

## Life is a Journey

This metaphor frames life as movement through space and time, with goals, obstacles, and destinations.

Idiom	Meaning	Example
At a crossroads	Facing a critical decision or turning point	After finishing college, I was at a crossroads and unsure whether to start working or pursue graduate studies.
Down the road	In the future	We might move to the countryside a few years down the road.
Go the extra mile	Make a special effort	She always goes the extra mile to help her students succeed.
Hit a dead end	Reach an impasse or failure	I hit a dead end with my research and had to start over.
Smooth sailing	Proceeding without difficulty	Once we resolved the initial issues, it was smooth sailing from there.
On the right track	Making progress toward a goal	Your recent grades show that you're on the right track.
A bumpy ride	A difficult or turbulent period	Our relationship had a bumpy ride at first, but we've grown stronger.
One step at a time	Dealing with things gradually	Recovering from surgery takes patience—just take it one step at a time.
Follow in someone's footsteps	Imitate or continue someone's path	She followed in her mother's footsteps and became a doctor.
Off the beaten path	Unconventional or unfamiliar direction	We took a trip to a small village off the beaten path—no tourists in sight.

**Business and Politics and Life are a Game of Cards esp. Poker**

Idiom	Meaning	Example
Play your cards right	Act wisely or strategically to succeed	If she plays her cards right, she could become party leader next year.
Hold your cards close to your chest	Keep your plans or ideas secret	The finance minister is holding her cards close to her chest ahead of the budget announcement.
Call someone's bluff	Challenge someone who may be pretending or exaggerating	The opposition called the prime minister's bluff on the early election.
Up the ante	Increase the stakes or pressure in a situation	The union upped the ante by threatening a nationwide strike.
A high-stakes game	A situation involving major risk or reward	The trade war is a high-stakes game with global economic consequences.
The cards are stacked against (someone)	Someone is at a disadvantage; the situation is unfair	With low funding and no media coverage, the challenger knew the cards were stacked against him.
Lay your cards on the table	Be open and honest about your intentions	It's time for the company to lay its cards on the table about layoffs.
Play the hand you're dealt	Make the best of your current situation	The administration inherited a weak economy — now they have to play the hand they were dealt.
All in	Fully committed, taking a major risk	The candidate went all in on a single-issue campaign — and it worked.
A poker face	A neutral or unreadable expression to hide thoughts or emotions	He kept a poker face throughout the negotiations, revealing nothing.
Wild card	An unpredictable factor	The independent candidate is the wild card in this election.
Put your money where your mouth is	Back up your words with action or investment	If the government believes in clean energy, it should put its money where its mouth is.
Know when to fold	Know when to quit or cut your losses	The senator knew when to fold and withdrew before the vote.
Sweeten the pot	Make an offer more attractive	To get the deal done, the company sweetened the pot with stock options.
Bluff your way through	Pretend to have knowledge or confidence to get through a situation	He bluffed his way through the debate with soundbites, not substance.
Cash in your chips	Retire, withdraw, take a reward, or die	After 20 years in public service, she cashed in her chips and joined a think tank.
Ante up	Pay or contribute (often reluctantly)	Each department had to ante up part of its budget for the rebrand.
Playing a losing hand	Trying to win in a situation that's already stacked against you	The CEO knew he was playing a losing hand, but he refused to step down.
Play your hand	Use your available resources or position	The trade minister played her hand well during negotiations.
Luck of the draw	Pure chance, no skill involved	Landing a key swing state is often the luck of the draw.
Come up trumps (British idiom)	Succeed unexpectedly or deliver a good result	The underdog candidate came up trumps in the televised debate.
Hold all the cards	Have control or advantage	In the negotiations, the company held all the cards.
Luck of the draw	Outcome left to chance	I ended up with the worst shift—just the luck of the draw.
Stacked deck	An unfair or manipulated situation	The competition felt like a stacked deck from the start; they clearly favoured the hometown team.
In the cards (or on the cards in British English)	Likely or possible in the future	A leadership challenge might be in the cards after this defeat.

## Business and Politics and Life are a Gamble

Idiom	Meaning	Example
Roll the dice	Take a risky chance with an uncertain outcome	The central bank rolled the dice by slashing interest rates.
Long shot	An unlikely but possible success	Winning the seat is a long shot, but the party is investing heavily.
Put your money on (something/someone)	Meaning: Bet on or strongly support	I'd put my money on her being the next CEO.
Play the odds	Make decisions based on likelihood or probability	They played the odds by investing in green tech early.
Safe bet	A very likely or low-risk outcome	Healthcare will be a safe bet for any campaign platform this year.
All bets are off	A situation has become unpredictable or chaotic	After the scandal broke, all bets were off about who would win the election.
Back the wrong horse	Support someone or something that ends up failing	They backed the wrong horse by aligning with that candidate.
Hedge your bets	Reduce risk by spreading or balancing options	The company is hedging its bets by investing in both fossil fuels and renewables.
A losing bet	Something likely to fail	Continuing with that product line is a losing bet.
Spin the wheel	Take a chance without knowing the outcome	Investing in crypto was like spinning the wheel in 2021.
Put it all on the line	Risk everything	He put it all on the line to push the policy through Parliament.
Hit the jackpot	Achieve great success or luck	They hit the jackpot with that viral marketing campaign.
The odds are against you	Low probability of success	The odds were against them, but they still won the case.
The chips are down	Facing a crisis or important moment	When the chips are down, true friends reveal themselves.

## Business & Politics are Sailing

Metaphors are often derived from the shared history of a nation, so in Britain, sailing metaphors are common from our history of piracy and ruling the world's oceans. Now that the Empire has been dismantled and fewer of us have connections with the sea, these metaphors will gradually die out of use.

Idiom	Meaning	Example
All hands on deck	Everyone is needed to help	The project deadline is tomorrow — it's all hands on deck today!
Take the wind out of someone's sails	To deflate someone's confidence or enthusiasm	When I told her the job had already been filled, it really took the wind out of her sails.
Know the ropes	To be experienced or knowledgeable about something	Don't worry about the new software — Jane knows the ropes.
Three sheets to the wind	Very drunk	He was three sheets to the wind after just two cocktails.
Batten down the hatches	Prepare for trouble or a difficult situation	The economy's looking rough — time to batten down the hatches.
Plain sailing / Smooth sailing	Something is going easily or without problems	After we fixed the bugs, the rest of the launch was smooth sailing.
In the same boat	In the same situation, often a negative one	We're all in the same boat — nobody got a raise this year.
Run a tight ship	To manage a team or operation in a very disciplined, efficient way	The new manager runs a tight ship — everyone's always on time.
To be left high and dry	Stranded or left helpless	He promised to help but left me high and dry when I needed him most.
A sinking ship	A failing or doomed enterprise	After the scandal, investors started fleeing the company like a sinking ship.
Like ships passing in the night	People who meet briefly and then part, often without deep connection	We had a few good conversations, but we were like ships passing in the night.
To be at the helm	To be in control or in charge	With the new CEO at the helm, the company is heading in a fresh direction.

## Business & Politics are Hunting, Shooting and Fishing

Fox hunting was another common source for idioms, but now that it has been banned by the urban elites, I expect these metaphors will become less common in the language. Together with hunting and fishing it is still a rich source of idioms.

Idiom	Meaning	Example
On the scent	Close to discovering the truth	The investigators are on the scent of corruption in procurement.
Flush out	Force someone/something into the open	The debate flushed out his real position on climate policy.
Like a fox in the henhouse	Someone dangerous in a vulnerable situation	Putting that lobbyist on the regulatory board is like putting a fox in the henhouse.
Hunt down	Pursue and eliminate	The audit committee is hunting down every financial discrepancy.
Loaded for bear	Ready for a tough challenge	The legal team came into that meeting loaded for bear.
Bite the bullet	Endure something unpleasant	It's time to bite the bullet and raise interest rates.
Keep your powder dry	Stay prepared for future action	The opposition is keeping its powder dry until the next debate.
Big game hunting	Going after major targets	They're not after low level corruption— this is big game hunting.
Take aim at	Direct criticism or attack	The senator took aim at corporate tax loopholes.
Dead in the sights	Clearly targeted	The new policy has the tech sector dead in its sights.
Pull the trigger	Make a final decision or take decisive action	The board finally pulled the trigger on the merger.
Miss the mark	Fail to achieve the intended result	The minister's speech missed the mark with younger voters.
A big fish	A powerful or important person	They landed a big fish with that new board member.
Fishy	Suspicious	That sudden contract cancellation seems fishy.
Hook, line, and sinker	Fall completely for a lie or scheme	The public bought the spin hook, line, and sinker.
Cast a wide net	Try to include or attract many options	The hiring team is casting a wide net for diverse talent.
Plenty of other fish in the sea	Other opportunities exist	The deal fell through, but there are plenty of other fish in the sea.

Sports are a very common source of metaphors. In British English, cricket and football (soccer for you Americans and Europeans) are important sources of metaphors in business and politics. In the USA, baseball and American football are common sources. If your students want to understand political and business news, then they need a grounding in these metaphors.

#### Business & Politics are Cricket

Idiom	Meaning	Example
A sticky wicket	A difficult or tricky situation	Negotiating with both unions put the minister on a sticky wicket.
Play with a straight bat	Be honest or act with integrity	Despite pressure, she played with a straight bat during the inquiry.
It's just not cricket	It's unfair or not proper behaviour	Smearing a colleague in the press? That's just not cricket.
Hit someone for six	Shock or upset someone	The sudden resignation hit the board for six.
Bowled over	Greatly impressed or surprised	The shareholders were bowled over by the new strategy.
To be stumped	Be confused or unsure	When asked about policy details, the candidate was completely stumped.
On the back foot	In a defensive or disadvantaged position	The scandal put the minister on the back foot.
Catch someone out	Expose someone in a lie or mistake	The journalist caught the official out on a lie.
A good innings	To have a long life	He died at 99 – he had a good innings.
To hit for six	To act/play very well.	Those were difficult questions, but he hit the last one for six – a brilliant answer.

## Business & Politics are Football

Idiom	Meaning	Example
Move the goalposts	Change the rules unfairly	They moved the goalposts after we met their conditions.
Kick off	Begin or launch	The campaign kicks off next Monday.
Score an own goal	Make a mistake that harms oneself	Cutting healthcare funding was a political own goal.
Get the ball rolling	Start something	Let's get the ball rolling on the new initiative.
On the ball	Alert and responsive	Her responses during the debate proved she's on the ball.
Top of the table	In a leading position	Their product is top of the table in market share.
Red card	Serious penalty or disqualification	That comment earned him a red card from the media.
Kick into touch	Delay or avoid a decision	They kicked the reforms into touch for another year.

**Business & Politics are Tennis**

Idiom	Meaning	Example
Game, set, and match	It's over; a decisive win	When she secured the funding, it was game, set, and match.
On the back foot	In a defensive position	They were on the back foot after the earnings call.
The ball is in your court	It's your turn to act	We've presented our case. The ball is in their court.
Rally	A comeback or collective push	The team rallied to meet the deadline.



## Business & Politics are American Football

Idiom	Meaning	Example
Move the goalposts	Change the rules unfairly	They moved the goalposts mid-negotiation.
Drop the ball	Make a mistake or fail to act	The agency dropped the ball on the rollout.
Game plan	Strategy or plan	What's our game plan for the next quarter?
Monday morning quarterback	Someone who criticizes after the fact	Easy for him to complain now — he's just a Monday morning quarterback.
Go the whole nine yards	Do everything possible	They went the whole nine yards to win the contract.
Kickoff	The start of an event or campaign	The product launch will kickoff next week.
Hail Mary play	A desperate last-minute attempt	That lawsuit is just a Hail Mary play.
Call the shots	Be in charge	In this merger, it's clear who's calling the shots.

## Business & Politics are Baseball

Idiom	Meaning	Example
Step up to the plate	Take responsibility	It's time to step up to the plate.
Touch base	Check in or make contact	Let's touch base after the meeting.
Out of left field	Unexpected or unusual	That policy came out of left field.
Throw a curveball	Introduce something unexpected	The press threw a curveball with that question.
Hit a home run	Achieve great success	Her marketing pitch hit a home run.
Strike out	Fail completely	He struck out with investors again.
In the big leagues	At a high or professional level	She's playing in the big leagues now.
Ballpark figure	A rough estimate	We're looking at a ballpark figure of \$2 million.
Go to bat for someone	Defend or support someone	The CFO really went to bat for her team.
To hit it out of the park	To act/play very well.	Those were difficult questions, but he hit the last one out of the park – a brilliant answer.

## Business and Politics and Life are Gardening

Idiom	Meaning	Example
To nip (something) in the bud	To stop a problem or bad situation at an early stage before it becomes worse.	The manager decided to nip the gossip in the bud before it could spread across the office.
To put down roots	To settle in a place and start to establish a life there.	After years of traveling, they decided to put down roots in the small coastal town.
To weed out	To remove unwanted elements from a group or collection.	The company is trying to weed out inefficient practices from its operations.
To blossom (also: to come into bloom)	To develop in a healthy or promising way.	Her talent truly blossomed after she joined the creative workshop.
Pushing up daisies	A humorous or euphemistic way to say someone is dead and buried.	That old car is finally pushing up daisies in the scrapyard.
To bear fruit	To yield positive results; to be successful.	After months of hard work, their efforts finally began to bear fruit.
The grass is always greener (on the other side)	Other people's situations always seem better than your own, even if they may not be.	She keeps thinking about moving abroad, but the grass is always greener on the other side.
To go to seed	To decline in quality or appearance.	The building has really gone to seed since the last owners moved out.
To dig up dirt (on someone)	To uncover and share negative or scandalous information about someone.	The reporter tried to dig up dirt on the politician during the campaign.
To reap what you sow	Your actions will have consequences, good or bad.	If you treat others with respect, you'll reap what you sow.
To water down	To make something weaker or less effective.	The committee watered down the proposal to make it more acceptable.

## Business and Politics and Life are the Environment

Idiom	Meaning	Example
Can't see the forest for the trees	To be so focused on small details that you miss the overall picture.	He's so concerned with the minor edits, he can't see the forest for the trees.
A drop in the ocean	A very small amount compared to what is needed.	Donating £5 is just a drop in the ocean when it comes to fighting world hunger.
Clear as mud	Not clear at all; very confusing.	The instructions were as clear as mud.
On thin ice	In a risky or dangerous situation.	You're on thin ice coming in late to work again.
To weather the storm	To survive a difficult situation.	The company managed to weather the storm during the economic downturn.
To be snowed under	To be overwhelmed with work or other responsibilities.	I can't take on another project—I'm already snowed under.
To make a mountain out of a molehill	To exaggerate a small problem as if it were a major one.	Don't make a mountain out of a molehill; the issue is not that serious.
Down to earth	Practical and sensible.	Despite her fame, she's very down to earth.
Under the weather	Feeling unwell.	I'm feeling a bit under the weather today, so I'll stay home and rest.
In deep water	In serious trouble.	He forgot to submit his assignment and now he's in deep water.

## Business & Politics are Tech

As we are increasingly living in a tech dominated world, tech metaphors are increasingly being incorporated into the language.

Idiom	Meaning	Example Sentence
Back to the drawing board	Start again after a failure or setback	Our merger proposal was rejected, so it's back to the drawing board.
Blow a fuse	Lose one's temper suddenly	The CEO blew a fuse when he saw the quarterly losses.
Crash and burn	Fail spectacularly	Their AI startup crashed and burned after just six months.
Cutting-edge	Very advanced, innovative	The company invests in cutting-edge technology to stay competitive.
Firewall	A barrier to block or protect (literal & figurative)	We need a political firewall to prevent further misinformation.
Hardwired	Innate or strongly fixed	The desire to innovate is hardwired into the company culture.
Plugged in	Well-informed or connected	She's really plugged in to Washington politics.
Reboot	Restart or make a fresh beginning	After the scandal, the party needed a complete reboot.
Short-circuit	Disrupt or bypass normal procedure	His remarks short-circuited the negotiations entirely.
Bandwidth	Capacity to deal with tasks or issues	I don't have the bandwidth to handle another project right now.
Fast-track	Accelerate progress or development	They're fast-tracking the new product launch for Q3.
In the pipeline	In development or on the way	Several new regulations are in the pipeline.
Hit the panic button	Overreact or respond with urgency	Investors hit the panic button after the surprise rate hike.
On the same wavelength	Thinking in a similar way	The campaign team is finally on the same wavelength.
Boot up	Start something from the beginning	The government is booting up a new transparency initiative.
Power down	Reduce effort, shut down, or relax	After the summit, the delegation powered down for the weekend.
Glitch	Small error or problem	There was a glitch in the system that delayed the results.
Beta test	Try something out on a small scale first	The new policy will be beta tested in two states before going national.
Upgrade	Improve or enhance something	The education budget got a major upgrade this year.