

# Business English Phrases and Idioms – Video

In this lesson, you can learn some common business English phrases, vocabulary and idioms for office life. This class will help you understand English speakers at work and use a wider range of English vocabulary in your office conversations.

## 1. What's Your USP?

(<https://www.oxfordonlineenglish.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Unique-selling-proposition.webp>)

**Savannah:** So, how are things looking?

**Oli:** Not good, to be honest... We're way behind our forecasts. We missed our targets for Q1 and it's not looking positive for this quarter, either.

**S:** OK, so what's going wrong?

**O:** We're not really sure...

**S:** Right now, I'm afraid that's not good enough. You're the sales manager – you need to have answers.

**O:** Well, one problem is that cold calling doesn't seem to be working as well as it did in the past.

**S:** So? You're in charge. If it's not working, change it. We may be a big company, but we still need to be quick on our feet.

**O:** I take your point, but I can't turn everything around overnight. A case in point is our high staff turnover. Many of our sales team are relatively inexperienced.

**S:** But we have a good product...

**O:** Of course, but inexperienced salespeople don't have that deep understanding of our USP that comes from working here for a while. And, in B2B sales, buyers can smell that inexperience.

**S:** Either way, this is your domain. You need to come up with some answers.

Here, you heard some business English phrases to talk about sales. You're going to see some sentences from the dialogue, \*but\* the highlighted phrases all have a mistake. Can you correct the mistakes? Let's look.

*One problem is that cool calling doesn't seem to be working.*

*We still need to be quick on our legs.*

*A case in point is our high staff turnunder.*

*Inexperienced salespeople don't have a deep understanding of our USB.*

Think about your ideas. Can you remember the correct phrases? Pause the video and find your answers now.

Could you do it? Let's see the correct phrases.

*One problem is that **cold** calling doesn't seem to be working.*

*We still need to be quick on our **feet**.*

*A case in point is our high staff **turnover**.*

*Inexperienced salespeople don't have a deep understanding of our **USP**.*

How did you do? Did you get all the right answers? And, do you know what these words and phrases mean?

‘Cold calling’ is a sales technique. It means calling someone you’ve never spoken to before and trying to convince them to buy whatever you’re selling.

‘Quick on your feet’ means flexible – if you’re quick on your feet, you can adapt to new situations easily.

‘Turnover’ in this dialogue means how often staff arrive and leave. If staff often leave your company and need to be replaced, then you have high turnover. If employees tend to stay at your company for a long time, then you have low turnover.

‘Turnover’ also has other meanings. In particular, it can mean the total amount of money that goes in and out of a business.

Finally, what about USP? What does this stand for?

USP stands for ‘unique selling proposition’, or sometimes ‘unique selling point’. This is about what makes your product or service different from competitors. Maybe your product is higher quality, or maybe it’s cheaper, or maybe it has features that competing products don’t. These could all be USPs.

USP is an abbreviation. You heard two other business abbreviations (<https://7esl.com/business-acronyms/>) in the dialogue. Do you remember?

You heard ‘Q1’ and ‘B2B’. The ‘Q’ in ‘Q1’ stands for ‘quarter’, meaning a three-month period. Generally, Q1 means January to March.

B2B stands for ‘business to business’. You can also talk about ‘B2C sales’ – business to customer.

Everything clear? Remember that you can always review a section if you need to. Turn on subtitles or adjust the playback speed to make it slower if you find it difficult to follow.

Learn more business English vocabulary with this Oxford Online English lesson: Phrasal Verbs for Business (<https://www.oxfordonlineenglish.com/phrasal-verbs-for-business>).

For now, let’s look at our next topic.

## 2. In The Loop

(<https://www.oxfordonlineenglish.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/meeting.webp>)

**Oli:** I don’t seem to have a copy of the agenda for next week’s meeting. Has it not been sent out yet?

**Savannah:** What? We’re not doing the meeting. We’re having a conference call instead, so that the team in Singapore can be involved.

**O:** Really? No one told me.

**S:** I can forward you the details. Actually, do you have any free time later this week? I’d like to touch base with you about some of the proposals we’ll be making.

**O:** Er... What proposals? Seems like I’m really out of the loop here. No one’s told me anything.

**S:** I mean the new product lines we’re launching for the East Asian market. We talked about it at some length in the last team meeting. You were there, right? Anyway, if you need to refresh your memory, you can read the minutes.

O: I wasn't there – I was in Paris for the conference that week, remember?

S: Ah... Right...

O: In that case, let's find a time later this week. You can catch me up so that I'm ready.

S: Yes, agreed. I'd like your input on a few things. I'll send you the materials and we can fix a time by email.

In this dialogue, you heard some vocabulary for talking about meetings and teamwork.

Let's see if you can remember what you heard. Can you complete the missing words?

*We're having a \_\_\_\_\_ call instead.*

*I'd like to touch \_\_\_\_\_ with you about some of the proposals.*

*Seems like I'm really out of the \_\_\_\_\_.*

*You can \_\_\_\_\_ me up so that I'm ready.*

*I'd like your \_\_\_\_\_ on a few things.*

If you're stuck, you can always rewind and listen to the dialogue again. Either pause now, or review, and get your answers. You'll see the answers in a few seconds.

Ready? Let's check together.

*We're having a **conference** call instead.*

*I'd like to touch **base** with you about some of the proposals.*

*Seems like I'm really out of the **loop**.*

*You can **catch** me up so that I'm ready.*

*I'd like your **input** on a few things.*

How many did you get? Have you heard these words and business English phrases before?

'Touch base' means 'talk' or 'have a discussion'. It's a conversational, idiomatic phrase.

If you're out of the loop, then you don't know what's going on. For example, if go on vacation for two weeks and don't check your emails, when you get back to work, you might be a bit out of the loop – you won't know what's happening and what people are working on.

You can also use the opposite phrase – 'in the loop' – meaning that you're speaking to your colleagues regularly and you know everything that's happening in your office.

'Catch up' is a phrasal verb. If someone says 'You can catch me up', this means that there are some things which I don't know, and which you can tell me about. It has the idea that I've missed something – there's something I should know, but I don't, and you're going to tell me.

From experience, 'catch up' can be difficult to translate into other languages. If you're confused about this, check an online dictionary and look for more example sentences. Longman (<https://www.ldoceonline.com/>) and Lexico (<https://www.lexico.com/>) are good online dictionaries to use.

Finally, what about 'input'? If someone says 'I'd like your input', it means that they want your ideas and opinions.

Got it? Let's move on.

Want more practice for meetings? Be sure to watch this lesson on Attending a Business Meeting in English (<https://www.oxfordonlineenglish.com/attending-business-meeting>).

### 3. Pie In The Sky

(<https://www.oxfordonlineenglish.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/ladder-in-clouds-scaled.webp>)

**Savannah:** Let me tell you about my vision. Instead of having bricks-and-mortar offices in just a few countries, we move our sales infrastructure 100% online. This will not only...

**Oli:** Whoa, whoa, hold on a second. You're talking about your 'vision' and your 'mission', but your branch is still losing money every month. Don't you think you're overreaching?

**S:** Well, I have a comprehensive business plan. We put together a road map for digitising our national operations, as a first step, and...

**O:** How about you focus more on breaking even on a month-to-month basis, and spend less time on these pie-in-the-sky ideas? Besides, this is way beyond your pay grade. You need to deal with your own branch, your own team, and your own KPIs. It's not that you shouldn't make suggestions for improving things, but you should get the basics right first.

**S:** Yes, but...

**O:** No buts! The number one priority for you right now is making sure your branch at least breaks even. You're a young branch, so losing money at the start is expected, but we need to see a path to profitability. Right now, I'm not sure you're on the right track.

**S:** But in the current business environment...

**O:** Look, I don't want to hear it. You need to get your house in order. Put your team first, and build a successful regional branch office.

This dialogue was about business planning and strategy. Let's start with one question: did you notice the title of this section? It was 'pie in the sky'? What could this mean? You also heard it in the dialogue. Any idea?

'Pie in the sky' means an impossible dream. In the dialogue, you heard this sentence.

*How about you focus more on breaking even on a month-to-month basis, and spend less time on these pie-in-the-sky ideas?*

'Pie-in-the-sky ideas' are ideas which sound nice, but which aren't realistic.

Let's look at some more language which you heard.

*Don't you think you're **overreaching**?*

*We put together **a road map**.*

*This is way **beyond your pay grade**.*

*I'm not sure you're **on the right track**.*

*You need to **get your house in order**.*

Look at the highlighted words and phrases. Imagine you want to explain them in English to someone who doesn't know the meaning. How would you do it? Pause the video and think about your answers.

'Overreaching' means to go too far, or to try to do too much. For example, if you agree to do a project which you don't have the skills or experience for, you could say that you overreached.

A road map is a detailed plan, showing exactly how you will achieve something. It's often used for large, complex projects and plans.

'Beyond your pay grade' refers to something which is not your job. If someone asks you to do something, and you say 'that's beyond my pay grade', you mean that you aren't responsible for this and you won't do it. In the dialogue, the phrase was used as a criticism. Telling someone else 'that's beyond your pay grade' is a way to say that they're trying to do something which isn't part of their job; it suggests that the person you're talking to should stick to their own job.

'On the right track' means 'going in the right direction'. If you're working on a project, and you say 'everything's on the right track', you mean that things are going to plan.

'Get your house in order' means to sort out your own responsibilities. An alternative – with the same meaning – is 'put your house in order'. It's most often used as a criticism. For example, if someone who is weeks behind on their work criticises you for being slow or lazy, you might tell them to get their house in order, meaning that they should do their own work on time before they start criticising others.

One more point: there is more language in these dialogues that you might find useful. We suggest reviewing each dialogue at least once, and make notes of the business English phrases or words you want to remember.

Now, let's go to our last section.

#### 4. Put Your Money Where Your Mouth Is

**Oli:** So, what do you think?

**Savannah:** About what? Is that everything?

**O:** Well, yes... I worked all week on it.

**S:** It's just two pages, with hardly any detail. What about the technical infrastructure? What about cost estimates? Look, I won't beat around the bush: I can't do anything with this. I'd get laughed out of the room.

**O:** Perhaps I have bitten off more than I can chew... I'm not so familiar with the technical side of things. I thought we could fill some of those details in later.

**S:** Doesn't work like that, I'm afraid. Either you bring me something I can use, or you go back to the drawing board, or you give up.

**O:** I don't suppose you could assign someone to help me to work on the IT angle?

**S:** My hands are tied, I'm afraid. We're under a lot of pressure right now. You said that you could make this work; now you need to put your money where your mouth is, to be blunt.

**O:** OK, I'll have a think about it. Back to square one, I guess...

In this dialogue, you heard several idioms.

Do you remember the idiom from the title of the last section? It was 'pie in the sky'. You heard more idioms like this here. Can you remember them?

You heard idioms with these meanings.

*Speak in an indirect and unclear way*

*Try to do something which is too difficult for you*

*Start something again from the very beginning*

*I cannot do anything to help you*

*Show that you can do what you say you can*

Can you remember the business English idioms which match these meanings? For the third meaning – start something again from the very beginning – you heard two idioms in the dialogue.

Pause the video, or review the dialogue and try to find the idioms with these meanings! Try to find all six – remember there are two answers for one point.

Did you get all six? Let's check.

'Beat around the bush' means to speak in an indirect, unclear way. If someone's beating around the bush, they're not saying what they really think. This is often used in the negative; for example, if you tell someone 'don't beat around the bush', you want to say 'get to the point and tell me what I need to know.'

'Bite off more than you can chew' means to try to do something which is too difficult. The meaning here is more direct – imagine trying to put too much food in your mouth at one time.

For the third meaning, there were two phrases: 'go back to the drawing board' and 'back to square one'. You can use these phrases as verbs, with 'go', or as simple exclamations, without the verb 'go'. So, you could say 'We need to go back to the drawing board,' or just 'Back to the drawing board!' The meaning is the same either way.

'My hands are tied' means that I can't help you. If you say this, it suggests that you aren't free to choose. You can use it to mean 'I want to help you, but I can't.'

Finally, 'put your money where your mouth is' means to back up your words with actions. If you tell someone 'You need to put your money where your mouth is', you're telling that person to stop talking and do something instead.

Have you heard any of these business English idioms before? You can use them and hear them in many situations, not just in the office.

That's all for this class. Thanks for watching!

Continue vocabulary practice with this lesson on Collocations in English (<https://www.oxfordonlineenglish.com/collocations-in-english>).