Working in a Team – Business English Video

In this business English lesson, you can learn useful language to talk about collaborative projects and working in a team. You'll learn words and phrases to talk about teamwork, assigning tasks, staying on schedule and more.

1. Being Part of a Team

(https://www.oxfordonlineenglish.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/work-together-scaled.webp)

In many workplaces, you might be asked to join a team project. Sometimes the project involves colleagues from the same department, but you may also work with people from different departments (https://www.ego4u.com/en/business-english/communication/departments-jobs) or even different companies.

Here's a question for you. Look at a phrase with a missing word.

_____ *a team*

There are many verbs you could use here. How many can you think of? Pause the video and see how many you can get.

There are many, but here are some common possibilities. You can 'form a team', create a team', or 'build a team' – these all have a similar meaning.

You'll hear phrases like 'form a team', create a team', and 'build a team'. You may even be asked to lead a team. In this situation, you might say you 'run the team' or 'head the team'. You can also say that you are the team lead.

Let's listen to a dialogue about two colleagues who have just started working together on a project. While you listen, see if you can hear two more expressions.

One: an expression for joining a team project.

Two: an expression for working together on a project.

Ready? Watch the dialogue now.

Martin: It's great to have you on board for this project.

Savannah: Glad to be here! I think it's good to join forces on this. By the way, who else is going to be involved?

M: Well, as you know, I'm the team lead, but Sarah, Mark and Jennifer are also going to be working with us.

S: Oh really? That… Er…

M: Something wrong?

S: Well, I'm not sure if you know, but Mark and Jennifer don't get along too well. There have been issues previously…

M: Really? I wasn't aware of that. What's the issue between them?

S: Mark isn't a team player. He tends to do his own thing.

M: Well, we need the team to gel for this project. I'll talk to them, and if they can't commit to working together, then I'll try to find someone else.

Did you hear the expressions? Let's look at them together.

The expression for joining a team project was 'on board'. You heard 'it's great to have you on board for this project'.

You can use this phrase in other ways. For example: 'how many people have you got on board already?' Meaning: how many people are already on the team?

The expression for working together on a project was 'join forces'. The sentence was 'I think it's good to join forces on this.'

In the dialogue, you heard Mark's name mentioned. Can you remember what was said about him?

You heard 'he isn't a team player'. This means that he doesn't work well in a team. You also heard 'he tends to do his own thing', and this means the same – that Mark doesn't work well with other people.

You also heard 'we need the team to gel'. What does 'gel' mean?

'Gel' means that everyone gets on with each other and works well together. Here's another example: 'The project was a disaster. The team never really gelled and there were constant arguments.' If you say 'the team never really gelled', you mean that people couldn't work well together.

When you're working on a team project, you will be given tasks to do or responsibilities to complete. Let's look at the language for these situations now.

2. Tasks and Responsibilities

(https://www.oxfordonlineenglish.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/agenda-scaled.webp)

A project usually has several tasks that are shared between team members. You can talk about sharing tasks, or you can talk about *allocating* tasks, which has a similar meaning.

A team leader can allocate tasks to team members. This is called *delegating.* The team lead might *prioritise* tasks. This means that the most important tasks are completed first.

Let's listen to another dialogue. While you listen, think about two questions.

One: What language does the team lead use for allocating tasks?

Two: What language does the team lead use for giving instructions?

Ready? Let's listen.

Martin: There are a few more tasks that need to be completed. Mark and Sarah are still working on the designs, aren't they?

Savannah: Yeah, and Jennifer is doing the written copy.

M: Would you be able to sort out the printing?

S: Yes, certainly. I can do that.

M: It might be best to get some prices first.

S: Sure. I'll phone around and see how much it will be.

M: Do you think you can do it before the weekend?

S: Of course. That won't be a problem.

How did you get on? Did you notice that the language used sounded very polite? In English, it's usual to give instructions in this polite way. Let's look at the phrases from the dialogue together.

To allocate the task, the team lead said 'would you be able to sort out the printing?' It sounds like a question, doesn't it? But the team lead is allocating a task. This actually means 'sort out the printing'; it's not actually a question.

So what language did the team lead use to give instructions? There were two instructions. Can you remember them?

The first was 'it might be best to get some prices first.' This sounds like a suggestion, but it's actually an instruction. It means 'get some prices first.' You can use 'it might be best to…' to give instructions or make suggestions in an indirect, polite way.

Learn more in this video lesson: Making Suggestions in English (https://www.oxfordonlineenglish.com/making-suggestions-in-english).

The second was 'do you think you can do it before the weekend?' Again, the language is very polite, so this sounds like a question. It's an instruction, though. It means 'do it before the weekend.'

This is common when you want to be indirect or polite. You might hear 'questions' like 'would you be able to handle the animation work?' Again, these aren't really questions. They're polite instructions.

Sometimes you might want to check that you've understood the tasks or check some information. Let's look at how to do that next.

3. Clarifying Tasks and Information
(https://www.oxfordonlineenglish.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/two-women-meeting-2-scaled.webp)

Pop quiz: what's a word beginning with 'c' which means to check information, or make something clearer? Here's a hint: you saw this word on screen a few seconds ago.

The answer is 'clarify'. When working in a team, you might need to clarify instructions or other information; you need to check that you've understood what you need to do.

In your next dialogue, there are four phrases for checking instructions. See if you can hear them as you listen.

Martin: So, when the designs are ready, would you be able to label them?

Savannah: What exactly do you mean by label them?

M: Just put headings on them. Something simple.

S: OK, but I'm still not entirely clear what you're looking for. Do you want descriptive titles, or…?

M: Yes, just a simple title so that we can organise the files and keep track of what's where.

S: Can I just check whether you also want serial numbers on them?

M: I do, yes. And some sort of reference too, please.

S: When you say reference, do you mean a file name?

M: Yes. So each design will have a heading, a number and a reference.

S: Sorry, can you just run through that again?

How did you do? Did you hear any of the phrases for clarifying (https://learn-english-today.com/vocabulary/expressions-clarifying-info.html)?

The first one you heard was 'what exactly do you mean by label them?' You can use 'what exactly do you mean by…', to check a specific part of the information. For example, 'what exactly do you mean by complete?'

The second one in the dialogue was 'can I just check whether you want numbers on them?' You can say 'can I just check whether' or 'can I just check if'. They mean the same. For example, you could say 'can I just check whether you need hard copies of the contracts?' Or: 'can I just check *if* you need hard copies of the contracts?'

The third one you heard was 'when you say reference, do you mean a file name?' This is another way to check a specific part of the information. You can use this for other things, too: 'when you say …, do you mean…?' For example 'when you say Friday, do you mean this Friday, or next week?'

The last one in the dialogue was 'sorry, can you just run through that again?' 'Run through' is a phrasal verb which means to explain or summarise something from beginning to end. It's a useful phrase if you want someone to repeat the instructions.

What's next? You're working on your team project, but how is everything going? You need to check in and *monitor* your team's progress. Let's move on.

4. Monitoring Progress
Martin: I'd like to have regular updates on the project.

Savannah: No problem. I'll keep you in the loop.

M: It's important that we keep on schedule, so let me know if there are any issues.

S: So far, the only issue has been with the children's designs. They're taking a lot more time that I expected.

M: Well, we could shelve that idea for now. Then we can stay on track; we can always come back to it later.

S: That's a good idea.

M: I think it's better if we keep to the deadline.

S: I agree. It is.

In the dialogue, you heard some expressions related to schedules and deadlines. Do you remember any?

You heard 'keep on schedule', 'stay on track' and 'keep to the deadline'.

'Keep on schedule' and 'stay on track' are similar. They both mean that work is finished on time and you don't fall behind. 'Keep to the deadline' means that the whole project will be ready on time.

You can use the verb 'stick to' instead of 'keep' with the same meaning. So you can say 'stick to the schedule' or 'stick to the deadline'.

You also heard some expressions related to monitoring progress in the dialogue. Can you remember?

> *I'd like to have r—— u——.*
> *I'll keep you — — l—.*

Pause the video if you want time to think about it.

Do you know? Here are the answers.

> *I'd like to have regular updates.*
> *I'll keep you in the loop.*

How would you explain the meaning of these phrases?

'I'd like to have regular updates' means that you want your team to communicate with you and tell you how the project is going from day to day or week to week.

'I'll keep you in the loop' means 'I'll keep you informed'. There's an opposite expression 'out of the loop'. If you're out of the loop, you aren't communicating with other team members and you don't know what's going on.

Finally, you also heard the expression 'we could shelve that idea for now'. What does this mean?

If you shelve something, you stop working on it for now. You put it aside, and maybe you come back to it later.

That's everything. Thanks for watching.

Continue practicing business English phrases you can use in groups with another Oxford Online English lesson: Attending a Business Meeting (https://www.oxfordonlineenglish.com/attending-business-meeting).