



# IIT Madras

## BSc Degree

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**Basic English**  
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**Make Your Expressions Impressive**

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**MAKE YOUR EXPRESSIONS IMPRESSIVE**

KARTHIKA SATHYANATHAN



Hello, all. I welcome you to this module. Today's module is titled Make Your Expressions Impressive. Guess what we are going to discuss in today's module. Well, we are going to look at a few expressions that can be used in our day-to-day conversations with people, and I am sure this will make your language very impressive. So let's get started.

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## COMMON PHRASES

1. Add insult to injury – to act in a way that makes bad situation worse
2. At the eleventh hour – at the last moment
3. Out of shape – Not physically strong, not fit, not in a healthy condition
4. Out of the loop – uninformed, not having the information that everyone else has
5. Apple of one's eyes – lovable
6. Crocodile tears – false tears
7. Hold one's tongue – remain silent
8. White elephant – A costly but useless possession
9. Out of touch – Not communicating with each other
10. Barking up the wrong tree – to be wrong about the way to achieve something or the reason for something



The first phrase is to add insult to injury. What does that mean? To act in a way that makes a bad situation worse. Let us check the usage. I was already getting late for work, stuck in the traffic, and to add insult to injury; I was stopped by the police for over-speeding.

The second phrase is, at the eleventh hour. What does that mean? It means at the last moment. Let us check the usage. Just minutes before the deadline, he submitted his assignment at the eleventh hour. The third phrase is out of shape. What does that mean? Not physically strong or fit or not in a healthy condition. Let us check the usage. I am tired the whole day. Oh man, I think I am getting out of shape.

The fourth phrase is out of the loop. What does that mean? It means uninformed or not having the information that everyone else has. Let us check the usage. She may be out of the loop for a short time. So here, someone is telling that let us suppose it is an office discussion that looks like some person has not been informed about what is happening, and therefore, third-person comments on that, saying she is out of loop for this, for some time.

The fifth phrase is the apple of one's eyes. What does that mean? It means lovable. Let us check the usage. I love my niece Shreya; she is the apple of my eye, which means Shreya is very dear to her aunt.

The sixth phrase is crocodile tears. What is the meaning of that? False tears. Let us check the usage. The sight of David shedding crocodile tears made me sick. So someone here is

commenting on the whole act of David shedding tears. So he feels that it is false tears and he really does not mean or feel bad about what is happening. Therefore he is shedding crocodile tears.

The next phrase is to hold one's tongue. What does that mean? Means to remain silent. Let us check the usage. If you do not hold your tongue, you will have to walk out of the class. So let us suppose that some student is talking back to the teacher, and the teacher is really furious, and the teacher says if you do not hold your tongue, you will have to walk out of the class.

The next phrase is white elephant, which means a costly but useless possession. Let us check the usage. The bridge remains underused and has become a white elephant project. So let us suppose this is a project of the government and they have built a bridge which is not used by people at all and the whole process of getting the bridge build was a very expensive one. So someone is commenting that this is a white elephant project because this was a very pricey project, this was a very expensive project, but that is not put to use properly.

The next phrase is out of touch. What does that mean? It means not communicating with each other for quite some time. Let us check the usage. I have been out of touch with my cousin for many years. So it looks like someone is commenting that I have not been in touch with my cousins for a long time now. So this might be true with a lot of us, right? I mean, we do not keep in touch with our relatives all the time, so we end up being out of touch with them for some time.

Well, the next phrase is barking up the wrong tree. Well, what does that mean? To be wrong about the way to achieve something or the reason for something. Let us check the usage. I have been trying to solve this math question, but I think I have been barking up the wrong tree. So someone has spent a lot of time on solving one math question, and he feels I wasted a lot of time, so I have been barking up the wrong tree, maybe I should have done it differently.

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## COMMON PHRASES

1. To call it a day – to stop what you were doing because you think you have done enough or do not want to do anymore.
2. Take the law into one's hand – to punish someone according to one's own idea of justice
3. Take the bull by the horns – to face difficulties in a direct way (difficult and dangerous situations)
4. Burn the candle at both ends – to work extremely hard
5. Break the ice – to make people who have not met each other before feel more relaxed and comfortable.
6. A nine days' wonder – short-lived
7. The ball is in your court – it is your turn to make the next step or decision
8. Cost an arm and a leg – to be very expensive
9. Put the cart before the horse – to do things wrongly
10. Get your act together – to organise yourself so that you can do things in an effective way.



Now, the next set of phrases. The next phrase is to call it a day. What does that mean? To stop what you were doing because you think you have done enough or you do not want to do that work anymore. So let us check the usage. I am getting a bit tired now, let us call it a day. So let us suppose, a boss is having a meeting with a lot of people and it is late in the evening, and he feels he is quite tired. So he says, look, I am tired let us call it a day, which means let us stop the work here.

The next phrase is to take the law in one's hand. What does that mean? To punish someone according to one's own idea of justice. Let us check the usage. After his daughter's killer was let off without a conviction, the man decided to take the law into his own arms. So looks like a criminal who has killed a person's daughter has come out of the prison or was let free without a conviction and so, the man decides to punish himself, and therefore, he takes the law into his own hands.

The next phrase is to take the bull by the horns. What does that mean? It means to face difficulties in a direct way, particularly when they are of very difficult and dangerous situations. Let us check the usage. The government will have to take the bull by the horns and tackle the problem of inflation.

So it looks like there is a problem of inflation and a person is commenting about it, and he says the government will have to deal with this problem directly in a very direct way and tackle the

situation or this problem of inflation by taking the bull by its horns, that is, by facing it directly. So what is the usage? The government will have to take the bull by horns and tackle inflation.

The next phrase is burn the candle at both ends. What does that mean? To work extremely hard. Let us check the usage. Ever since I started my new job, I have been burning the candle at both ends. So someone is making this statement that I found a new job, I and I want to please myself and the people around me, my colleagues and my boss particularly and therefore, I am working really hard. And therefore, he says ever since I started my new job, I have been burning the candle at both ends.

The next phrase is break the ice, which means to make people who have not met with each other before, feel more relaxed and comfortable. Let us check the usage. He organized a few party games to break the ice when people first arrived. So looks like a person has invited a few people for the party and they do not know each other and therefore, to break the ice or to make the people who have come for the party more comfortable, he has planned to do, or he has arranged for some games.

The next phrase is a nine day's wonder. What does that mean? It means short-lived. Let us check the usage. Do not worry about the story in the newspaper, it will be a nine day's wonder, and then people will forget that.

So let us suppose a very famous personality or a film actor is feeling bad about what is being published about him or her in the newspaper, so let us suppose a friend is consoling him or her saying, oh, do not worry about it or these things keep coming all the time, it is going to be a nine day's wonder, and people are going to get a different piece of information for which is going to draw their attention. So do not worry about this, this is a short-lived thing, it is a nine day's wonder.

The next phrase is the ball is in your court. What does that mean? It means now it is your turn to take the next step or decision. Let us check the usage. Dev made the last offer, the ball is in Shiv's court now, which means Dev has done what he needs to be doing from his side, and now, it is the turn for Shiv to make the decision and therefore, the ball is in Shiv's court.

The next phrase is cost an arm and a leg. What does that mean? It means to be very expensive. So let us check the usage. Is it really worth to spend an arm and a leg on certain types of cosmetics?

So let us suppose that someone is seeing a lot of cosmetic products and the price of that, the price tag of those cosmetic products and then he or she is perplexed and then she asks this question to her friend, is it really worth to spend that much money on cosmetics? And for that, he uses a phrase cost an arm and a leg. So let us see how he uses that? Is it really worth to spend an arm and a leg on a certain type of cosmetics? Is it really worth to spend an arm and a leg on a certain type of cosmetics?

The next phrase is put the cart before the horse. What does this mean? It means to do things wrongly. Let us check the usage. I think you are putting the cart before the horse by leaving your permanent job before getting a new one. So let us suppose, a family member or a concerned friend is advising saying that you are not doing the right thing by leaving a permanent job and then hunting for a new one; you find a new job, a dream job of yours, and then leave the permanent one that you have right now.

The next phrase is get your act together. What does that mean? To organize yourself so that you can do things in an effective way. Let us check the usage. I wish she could get her act together. So here, someone is making a comment that this person seems to be clumsy and not doing things the right way. So I wish she conducts herself and her life properly. So, therefore, they say I wish she would conduct her act together.



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## COMMON PHRASES



1. Put all your eggs in one basket – to depend for success on a single person or plan
2. Every cloud has a silver lining – every negative has a positive
3. To get out of hand – become difficult to control
4. To cry wolf – to call for help when you don't need it
5. It takes two to tango – actions or communication needs more than one person
6. To get something out of your system – to get rid of a wish or emotion especially a negative one, by allowing yourself to express it
7. To sit/ be on the fence – undecided / taking a neutral stand / not take sides
8. To step up ones game – to start performing better
9. To sell someone out – to snitch on someone or let their secret out
10. To be all Greek – be not understood



We will look at the next set of phrases. The next phrase is put your eggs in one basket. What does that mean? To depend for success on a single person or plan. Let us check the usage. His financial advisor urged him to be careful and not put all his eggs in one basket by investing all his money on the stocks. So what is the scenario here? So here, a financial advisor is telling his client, do not invest only on stocks and for that, he says do not put all his eggs in one basket by investing all his money on stocks.

The next phrase is every cloud has a silver lining. What does that mean? Every negative has a positive. Let us check the usage. Do not worry about breaking your leg; you will be able to relax all day on the sofa watching your favourite TV shows, so you see, every cloud has a silver lining.

So here, someone has broken his leg, and he is taking a rest at home; he is taking a good rest at home, and so, his friend is saying don't feel bad about this because you get to watch television the whole day, you can watch your favourite TV shows, and then you will also be resting the whole day on your couch. So every cloud has a silver lining.

The next phrase is to get out of hand, which means become difficult to control. Let us check the usage. Please call for help; I do not want the fire to get out of hand. So it looks like there is a fire breakout and the person is saying, please call for help as soon as possible, I do not want this fire to get out of hand, or I do not want this to become difficult to control.



The next phrase is to cry wolf. What does this mean? To call for help when you really do not need it. Let us check the usage. Do not pay attention to Sitara; she is only crying wolf. So here, someone is saying; here, someone is making a statement that look, she often does that, do not pay attention to that.

For that, how is he praising it? Do not pay attention to Sitara; she is always crying wolf, meaning she is asking for help, and she really does not need that. So you really do not pay attention is what the person is saying.

The next phrase is it takes two to tango. What does that mean? It means actions or communication needs more than one person. Let us check the usage. Do not blame me for the argument; it takes two to tango; you are equally responsible. So it looks like there was an argument between two people and one of them is making the statement that do not blame me for this argument because at the end of the day two people are responsible for an argument. So for that, he says it takes two to tango; you are also equally responsible for this argument.

The next phrase is to get something out of your system. What does that mean? To get rid of a wish or an emotion, especially a negative one by allowing yourself to express it. Let us check out the usage. Please make a diary entry of all the negative emotions you feel; you will feel better if you get it out of your system.

Well, what does that mean? So let us suppose a psychologist is talking to her patient, she is saying to get things out of your system, to get all the negative emotions out of your system, you must start the habit of making a diary entry of all that you are feeling; a diary entry of your emotions and feelings.

The next phrase is to sit or be on the fence. What does that mean? It means undecided or taking a neutral stand or not taking sides. Let us check the usage. So what does sitting on the fence means?

Let me give an example. So you go to an ice cream counter, and you are not able to decide whether you need a chocolate ice-cream or vanilla ice-cream. Then you are sitting on the fence, and the guy who sells ice-cream, who is at the counter is saying you cannot sit on the fence for long, you make your decision fast and let me know what I should get for you.

The next phrase is to step up one's game, which means to start performing better. Let us check the usage. You really need to step up your game if you need to stay in this company. Let us suppose a boss is warning his employee that unless you do, you better your performance unless you perform better; you do not dream about staying in this company any longer.

So how does he phrase that? Unless you step up your game, do not think about staying in this company. He says, you really need to step up your game if you want to stay in this company.

The next phrase is to sell someone out, which means to snitch on someone or let their secrets out. Let us check the usage. The company had put a lot of trust on him, but he sold them out by leaking confidential information to the competitors. There is another usage, can I trust you on this or will you sell me out?

So here, our friend is asking can I tell this secret to you, will you share it with anybody, are you going to let it out? So for that, instead of that, she is asking can I trust you with this or will you sell me out?

And the final phrase of today's module is to be all Greek, which means be not understood. Let us check the usage. I tried reading that science journal, but it was all Greek to me. So someone is trying to read a science journal, and he has not understood a word of that, and therefore, he says I tried reading that science journal, but it was all Greek to me. Meaning he did not understand any of that.

So with that, we are coming to an end of this module. I will see you with a different module on a different day. Until then, stay safe, take care. Bye.