




Railway Expressions


For Curious Linguists

- Teacher's Insights -

At a Glance

-  60 minutes
-  **B1**, B2,
-  idiomatic expressions, business English (especially expressions with 'track') and speaking

Preparation

-  0-5 minutes
- Print one worksheet for each student.
- Print the Teacher's Insights or keep them at hand.

Exercise Summary

- Kickoff:** speaking intro
- Reading:** introductory reading linking the railway to the English language, business, and culture
- Vocabulary:** complete idiomatic expressions related to trains and the railway
- Speaking:** questions using the idioms from the last section which encourage students to speak
- Extra Activity:** drawing game with railway idioms

Kickoff: Read and answer the questions.

This activity aims to engage students in the topic of trains and railways while activating their prior knowledge. Encourage students to share their experiences and opinions related to trains and railway expressions.

1. Are there trains in your country?
2. Do you enjoy travelling by train?
3. Do you know anything about the history of trains?
4. Can you think of any expressions in English with the following words?
 train track rails steam

Question 4: Students often come up with "on track" as this is a more basic expression. Don't start teaching the expressions here; it is just to check prior knowledge.

Reading: Read the introductory paragraph together.

The reading activity introduces the historical and cultural significance of the railway in Britain. Have students read the text together, either as a class or in small groups, to practice their reading skills and build comprehension. Encourage students to ask questions and clarify any vocabulary or expressions they don't understand.

Students may not know "glimpse": as a quick or brief look at something.

The railway has played a significant role in the development of British society and culture. It has not only revolutionised transportation and commerce, but has also had a lasting impact on the English language. The first intercity passenger railway was the Liverpool-Manchester line which opened in 1830, marking the beginning of a new era in transportation and communication. Many expressions related to the railway have become part of everyday conversation in Britain, and they provide a fascinating glimpse into the country's history and heritage.

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From “being on the right track” to “running out of steam”, the railway has left a rich legacy of idioms and expressions that are still widely used in Britain and worldwide today. Not only that, but their connection to progress means they are commonly used in terms of business. These expressions offer a unique window into the cultural, social, and historical significance of the railway in Britain.

Vocabulary: Complete the expressions with the missing words in the boxes.

Students should read the definitions and try to find the right words to fit the gaps. If you are teaching groups, this can be an ideal group activity.

sidetrack	off	one	full
steam	thought	stay	rails
on	right	back	wreck

- to be **on** track: This means to be making progress as planned and to be on schedule.
- to be on the **right** track: This means to be on the correct path to success.
- to **sidetrack**: This means to intentionally divert from a main topic of discussion or from a plan.
- to **stay** on track: This means to remain on the course or path that has been set or intended.
- to go **off** track: This means to accidentally deviate from the plan or conversation topic.
- to get **back** on track: This means to return to the original plan or intended course of action.
- full** steam ahead: This means to proceed with full energy, enthusiasm, or momentum.
- run out of **steam**: This means to lose energy, enthusiasm, or momentum.
- lose your train of **thought**: This means to forget what you were thinking or saying.
- have a **one**-track mind: This means to be single-minded and obsessed with a single idea.
- go off the **rails**: This means to become erratic, unstable, or uncontrolled.
- be a train **wreck**: This means to be a disaster, a failure, or a complete mess.

Speaking: Ask and answer the questions as a group.

The speaking activity is designed so that each of the questions leads students to use one of the twelve questions from the previous activity. Try to divide the remaining class time into 12 and try to make students talk about each one for that time. For example, if you have 20 minutes remaining, you’d have about a minute and a half to talk about each question.

- What tools do you use to know if you are on track with your work or studies?

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2. How does it feel when you are sure you are on the right track towards your goals?
3. Have you ever sidetracked from your goals to do something different for a period of time?
4. Do you find it difficult to stay on track when you are studying or working from home?
5. What causes you to go off track in a conversation or in a meeting?
6. What helps you to get back on track when you realise that you have been distracted?
7. Do you find it easiest to move full steam ahead in the morning, afternoon, or in the evening?
8. Have you ever felt like you had totally run out of steam and couldn't go on any longer?
9. How often do you feel like you lose your train of thought?
10. How can having a one-track mind be harmful to reaching your goals?
11. Can you think of any celebrities or famous people who have gone off the rails?
12. When was the last time your house was like a train wreck and what was the reason?

Extra Activity: Play a drawing game with the railway expressions.

You will need a whiteboard, flipchart, and some pens. For online teaching, you would need to allow students to share their screens.

- Divide the class into two teams.
- One member from each team will take turns drawing one of the railway vocabulary expressions from the lesson on the whiteboard or a large sheet of paper.
- The rest of the team members will try to guess the expression being drawn within a certain time limit (e.g., 1 or 2 minutes).
- If the team guesses the expression correctly within the time limit, they earn a point.
- The game continues with each team taking turns until all the expressions have been drawn.
- The team with the most points at the end of the game wins.

