



Virtual E School

Virtually Anywhere

30 IDIOMS

to expand your vocabulary



1. 'have a soft spot for someone / something'

Meaning: be fond of or affectionate towards someone / something, like someone or something very much, have a sentimental weakness towards someone or something.

Examples:

- *They both have a soft spot for puppies.*
- *I've always had a soft spot for Liverpool.*
- *I have a soft spot for eccentric kids, probably because I used to be one myself.*

Personalise it 

"I've always had a soft spot for _____".

2. 'wing it'

Meaning: perform or speak without having prepared what you are going to do or say.

Examples:

- *I don't have time to write a speech, so I'm just going to wing it.*
- *I hadn't practised the part, so I got up there and winged it.*
- *He had no time to study, so he had to wing it.*

Personalise it 

Are you good at 'winging it'? When was the last time you had to wing it?

3. 'if memory serves' ('if my memory serves me right')

Meaning: if I remember correctly.

Examples:

- *If memory serves, we turn left here.*
- *I think he's called Blake, if my memory serves me right.*

Personalise it 

"If memory serves, _____".

4. 'push the envelope'

Meaning: go beyond normal limits, try out a new and different idea that is often viewed as radical or risky.

Examples:

- *Our team is always looking for ways to push the envelope in terms of product innovation.*
- *I think we need to push the envelope a bit more if we want to stand out from our competitors.*
- *I'm going to push the envelope with this design and see how far I can take it.*

Personalise it 

Could you name a writer / artist / musician who pushes the envelope of creative norms?

5. 'good shout' (mainly UK English)

Meaning: good idea.

Examples:

- *Anyone fancy a burger? - Good shout.*
- *I really want to go clubbing tonight. - Oh, that's a good shout.*

Personalise it 

Name a place to visit, a thing to do or a food to try that would be a good shout for a Friday night.

6. 'spring to mind'

Meaning: come quickly into your mind, when you think of it immediately and without much effort.

Example:

- *Say the word 'Australia', and a vision of beaches and blue seas immediately springs to mind.*

Personalise it 

What springs to mind when you hear the word 'England'?

7. 'put paid to something'

Meaning: stop something from happening, spoil and end plans and hopes completely.

Examples:

- *A knee injury has put paid to her chances of getting into the final.*
- *Bad exam results put paid to his hopes of a university place.*

Personalise it 

“_____ put paid to _____”.

8. 'go off the rails'

Meaning:

- of someone - start to behave in a strange, wild or unacceptable way, upsetting other people
- of something - start to go wrong

Examples:

- *Away from the routine of army life, some ex-soldiers go completely off the rails.*
- *He went off the rails in his first year at university.*
- *By spring, the project seemed to be going off the rails.*

Personalise it 

Can you think of someone or something that has gone off the rails in your country?

9. 'on track'

Meaning: progressing or developing as planned, scheduled or expected.

Examples:

- *They're on track to make record profits.*
- *With the help of her parents, she's finally back on track.*
- *We were behind schedule on this job, but we're back on track now.*

Personalise it 

“After a few setbacks, I feel like I'm finally back on track with _____”.

10. 'pick someone's brain(s)'

Meaning: ask someone's advice about a subject the person knows a lot about.

Examples:

- *You know a lot about tax law - can I pick your brain for a minute?*
- *You should pick John's brain sometime. He knows a lot about car engines.*

Personalise it 

"People often pick my brain(s) about _____".

11. 'put your feet up'

Meaning: sit down and relax.

Examples:

- *After a long day at work, I like to come home, put my feet up, and watch some TV.*
- *Sometimes the best thing to do is just put your feet up, relax, and let your mind unwind.*

Personalise it 

"I like to put my feet up after _____".

12. 'have a knees-up'

Meaning: have a lively party or gathering.

Examples:

- *I haven't seen my old school friends in years. Maybe we should plan a knees-up and catch up on old times.*
- *We had a great time at the wedding reception. It was a proper knees-up with lots of dancing and good food.*

Personalise it 

When was the last time you had a good knees-up?

13. 'blow away the cobwebs'

Meaning: energise and invigorate yourself, make yourself feel more mentally alert and lively.

Examples:

- *I always go for a run in the morning to blow away the cobwebs and start my day off right.*
- *Sometimes a change of scenery is all you need to blow away the cobwebs and get inspired again.*

Personalise it 

What is the best way to blow away the cobwebs?

14. 'bend over backwards'

Meaning: try as hard as possible to help or please someone.

Examples:

- *My parents have always supported me and bent over backwards to help me achieve my goals.*
- *I know I can always count on my sister to bend over backwards to make sure I'm okay.*
- *The hotel staff bent over backwards to make our stay as comfortable as possible.*

Personalise it 

"I (used to) bend over backwards to _____".

15. 'be an item'

Meaning: be in a romantic relationship.

Examples:

- *I heard that John and Sarah are an item now. They've been dating for a few months.*
- *I don't think they're an item anymore. I heard they broke up last week.*
- *Are they really an item, or are they just hanging out as friends?*

Personalise it 

Can you think of any celebrities you hadn't realised were an item?

16. 'pull your socks up'

Meaning: make an effort to improve your work or behaviour because it's not good enough.

Examples:

- *You're not doing well in school, and it's time to pull your socks up and start studying harder.*
- *You've been slacking off at work lately. It's time to pull your socks up and start meeting your deadlines.*

Personalise it 

"I really need to pull my socks up and _____".

17. 'It's all downhill (from here)'

Meaning:

- it's going to get much easier
- it's going to get worse

Examples:

- *After getting through the first few weeks of the diet, it's all downhill from here.*
- *The job went well at first, but then I got sick and it's been downhill ever since.*

Personalise it 

"Once you've _____, it's all downhill from here."

18. 'on the edge of your seat'

Meaning: very excited, giving your full attention to something, because you want to know what is going to happen.

Examples:

- *The game was so close that we were all on the edge of our seats until the very end.*
- *The finale of the TV series was so intense that I was on the edge of my seat the whole time.*

Personalise it 

Which films or TV shows kept you on the edge of your seat?

19. 'pick up the slack'

Meaning: do something that needs to be done because someone else is no longer doing it.

Examples:

- *One of our team members is out sick, so we all need to pick up the slack to meet our deadline.*
- *The assistant is on vacation, so the manager will need to pick up the slack and handle some of their duties.*

Personalise it 

Think of a situation where you had to pick up someone's slack.

20. 'cut someone some slack'

Meaning: treat someone in a less harsh or critical way.

Examples:

- *My boss has been really hard on me lately, I wish she would cut me some slack.*
- *I've been going through a rough patch lately, I hope my friends can cut me some slack if I'm not my usual self.*

Personalise it 

"I need to cut ____ some slack because _____".

21. 'touch base'

Meaning: talk to someone for a short time to find out how they are or what they think about something.

Examples:

- *I'll touch base with the client later today to confirm the details.*
- *Let's touch base next week to see how the project is progressing.*
- *We should touch base at the end of the month to discuss our sales numbers.*

Personalise it 

"I need to touch base with _____ to find out _____".

22. 'take something on board'

Meaning: listen to and accept an idea, suggestion, etc.

Examples:

- *I appreciate your feedback and will take it on board for future projects.*
- *I understand your concerns and will take them on board when making a decision.*

Personalise it 

Think of a situation when your manager or colleagues took your suggestions on board.

23. 'get on board with something'

Meaning: agree with, be willing to participate in something.

Examples:

- *If we want to succeed, everyone needs to get on board with the plan.*
- *I had some reservations at first, but I've since got on board with the idea.*

Personalise it 

"I would never get on board with _____".

24. 'hands down'

Meaning: easily, without any doubt (when talking about someone or something that is the best or most important).

Examples:

- *She's the best candidate for the job, hands down.*
- *The concert last night was hands down the best one I've ever been to.*

Personalise it 

"_____ is hands down the best film of the year / football player in history / ice-cream brand).

25. 'on the flip side'

Meaning: looking at the opposite (negative) side of things.

Examples:

- *I know I won't be able to attend the meeting, but on the flip side, I can send my comments in writing.*
- *I'll have to work really long hours and be away from my family for long stretches of time, but, on the flip side, I'll get the opportunity to travel around the world.*

Personalise it 

"I have to _____, but on the flip side, _____".

26. 'cut corners'

Meaning: to save time, money, or energy by doing things quickly and not as carefully as you should.

Examples:

- *The company was trying to cut corners by using cheap materials, but it ended up costing them more in the long run.*
- *I don't want to cut corners on my project and risk getting a low grade.*

Personalise it 

"I would never cut corners on _____".

27. 'the ins and outs'

Meaning: the details about how something works or is done.

Examples:

- *You need to know the ins and outs of the legal system if you want to represent yourself in court.*
- *I know how to use computers, but I don't really understand the ins and outs of how they work.*

Personalise it 

"I'm still learning all the ins and outs of _____".

28. 'lo and behold'

Meaning: look and see (used to indicate surprise or amazement at something that has just happened or been discovered. It is often used to introduce an unexpected event or to draw attention to something that is surprising).

Examples:

- *The idea of remote work took a while to gain traction, but after the pandemic forced many people to work from home, it became much more widely accepted.*
- *I was waiting for a long time for the bus, and then lo and behold, two came at once.*

Personalise it 

"I spent hours looking for _____, and then lo and behold, _____".

29. 'gain traction'

Meaning: to make progress or to become more widely accepted or recognized.

Examples:

- *The new business idea took a while to gain traction, but after a few months, it started to get noticed by investors and customers alike.*
- *The idea of remote work took a while to gain traction, but after the pandemic forced many people to work from home, it became much more widely accepted.*

Personalise it 

Which idea / technology had a hard time gaining traction in your country?

30. 'be game'

Meaning: be willing to participate in something.

Examples:

- *Are you game for a hike in the mountains this weekend?*
- *He's always game to try new things, even if they're outside of his comfort zone.*
- *I'm not sure if I'm game for a night out, I think I might just stay in and relax.*

Personalise it 

"I'd be game to _____ this weekend".

Please, do not reproduce this workbook without the author's permission!

English lessons: www.virtual-e-school.com/lessons

Instagram: @virtually_anywhere_

Email me: irina@virtual-e-school.com

