

Come Out on Top: 4 Success Idioms That Pay Off

English learning resource · EN

Full episode script · English

97 lines

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

Martin, why are you carrying a tiny plastic trophy?

It belongs to Emma, one of the students in my presentation group.

Did she win something?

She entered a difficult competition and came out on top.

So all her preparation paid off.

It did.

And her manager says she is going places.

That is three success idioms already.

I have one more.

She passed the final assessment with flying colours.

Then we definitely need today's lesson.

Welcome to Your English Toolbox.

I am Martin.

And I am Julia.

Today we are exploring lesson eight of our free Idiom Toolbox course: Success.

You can find the course at yourenglishtoolbox.com.

Open the Idioms section and choose lesson eight, Success.

You will find slow listening, clear explanations, multilingual support, examples and interactive retrieval practice.

The direct link to this free lesson is also in the episode description.

Let us begin with come out on top.

To come out on top means to succeed after a competition, difficulty or challenging situation.

Emma competed against twenty other candidates and came out on top.

Or: The negotiation was difficult, but our team came out on top.

The past form is came out on top.



And it describes an actual result, not simply confidence that someone will succeed.

Did Emma expect to win?

Not at all.

Her first practice presentation went badly.

But she continued working.

Yes.

And eventually, all that work paid off.

To pay off means to produce a good result after effort, patience or investment.

For example: Months of practice finally paid off.

Or: Taking time to prepare really paid off during the interview.

Notice that the effort pays off.

We do not normally say the effort pays us off in this meaning.

There is another meaning connected with money.

Yes.

You can pay off a debt, but today we are talking about effort producing a valuable result.

So Emma's practice paid off because it helped her succeed.

Exactly.

Our third expression is go places.

If someone is going places, we believe that person is likely to become successful in the future.

Her manager said, "Emma is going places."

You could also say: That young designer is going places.

This expression does not mean the person is travelling.

It means that their ability and progress suggest a successful future.

Can a company go places?

Yes.

A new company can go places if it has strong ideas and good leadership.

Now compare go places with come out on top.

Come out on top describes success in a particular challenge.

Go places describes future potential.

Emma came out on top in the competition, and people now think she is going places.



Perfect.

Our final expression is with flying colours.

If you pass something with flying colours, you pass it very successfully.

Emma passed her final assessment with flying colours.

Or: The new system passed every safety test with flying colours.

We often use this expression with exams, tests, inspections and assessments.

It is stronger than simply saying that someone passed.

And the expression is always plural: with flying colours.

Let us compare all four idioms.

Come out on top means succeed after competition or difficulty.

Pay off means produce a good result after effort or patience.

Go places means be likely to become successful in the future.

And with flying colours means very successfully, especially when passing a test or assessment.

Time for a quick challenge.

Choose the best expression before we answer.

Situation one.

You study carefully for months and receive an excellent result.

Your hard work paid off.

Situation two.

A young musician is improving quickly and seems likely to have a successful career.

That musician is going places.

Situation three.

Your team succeeds after a very difficult competition.

Your team comes out on top.

Situation four.

A new product passes every quality test extremely successfully.

It passes with flying colours.

Now complete one sentence about your own experience.

My effort paid off when...

A personal example helps turn an idiom into language you can actually retrieve.



Continue with lesson eight in the free Idiom Toolbox course at yourenglishtoolbox.com.

You can also download the printable practice and review the four expressions away from the screen.

The direct lesson link is in the episode description.

So, are you giving Emma her trophy?

Yes.

But first I need to remove the price label.

How much did her great victory cost you?

Three euros and fifty cents.

Your generosity is going places.

I am not sure that expression works there.

No, but your English passed the test with flying colours.

See you next time, friends.

Goodbye.

