a very interesting job, but she's paid peanuts."
- **Play second fiddle:** If you play second fiddle to another person, you accept to be second in importance to that person, or have a lower position.  
"Uma resented having to play second fiddle to the sales manager when the company was restructured."
- **Plum job:** A desirable position which is well-paid and considered relatively easy is called a plum job.  
"Ideally he'd like to find himself a plum job in New Delhi."
- **Pound the pavement:** Someone who pounds the pavement walks the streets or goes from company to company, usually in search of employment.  
(You can also pound the pavement in an effort to raise funds or gain support for a cause.)  
"Rajesh is out there pounding the pavement since he lost his job."
- **Put out to pasture:** To say that someone has been put out to pasture means that they have been forced to retire or give up their responsibilities.  
"He's in good health and he feels it's too early to be put out to pasture."
- **Be sacked / get the sack:** If someone is sacked or gets the sack, they lose their job, usually because they have done something wrong.  
"Umesh got the sack when his boss caught him stealing."
- **Pink slip:** If employees are given their pink slips, they are informed that they are no longer needed to do the job that they have been doing.  
"Eastern Airlines shut down operations at midnight, and 18,000 employees were given their pink slips."
- **Separate the sheep from the goats:** If you separate the sheep from the goats, you examine a group of people and decide which are suitable and which are not.  
"Examining job applications is the first stage in separating the sheep from the goats."
- **Shape up or ship out:** This expression is used to warn someone that if they do not improve, they will have to leave their job.  
"When Tom started neglecting the customers, he was told to shape up or ship out."
- **Show someone the ropes:** If you show someone the ropes, you teach or explain to them how to do a particular job.  
"The manager is busy showing the ropes to two new trainees."
- **Another string to your bow:** If you have another string to your bow, you have another skill or possible course of action if everything else fails.  
"In addition to her excellent qualifications, she's got another string to her bow to help her find a job. She speaks fluent Chinese."
- **Tricks of the trade:** This term refers to a clever or expert way of doing things, especially in a job.  
"He's a tough negotiator; he knows all the tricks of the trade."



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- **Waiting in the wings:** If someone is waiting in the wings, they are waiting for an opportunity to take action, especially to replace someone else in their job or position.  
"There are many young actors waiting in the wings ready to show their talent."
- **Walking papers:** If you are given your walking papers, your contract or a relationship has ended.  
"After causing a diplomatic incident, Carter got his walking papers."
- **Work to rule:** During a conflict, when employees decide to do only the minimum amount of work required by company rules, and refuse any overtime, etc., they work to rule.  
"In protest against the new measures, the employees decided to work to rule."
- **Worth one's salt:** Someone who deserves respect because they do their job well is a person who is worth their salt.  
"Any inspector worth their salt would have checked the papers carefully."
- **Chinese whispers:** This expression refers to a process by which a message or piece of information (especially gossip, rumours or scandalous news) is passed on from one person to another, and changes along the way, so that the final version is often very different from the original. The information often becomes distorted or exaggerated.  
"Rumours about the company being on the verge of bankruptcy are nothing more than Chinese whispers!"
- **Drop someone a line:** If you drop someone a line, you write a letter to them. "I always drop her a line wishing her Merry Christmas."
- **Get hold of:** If you obtain something, or manage to contact someone, you get hold of them. "I'd like to contact the owner. Do you know where I can get hold of him?"
- **Get/give the low-down:** If you get or give the low-down, you get or give complete information or facts about something.  
"I'll call you after the meeting and give you the low-down."
- **Hear through the grapevine:** If you hear of something through the grapevine, you learn about it informally, for example through friends or colleagues.  
"How did you hear that?" "Oh, through the grapevine as usual!"
- **Hit the airwaves:** When someone hits the airwaves, they go on radio and/or TV to be interviewed or to promote something.  
"The hospital was embarrassed when the patient hit the airwaves with his side of the story."
- **Hot off the press:** If a news article, for example, is hot off the press, it has just been published and contains the most recent information on the subject.  
"I just got it hot off the press: another bank has gone bankrupt."
- **Keep someone posted:** If someone asks you to keep them posted, they want you to keep them informed about a situation.  
"Our agent promised to keep us posted on developments regarding the negotiations."
- **Put someone in the picture:** If you give somebody all the information necessary to enable them to fully understand a situation, you put them in the picture.  
"Some changes were made during your absence. Let me put you in the picture."
- **Speed networking:** The term speed networking refers to a relatively new urban trend which consists in making a potential business contact by briefly talking to a series of people at an organised event and exchanging contact details.  
"If you are nervous about choosing your co-buyer on a virtual profile alone you can join a speed networking session organised by the website."
- **Spread like wildfire:** If something such as news, rumours or gossip spreads like wildfire, it becomes widely known very fast.  
"As soon as the nomination was announced, the news spread like wildfire."
- **Stool pigeon:** A person who acts as an informer, especially one who gives information to the police or the authorities, is called a stool pigeon.  
"I don't trust Jack. I think he's a stool pigeon for the management."
- **Word of mouth:** Information passed on through conversation is transmitted by word of mouth. "No announcement was necessary - the news had already spread by word of mouth."



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## II. Office Jargons

- **Going forward:** This is usually used to mean “from now on”. Some may consider it to have connotations of moving on positively from something negative that may have occurred: “we’ll adopt a different approach going forward”.
- **Think outside the box:** A favourite of ‘quirky’ creative agencies, the phrase “think outside the box” means to think creatively, abandoning all preconceptions.
- **Action:** You’ll know the word “action” from its normal contexts, such as action movies, or simply describing something being done (“taking action”). However, in the business environment this is one of many examples of a noun being turned into a verb. “Can you action that?” might be a request you’d hear in an office, meaning simply “Can you do that?”
- **Stakeholder:** This word is used to refer to anyone who’s involved in a particular project. If someone has a say in the outcome of a piece of work, they are a “stakeholder”.
- **Buy-in:** This term refers to the idea of gaining acceptance for something. If someone agrees to subscribe to a particular way of doing things, for example, they are “buying in” to the idea. You might see a phrase like “seek buy-in from employees” in an HR document discussing the implementation of a new set of rules, for example.
- **Leverage:** Though “leverage” is meant to be a noun – meaning the use of a lever to apply force – it’s often heard in a business context being used as a verb, meaning to utilise something to the business’s advantage – “leverage our contacts to spread the word”, for example.
- **Touch base:** This is surely one of the most cringe-worthy pieces of office jargon, and it’s filtered its way through from the pitches of American baseball into the offices of the UK. All it means in the office environment is “to make contact”. You might hear “let’s touch base”, meaning “let’s talk”.
- **On the same page:** In the world of office jargon, it’s apparently acceptable to use a well-known idiom. If you’re “on the same page” as someone, you’re approaching something from the same point of view as them, with the same agreed assumptions in mind.
- **Feed back:** While “feedback” *should* be used as a noun to describe constructive comments on something (as in essay feedback), in an office environment it’s not unusual to hear it used as a verb – “We’re waiting for him to feed back on the ideas” – or even, horrifically, in the past tense: “He’s fed back to us that he doesn’t like it”.
- **Price point:** For some reason, some business types like to talk about “price points” instead of just “prices”. This is one of many examples of using more complicated language in lieu of a simpler word or phrase.
- **End of play:** This irritating term refers to the end of the working day. “Close of play” is a variant, as in “Can you get this over to me by close of play today?”
- **Drill down:** You might hear this term used to describe something that deserves closer inspection: “we need to drill down to the finer details”.
- **Best practice:** You might hear colleagues referring to industry “best practice”, which describes a generally acknowledged ‘best way of doing things’ in order to achieve optimum results.
- **Core competency:** This phrase refers to the strengths of a person or company. The word “competent” doesn’t even refer to strength – it means the ability to do something to a satisfactory standard.
- **Scalable:** If something is “scalable”, this means that it’s an idea that will work easily on a larger scale to the one it currently works on. For example, a “scalable” business model is one that’s easy to replicate in order to expand the business.
- **Skill set:** This refers to someone’s range of skills. It’s jargon because it’s an unnecessary way of describing what could easily be referred to simply as “skills”.
- **Vertical:** You’d have thought that the word “vertical” is simply the opposite to “horizontal”, but not in a business context. In the world of business jargon, it refers to an area of expertise. Rather than saying “we cater for the logistics industry”, some business types might say “we cater for the logistics vertical”.
- **Get the ball rolling:** This is simply a way of saying “start”. You might hear it at the beginning of a meeting, when the person organising the meeting might say “let’s get the ball rolling” to mean “let’s begin the meeting”.
- **Annual leave:** Many business people now write in their out-of-office emails that they’re on “annual leave”. This simply means that they are on holiday. “Annual leave” is really a term used by the military, and it’s unclear how it became adopted into the world of civilian business.
- **Low-hanging fruit:** Imagine picking fruit from a tree: you’d go for the ones hanging low first, as they’re easiest to get. In business, the phrase “low-hanging fruit” is used to describe the tasks or opportunities that are easiest to tackle.
- **Quick wins:** This phrase refers to the same sort of thing as “low-hanging fruit” – the things that are easiest to achieve.
- **Helicopter view:** Believe it or not, this means “a quick overview”.  
Why anybody felt that describing it in this way was necessary is anybody’s guess; but the same could be said of any of the examples on this list of office jargon.

So, you’re best off avoiding these terms if you want to be taken seriously in an office environment.



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## III. Phrasal Verbs

Phrasal Verb	Meaning		
back up	to make a copy of	knuckle down	to stop being distracted and to focus on work
bail out	to help a person or business in difficulty	lay off	To terminate someone from employment
branch out	to expand	look forward to	to anticipate with pleasure
break into	to suddenly begin to do something	measure up	to be good enough; to have the necessary abilities, skills or qualities
bring off	to succeed in achieving something difficult	note down	to write
call <i>sb</i> back	to telephone someone again, or to telephone someone who called you earlier	pencil in	to make a provisional appointment for something to happen
call <i>sth</i> off	to decide that a planned event, especially a sports event, will not happen, or to end an activity because it is no longer useful or possible:	put back	to delay or postpone
carry on	to continue	report back	to tell someone (usually someone in authority) some information that you have discovered, or that they have asked you to find out
carry out	to perform or conduct	run out of	to have no more of something
close down	to stop operating	set up	to start (esp. a business)
come up	to be mentioned or talked about in conversation	sell up	to sell a business completely and move onto something else or somewhere else
deal with	to handle (a problem)	slack off	to work with less energy
draw up	to prepare a document or plan.	shop around	to compare the prices and quality of an item so that the best one can be chosen to buy
drop in	to visit	sign up	to agree to do something, or to take part in something, by signing one's name
fill out	to complete (a form)	sort <i>sth/sb</i> out	to deal satisfactorily or successfully with a problem, a situation, or a person who is having difficulties
find out	to discover or obtain (information)	step down	to resign or leave (a position/job)
get ahead	to be successful in the work that you do	step up	to do more of an activity, work harder at it, or increase the level or strength of something in order to improve a situation
get on	to make progress	stock up	to buy a lot of something
go through	to experience	take off	to suddenly start to be successful or popular
hack into	to get into someone else's computer system or online account secretly, and often illegally, in order to look at their information or do something illegal	take over	to start doing a job or being responsible for something that another person did or had responsibility for before
hand in	to submit, to deliver work	Take <i>sth</i> up	to fill an amount of space or time
hold on	to wait		to join another person, or group, in order to do something together
join in	to participate	weigh up	to consider
keep up with	If someone or something keeps up with someone or something else, they do whatever is necessary to stay level or equal with that person or thing.		
key in	to use a keyboard to type information into a computer or into an electronic system		