

Why Saying No Is a Productivity Superpower

English learning resource · EN

Key words & expressions · English

14 learning entries

Study task: Listen again and notice the expressions you studied.

1

to feel your stomach sink

DEF

To experience a sudden feeling of fear, disappointment or dread.

A vivid informal expression describing an emotional reaction as a physical sensation in the stomach.

My stomach sank when I saw the missed deadline.

Her stomach sank as soon as the phone rang.

2

famous last words

DEF

A humorous comment used after a confident prediction that later proves wrong.

Usually said ironically; it does not literally refer to somebody's final words before death.

"It will only take five minutes." Famous last words.

He said the journey would be easy—famous last words.

3

a rule of thumb

DEF

A practical general guideline that is useful but not exact in every situation.

It introduces an approximate working principle, not a strict scientific rule.

As a rule of thumb, begin with the task that has a real deadline.

This is a useful rule of thumb, not a mathematical law.

4

to turn someone down

DEF

To refuse a request, invitation or offer from someone.

A common phrasal verb; the object can go between turn and down: turn the invitation down.

She turned the request down politely.

I had to turn him down because my week was already full.

5

to step back

DEF

To reduce your involvement in an activity or responsibility.

It can mean withdrawing partly rather than abandoning something immediately.

I can help once more, but then I need to step back.

She stepped back from the committee after the event.



6

to break the pattern

DEF

To stop a repeated way of behaving or a recurring situation.

Often used when a habit or cycle continues automatically until someone acts differently.

One honest conversation broke the pattern.

Changing the morning routine helped him break the pattern.

7

to disguise something as something else

DEF

To hide the true nature of something by making it appear different.

Common structure: disguise A as B. It can be literal or figurative.

The unnecessary task was disguised as an urgent one.

The advertisement disguised a sales pitch as friendly advice.

8

to set a boundary

DEF

To state a clear limit on what you are willing or able to do.

Common in discussions about time, work and relationships; a boundary should be specific and respectful.

She set a clear boundary around her availability.

Setting a boundary does not require an angry tone.

9

to commit to something

DEF

To promise your time, effort or support to an activity or responsibility.

Often followed by a noun or -ing form: commit to the project; commit to attending weekly.

I cannot commit to another weekly meeting.

Before you commit to the course, check your schedule.

10

to take something on

DEF

To accept responsibility for a task, role or amount of work.

A separable phrasal verb: take the project on or take it on. It often implies additional responsibility.

I can help, but I cannot take on the whole project.

She took on a new role after the promotion.

11

to get back to someone

DEF

To contact someone later with an answer or more information.

The phrase normally implies that a response has been delayed for a practical reason.

Let me check my priorities and get back to you this afternoon.

The manager promised to get back to us by Friday.



12

to cut through the noise

DEF

To identify what is important in a confusing situation full of distractions or information.

A figurative expression; noise means irrelevant detail, competing opinions or mental clutter.

One honest question helped me cut through the noise.

The summary cuts through the noise and shows the real issue.

13

to delegate

DEF

To give responsibility for a task to another person who can complete it.

Delegating includes agreeing on the expected result and deadline; it is not simply dumping work on someone.

She delegated the collection to a colleague who was nearby.

Good managers delegate clearly instead of controlling every detail.

14

to let something go

DEF

To stop holding on to a task, concern or situation and allow it to end.

Often figurative; it can mean consciously releasing an unnecessary responsibility, not carelessly forgetting it.

The task added no value, so I let it go.

She found it difficult to let the old disagreement go.

