

Come Out on Top: 4 Success Idioms That Pay Off

English learning resource · EN

Key words & expressions · English

8 learning entries

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

1

come out on top

DEF

To succeed or be in the strongest position after a competition, difficulty or challenging situation.

It describes the final result of a real contest or difficulty. The past form is "came out on top"; it does not merely express confidence about future success.

Emma competed against twenty candidates and came out on top.

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

2

pay off

DEF

To produce a good result after effort, patience or investment.

In this meaning, the effort or preparation pays off; do not add a person as an object. A separate use, "pay off a debt", means to repay it completely.

Months of careful practice finally paid off.

Taking time to prepare paid off during the interview.

3

go places

DEF

To show the ability and potential to become successful in the future.

Usually said about a talented person, team or young company. It is figurative: it does not mean that the subject is travelling.

Her manager believes that Emma is going places.

That young company is going places because it has strong ideas.

4

with flying colours

DEF

Very successfully, especially when passing an exam, test, inspection or assessment.

The phrase intensifies "pass" and is always plural: say "with flying colours", not "with a flying colour".

Emma passed her final assessment with flying colours.

The new system passed every safety test with flying colours.



5

compete against

DEF

To try to win or perform better than another person, team or organisation.

Use “against” before the opponent. Use “compete for” before the prize or opportunity: candidates compete against each other for a place.

Emma competed against twenty other candidates.

Three teams are competing for the final contract.

6

a challenging situation

DEF

A situation that requires considerable effort, skill or determination.

“Challenging” often sounds constructive or neutral: the situation is difficult, but it may offer a chance to learn or improve.

She stayed calm in a challenging situation.

Leading the new team will be challenging but rewarding.

7

pass an assessment

DEF

To achieve the result required to succeed in a formal evaluation of knowledge, skill or quality.

Use “pass” directly before the exam or assessment, without “in”: “pass an assessment”. The opposite is “fail an assessment”.

Emma passed her final assessment with flying colours.

Every new product must pass a safety assessment.

8

retrieval practice

DEF

A learning technique in which you actively recall information instead of only reading or listening to it again.

Common in education. Completing a sentence from memory or answering before seeing the solution are forms of retrieval practice.

The lesson includes interactive retrieval practice.

A short recall quiz is useful retrieval practice.

