

How to Cross Any Desert: One Step at a Time

English learning resource · EN

Key words & expressions · English

12 learning entries

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

1 to feel overwhelmed

DEF

To feel that a task, situation or emotion is too much to manage.

A common B1–B2 expression. “Overwhelmed by” introduces the cause; “overwhelmed with” often introduces a large amount of work or emotion.

Julia felt overwhelmed by the idea of learning to drive.

Break the project into smaller steps when you feel overwhelmed.

2 manageable

DEF

Small, simple or controlled enough to deal with successfully.

It does not mean “easy”; it means that the difficulty has been reduced to a level you can handle.

One visible step made the enormous goal feel manageable.

Can we divide the workload into manageable pieces?

3 a habit that sticks

DEF

A habit that continues and becomes part of your normal routine.

“Stick” is informal and metaphorical here: the habit remains instead of disappearing after a few days.

Martin wanted to build a reading habit that actually sticks.

Start small if you want the new routine to stick.

4 a point of reference

DEF

A fixed or known thing used to understand direction, position or progress.

It can be physical, like a landmark, or abstract, like a target, standard or earlier result.

Each oil drum was a point of reference in the desert.

Use last month's results as a point of reference.

5 one step at a time

DEF

By dealing with one small stage before moving to the next.

A reassuring fixed expression used when a goal feels large or uncertain.

You do not cross a desert all at once; you go one step at a time.

I am learning to drive one step at a time.



6

just for today

DEF

Only for the present day, without making a permanent commitment.

A useful self-management phrase that reduces the psychological weight of words such as “forever” or “every day”.

I am not promising forever; just for today, I will read for ten minutes.

Just for today, put your phone away while you study.

7

to anchor a habit

DEF

To connect a new habit to an existing routine so that the routine acts as a reminder.

Closely related to “habit stacking”: after an established action, you immediately perform the new one.

Martin anchored reading to his morning coffee.

Anchor your pronunciation practice to brushing your teeth.

8

to start over from zero

DEF

To begin again completely, without keeping earlier progress.

Often used for projects, habits or relationships. The episode challenges the idea that one missed day erases all previous progress.

Missing one practice session does not mean you must start over from zero.

We lost the file and had to start over from zero.

9

to add up

DEF

To accumulate gradually until the total becomes important or noticeable.

Here it is intransitive and metaphorical. It can also mean “to calculate a total” or, informally, “to make sense”.

Fifteen minutes of practice a day really adds up over a year.

Small improvements add up to a major change.

10

dead time

DEF

Time when you are waiting or travelling and are not actively doing a planned task.

An informal productivity collocation. It can be reframed as available time, but rest may still be the best use of it.

He turned his dead time on the train into study time.

I use some of my dead time to review vocabulary.

11

to fall off track

DEF

To stop following a plan, routine or path towards a goal.

A conversational metaphor. It suggests a temporary deviation, not permanent failure; “get back on track” is its natural opposite.

One difficult week made her fall off track.

If you fall off track, restart with one small action.



12

a fresh start

DEF

A new beginning, especially after a problem, failure or period of inactivity.

A positive, common collocation. It focuses on renewed opportunity rather than punishment for the past.

Monday always feels like a fresh start.

After the setback, she gave the project a fresh start.

