

**Course: Corporate Communication and Public Relations**

**Lecture 5: Spicing up oral communication with idiomatic expressions**

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# Objectives

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By the end of this lesson, learners will be able to:

1. Define well an idiom and idiomatic expressions.
2. Explain clearly advantages of idiomatic expressions in oral communication.
3. Illustrate effectively the origin of idiomatic expressions.

# Introduction

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English is a language that is essential in this cutting-edge world, in each circle of life. This generally used worldwide language has immense applications in any field one needs to wander. So, it is better that we have fluent oral communication skills. Every workplace requires its employees to speak fluent English.

As such in this contracting world, which is getting joined with progression in innovation and communication, English speaking abilities assume a significant part. This advanced world is moving fast. An individual must know to speak fluent English to carry out conversations around the globe.

In this advanced time, one must have the essential abilities to impart in English. But as part of a cruel reality, numerous individuals come up short on the capacity to impart in English. And henceforth, they regularly experience the ill effects of feeling of inadequacy.

As a result, such people fall back and linger behind others in this serious world. And frequently neglect to arrive at the most successful point of their profession, due to the absence of oral communication abilities. They frequently retreat from significant discussions and occasions. As a result, they neglect to set up vocation development.

Communication skills is a key to everyday business at a workplace. Using idiomatic expressions add value to what we communicate and we grow in all four language skills.

# Definitions

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## **Idiom**

An idiom is a word or words that are peculiar to a particular language.

## **Idiomatic expression**

An idiomatic expression is an expression whose meanings cannot be inferred from the meanings of the words that comprise it.

Idiomatic expressions are phrases or expressions that have a meaning different from the literal interpretation of the individual words within them. These expressions often convey a concept, idea, or feeling that can't be easily deduced from the literal meanings of the words used. Idioms are an important part of language and are frequently used in everyday conversations.

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Generally, an idiom is a phrase where the words together have a meaning that is different from the dictionary definitions of the individual words.

It can also be defined as an expression, word, or phrase that has a figurative meaning that is comprehended in regard to a common use of that expression that is separate from the literal meaning or definition of the words of which it is made.

It is claimed that there are about 25,000 idiomatic phrases in the EL (Ambrose, 2003).

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A well-cited definition of idioms is that by Seidl and McMordie (1978), which states that “an idiom is a number of words which, taken together, mean something different from the individual words of the idiom when they stand alone.”

Moon (1998) and Simpson and Mendis (2003), cited in Blinova (2021), respectively defined an idiom as “multi-word expressions that are not the sum of their parts” and “a group of words that occur in a more or less fixed phrase which overall meaning cannot be predicted by analysing the meaning of its constituent parts.”

Asri and Rochmawati (2017) observed that “Idiomatic expressions are phrases that carry different meanings than the literal definition of their component words.”

# Advantages

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Using idiomatic expressions in any language can offer several advantages including but not limited to:

- ✓ **Enhanced Communication:** Idioms often convey complex ideas or emotions succinctly. They can help you express yourself more vividly and effectively in conversations or writing.
- ✓ **Cultural Understanding:** Learning idiomatic expressions can provide insights into the culture and history of a language. Many idioms have origins rooted in cultural or historical events, and understanding them can deepen your appreciation of a language.
- ✓ **Improved Fluency:** Incorporating idiomatic expressions into your speech can make you sound more fluent and natural in a language. Native speakers frequently use idioms, so using them yourself can help you blend in and be better understood.
- ✓ **Engagement:** Idioms can add interest and engagement to your conversations or writing. They often create imagery or evoke emotions, making your communication more captivating.

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- ✓ **Subtlety and nuance:** Idioms allow you to convey subtle nuances and emotions that might be challenging to express directly. They can add depth to your language use.
- ✓ **Connecting with native speakers:** Using idioms can help you connect with native speakers on a deeper level. It shows that you have a good grasp of the language and are familiar with its cultural aspects.
- ✓ **Creative expression:** Idioms can be fun to use and allow for creative expression. They can be playful, humorous, or poetic, adding an extra layer to your language use.
- ✓ **Memory aid:** Idioms often have memorable phrases or images, which can make it easier to remember vocabulary and expressions.

However, it's important to use idiomatic expressions appropriately. Misusing or overusing them can lead to confusion or unintended meanings. Additionally, idioms may not always translate directly between languages, so it's essential to understand the cultural and linguistic context in which they are used.

# Characteristics

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Idiomatic expressions have several characteristics that distinguish them from ordinary language and make them unique:

- ✓ **Non-Literal Meaning:** Idioms do not have a literal meaning that can be understood by looking at the individual words in the expression. Instead, they convey a figurative or metaphorical meaning that is often unrelated to the literal meanings of the words used.
- ✓ **Fixed Structure:** Idioms typically have a fixed structure or word order that should not be altered. Changing the words or their order may result in a loss of meaning or create confusion.

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- ✓ **Cultural and regional variability:** Idioms can be specific to certain cultures, regions, or languages. What is idiomatic in one language may not have an equivalent in another, or it may be expressed differently.
- ✓ **Figurative language:** Idioms often involve figurative language, such as metaphors, similes, or personification, to convey their meanings. They create imagery or comparisons that help convey the intended message.
- ✓ **Common usage:** Idioms are typically used frequently in everyday language. They are part of the natural way people speak and write in a particular language.
- ✓ **Context-Dependent:** The meaning of an idiom is often context-dependent. The same idiom can have different interpretations or nuances in various situations.

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- ✓ **Emotional or Expressive:** Idioms are often used to convey emotions, attitudes, or attitudes more effectively than plain language. They can add humor, emphasis, or depth to communication.
- ✓ **Non-Compositional:** The meaning of an idiom cannot be easily derived from its individual components. In other words, the whole idiom does not equal the sum of its parts.
- ✓ **Familiarity:** Native speakers of a language are generally familiar with idiomatic expressions, while non-native speakers may find them challenging to understand and use correctly.

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- ✓ **Variation and evolution:** Idioms can change over time, and new idiomatic expressions can emerge. They may evolve or fall out of common usage as languages and cultures evolve.
- ✓ **Conciseness:** Idioms often convey complex ideas or messages in a concise and efficient manner, making them valuable tools for effective communication.
- ✓ **Playfulness and creativity:** Some idiomatic expressions are playful or creative in nature, adding an element of fun or imagination to language.

Understanding these characteristics can help learners and non-native speakers of a language grasp the nuances of idiomatic expressions and use them effectively in communication.

# Dos and don'ts

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When using idiomatic expressions in your language, there are some important dos and don'ts to keep in mind to ensure effective and appropriate communication:

## **Dos:**

- ❖ **Understand the meaning:** Before using an idiom, make sure you understand its meaning and usage. Misusing idioms can lead to confusion.
- ❖ **Use idioms in context:** Idioms are context-dependent. Use them when they are relevant and appropriate to the situation or conversation.
- ❖ **Match the tone:** Consider the tone of the conversation. Some idioms are informal or humorous, while others are more formal. Choose idioms that match the tone you want to convey.

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- ❖ **Be clear:** If you're not sure if your audience will understand a particular idiom, it's better to use plain language to avoid confusion.
- ❖ **Practice:** To use idioms effectively, practice incorporating them into your speech and writing. This will help you become more comfortable with their usage.
- ❖ **Listen and observe:** Pay attention to how native speakers use idiomatic expressions in conversations. This can help you learn when and how to use them appropriately.

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## Don'ts

- **Overuse idioms:** Using too many idioms in your speech or writing can make you sound insincere or overly artificial. Use them sparingly.
- **Force idioms:** Don't force idioms into a conversation or piece of writing where they don't naturally fit. They should enhance communication, not disrupt it.
- **Translate directly:** Avoid translating idiomatic expressions directly from one language to another. Idioms often don't have direct equivalents in other languages.
- **Misinterpret idioms:** Be cautious when interpreting idiomatic expressions literally. Trying to understand them word-for-word can lead to misunderstandings.

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- **Use Inappropriate Idioms:** Some idioms may be considered offensive or inappropriate in certain contexts. Be aware of the cultural and social appropriateness of the idioms you use.
- **Rely Solely on Idioms:** While idiomatic expressions can enrich your language, don't rely on them exclusively. Maintain a balance between idiomatic and plain language to ensure clear communication.
- **Assume Universal Understanding:** Not all idioms are universally understood. What's common in one language or culture may not be in another. Consider your audience's familiarity with the idiom.
- **Forget Cultural Sensitivity:** Be mindful of cultural sensitivities and potential misinterpretations when using idioms from other cultures. Some idioms may have different connotations or meanings in different contexts.

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Incorporating idiomatic expressions into your language use can be valuable for enhancing communication and cultural understanding, but it should be done thoughtfully and in the appropriate context.

# Origin of idiomatic expressions

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The origin of idiomatic expressions is often rooted in the historical, cultural, and linguistic development of a language. Idioms can arise from various sources, including:

- **Historical events:** Some idiomatic expressions have their origins in historical events, stories, or anecdotes. Over time, these events became symbolic and were integrated into the language as idioms. *For example, "to break the ice" is thought to originate from the practice of ships breaking ice in frozen waters to create a navigable path.*
- **Cultural references:** Idioms may be based on cultural references, mythology, or folklore. These references become ingrained in the language and are used to convey certain meanings or ideas. *For instance, "Pandora's box" comes from Greek mythology and is used to describe a source of many unforeseen problems.*

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- **Metaphors and Imagery:** Many idioms are metaphors or use vivid imagery to convey meaning. These expressions often originate from comparisons between concrete objects or actions and abstract concepts. *For example, "to turn a blind eye" uses the image of someone looking away to describe ignoring a situation.*
- **Historical languages and dialects:** Idioms can sometimes be traced back to older languages or dialects that influenced the development of a language.
- **Trade and travel:** Idioms can emerge from interactions between different cultures and languages, particularly through trade and travel. Words and expressions from one language may be incorporated into another, leading to idiomatic expressions that reflect cultural exchange.

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- **Innovation and creativity:** Some idioms may have been created more recently through linguistic innovation or creative wordplay. These expressions may catch on and become part of everyday language.
- **Social and historical context:** The social and historical context of a language's development can also influence the creation of idiomatic expressions. Events, traditions, and social dynamics shape the language and its idioms.

It's important to note that the origins of many idiomatic expressions may not be well-documented, and the exact source of some idioms may be lost to history. Over time, idioms evolve, and their original meanings can become obscured or change. As a result, idiomatic expressions often take on a life of their own, and their meanings can be quite different from their historical roots.

# Spicing up oral communication

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Spicing up oral communication involves adding variety, interest, and energy to a speech to engage one's audience and make conversations more dynamic and memorable.

Effective oral communication involves adapting an approach to the specific audience and context. By incorporating techniques and being mindful of your audience's needs, one can add spice to oral communication and become a more engaging speaker.

One of the tools of spicing up oral communication is idiomatic expressions. They add value to the structure of utterances.

# What to consider

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- **Know your audience:** Consider your audience's familiarity with idioms. If you're speaking to native speakers or people well-versed in the language, you can use idioms more freely. If your audience includes non-native speakers, be mindful of clarity and provide explanations when necessary.
- **Use idioms sparingly:** Don't overdo it. Using too many idioms in a single conversation can make you sound contrived or insincere. Choose idioms that enhance your message rather than clutter it.
- **Relevance and context:** Use idioms that are relevant to the topic of conversation or the situation. Applying idioms in the right context makes them more effective and natural.
- **Transition and introduce:** When introducing an idiom, you can use phrases like "Speaking of which..." or "That reminds me of..." to smoothly transition into the expression. This can make your speech flow more naturally.

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- **Explain when necessary:** If you're unsure whether your audience understands an idiom or if you think it might be unfamiliar to them, don't hesitate to provide a brief explanation or example.
- **Vary your idioms:** Rather than using the same idiom repeatedly, try to diversify your expressions.
- **Practice proper pronunciation:** Ensure that you pronounce idiomatic expressions correctly.
- **Use non-verbal cues:** Sometimes, using non-verbal cues like facial expressions and gestures can enhance the impact of idiomatic expressions. *For instance, when saying "He's pulling my leg," you can playfully tug at your pant leg.*
- **Employ humor and creativity:** Idioms often have a playful or humorous element. Use them creatively.

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- **Be attentive to cultural sensitivity:** Some idioms may have culturally sensitive or inappropriate connotations.
- **Practice and familiarize:** The more you practice using idiomatic expressions, the more natural they will become in your speech. Listen to native speakers and observe how they use idioms to enhance your own skills.
- **Combine idioms sparingly:** You can get creative by combining idiomatic expressions or modifying them slightly, but exercise caution. Overdoing it may make your speech confusing.

# Understanding an idiomatic expression

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Understanding idiomatic expressions often requires paying attention to context clues, as the meanings of idioms are not always apparent from the literal meanings of the words used. Context clues are the words, phrases, or surrounding information in a sentence or conversation that help someone infer the intended meaning of an idiom. Here's how to use context clues to decipher idiomatic expressions:

- ❑ **Surrounding words and phrases:** Look at the words and phrases immediately before or after the idiom. These can provide hints about the idiom's meaning or usage.
- ❑ **Overall context:** Consider the overall context of the conversation or text. What is the topic being discussed? What emotions or situations are being described? The broader context can help you understand why a particular idiom is used.

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- ❑ **Tone and emotion:** Pay attention to the emotional tone of the conversation. Is the speaker excited, sad, angry, or joking? The emotional context can often shed light on the meaning of an idiom.
- ❑ **Contrast and comparison:** Sometimes, idiomatic expressions are used in contrast or comparison with other statements. For example, if someone says, "She was the apple of his eye," it implies that she was very important to him, especially when compared to other people.
- ❑ **Speaker's intent:** Consider what the speaker or writer is trying to convey. Why did they choose to use that particular idiom in that context? Understanding the purpose behind using the idiom can help you interpret its meaning.

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- ❑ **Familiarity with the idiom:** Your own familiarity with idioms and common expressions in the language can be a valuable context clue. If you've encountered an idiom before, you're more likely to recognize it in different contexts.
- ❑ **Non-verbal cues:** Sometimes, non-verbal cues like facial expressions, gestures, or body language can provide additional context for understanding idioms. These cues often accompany idiomatic expressions to reinforce their meanings.
- ❑ **Repetition:** If an idiom is repeated or used consistently throughout a conversation or text, it can reinforce its meaning. Pay attention to how it's used multiple times in different contexts.
- ❑ **Logical inference:** Use logical reasoning to make educated guesses about the meaning of an idiom based on the context. Sometimes, the context provides enough information to make an educated guess.

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□ **Ask for clarification:** If you're unsure about the meaning of an idiom despite considering the context clues, don't hesitate to ask the speaker or seek clarification. People are usually willing to explain idiomatic expressions to help with understanding.

Remember that idiomatic expressions can have multiple meanings and nuances, and the same idiom can be used differently in various contexts. Developing a good sense of context clues and actively listening and observing during conversations can greatly improve your ability to understand and use idiomatic expressions effectively.

# Meaning and usage

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Some of the idiomatic expressions are used alone other are used in a sentence.

Idiom	Meaning	Usage
Beat around the bush	Avoid saying what you mean, usually because it is uncomfortable	as part of a sentence
Better late than never	Better to arrive late than not to come at all	by itself
Bite the bullet	To get something over with because it is inevitable	as part of a sentence
Break a leg	Good luck	by itself

# Context examples

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## 1. Chip off the old block

Meaning: A person is similar in behaviour or actions to his parents.

Example: When grandmother saw her grandson collecting coins like her son used to do, she knew he was a Chip off the old block.

## 2. Don't cry over spilt milk

Meaning: Don't cry over what has happened as it can not be fixed.

Example: Walter failed his examination but his dad came and said just one thing, "Son, Don't cry over spilt milk."

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## **3. Beside yourself with joy**

Meaning: To be extremely happy.

Example: I can see that you are beside yourself with joy on being selected for the job, congratulations.

## **4. Fair and square**

Meaning: Being direct or fair.

Example: To tell you fair and square, I did everything that I was meant to do, but I still feel unfulfilled.

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## **5. A black sheep**

Meaning: Being a disgrace to the family.

Example: He became the black sheep of the family after he went to prison for tax evasion.

## **6. By the skin of your teeth**

Meaning: To just barely get by or make it.

Example: Lester made the dance team By the skin of his teeth, you see the audition gates were about to get closed.

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## **7. Fish out of water**

Meaning: To be out of your comfort zone.

Example: Tom felt like a fish out of water when his girlfriend took him to a Star Wars convention in LA.

## **8. In the fast lane**

Meaning: A life filled with excitement.

Example: When Chris turned forty, he decided to live his life in the fast lane and quit his job for his hobbies.

## **9. Go the extra mile**

Meaning: To make an extra effort.

Example: He was willing to go the extra mile for the love of his life,

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## **10. Palm off**

Meaning: Pass off something as genuine when it is spurious.

Example: This shopkeeper always palms off old stock to the customers.

## **11. On thin ice**

Meaning: In a precarious or risky situation.

Example: Andy played hooky from work for a week saying he was sick, and now his boss said that he is on thin ice.

## **12. Play devil's advocate**

Meaning: To argue, just for the sake of it.

Example: He was not agreeing to back off as if he was playing devil's advocate.

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## **13. Bite off more than you can chew**

Meaning: Take on difficult work that is beyond your capabilities.

Example: Andrew told his boss that he would triple the sales but in reality, he bit off more than he can chew and now all of us are in trouble.

## **14. Put something on ice**

Meaning: To put something on hold.

Example: As per the boss' order, Michael has put his personal matters on ice.

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## **15. Turn a deaf ear**

Meaning: To ignore what someone is saying.

Example: Whenever her mother complained of her excessive use of mobile phone, Anu turned a deaf ear.

## **16. Hit the books**

Meaning: Going to study

Example: I won't be able to come for dinner as I have to hit the books for my half-yearly examinations.

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## **17. Cut to the chase**

Meaning: Getting to the important point

Example: As the submissions were to be made tonight, boss cut to the chase and asked us to start working.

## **18. Face the music**

Meaning: Face the reality

Example: Shikha asked her husband to not run away from the problem and just face the music once!

## **19. Twist someone's arm**

Meaning: To convince someone

Example: I was not planning to come to the party but by reminding me of all the good food you twisted my arm!

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## **22. Once in a blue moon**

Meaning: Not very often

Example: I visit her place once in a blue moon.

## **23. Old as the hills**

Meaning: Someone very old

Example: The man looks as old as the hills.

# Common mistakes to avoid

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Using idiomatic expressions incorrectly can lead to misunderstandings and may make your language sound awkward or confusing. Here are some common mistakes to avoid when using idiomatic expressions:

**1. Misinterpreting the idiom:** One of the most common mistakes is misunderstanding the meaning of an idiom. Attempting to interpret it literally rather than understanding its figurative or metaphorical meaning can lead to confusion.

- Incorrect: "She spilled the beans, and now everyone knows we're having a surprise party!"
- Correct: "She accidentally revealed the secret, and now everyone knows we're having a surprise party."

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**2. Mispronouncing or misspelling idioms:** Mispronouncing or misspelling idiomatic expressions can detract from their impact and may lead to misunderstandings.

- Incorrect: "It's not rocket size."
- Correct: "It's not rocket science."

**3. Using idioms out of context:** Using idioms in inappropriate or unrelated contexts can confuse your audience and make your language sound forced.

- Incorrect: "He hit the nail on the head, but let's talk about ice cream."
- Correct: "He hit the nail on the head with his analysis of the situation."


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**4. Mixing or mangling idioms:** Combining or altering idiomatic expressions can lead to linguistic mishaps.

- Incorrect: "She's really barking up the wrong horse."
- Correct: "She's really barking up the wrong tree."

**5. Overusing idioms:** Excessive use of idioms in a short span of conversation can sound unnatural and may detract from the clarity of your message.

- Incorrect: "I'm over the moon, and it's raining cats and dogs, so I'll be late to the party."
  - Correct: "I'm thrilled, but due to heavy rain, I'll be late to the party."
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**6. Using idioms in formal or technical writing:** Idioms are generally more suited for informal or creative contexts. Using them in formal or technical writing can make your language appear less professional.

- Incorrect (in a formal report): "We need to cut to the chase and address the core issues."
- Correct: "We must address the central issues directly and promptly."

**7. Assuming universal understanding:** Not all idiomatic expressions are universally known or understood. Avoid assuming that everyone in your audience is familiar with a particular idiom.

- Incorrect: "It's raining cats and dogs, so bring an umbrella."
  - Correct: "It's raining heavily, so bring an umbrella."
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**8. Ignoring cultural sensitivity:** Some idiomatic expressions may have cultural or regional connotations that can be sensitive or offensive if used inappropriately.

- Incorrect: "He's as cheap as chips."
- Correct: "He's very thrifty."

**9. Forgetting to Provide Context:** Failing to provide context or explanations when using less common idioms can leave your audience puzzled.

- Incorrect: "He let the cat out of the bag."
- Correct: "He revealed the secret."

To use idiomatic expressions effectively, it's crucial to understand their meanings, use them in appropriate contexts, and be mindful of your audience's familiarity with them. If in doubt, it's better to opt for clarity and use plain language rather than risk miscommunication with an idiom.

# Oral communication at workplace

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Workplace communication involves speaking, listening, observing and the ability to understand verbal and nonverbal meaning in the communication process.

Being a good communicator at a workplace contribution to successful interactions among employees and customers who join such premises.

Good oral communication enhances professional relationship.

Workplace success depends on the ability to communicate with others.

Spicing up oral communication makes workplace communication more enjoyable and fruitful internally and externally.

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*Thank you!*