

THE UNWRITTEN DICTIONARY

International Student's Guide to UK Office Speak

Critical Path Finder
@criticalpathfinder



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HELLO AND WELCOME

We're your UK transition mentors

Have you ever sat in a meeting and felt like you've missed a crucial piece of the puzzle? You understand the words, but the meaning seems to be hidden between the lines. A colleague says they'll "put a pin in it," and another agrees that your idea "has legs."

You are not alone. Navigating the nuances of British workplace communication is one of the biggest challenges for international professionals. It's a culture of understatement, indirectness, and unique turns of phrase that you won't find in any textbook.

This glossary is your secret weapon.

We've curated the most common, confusing, and critical pieces of corporate jargon you're likely to hear in a UK office. Use it to decode emails, prepare for meetings, and feel the confidence that comes from truly understanding the conversation.

Think of this as your first step to not just working in the UK, but thriving here.

— *Karla and
Stephanie*



The Glossary

Organised by theme



A woman in a business suit is standing and presenting to a group of people seated around a large conference table. She is holding a small device and pointing towards a presentation board in the background. The board displays a chart and the word 'Gonatural'. The room is bright with large windows and modern decor, including a potted plant on the table and a framed abstract painting on the wall.

**Move forward.
Good things are
up ahead.**

CHAPTER ONE: PHRASES FOR DISCUSSING PROJECTS, IDEAS, AND STRATEGY

In the Meeting Room

All Hands (on Deck)

- What it means: A meeting or project requiring everyone's involvement.
- Example: "This is a priority one issue, so it's all hands on deck until it's resolved."

Blue Sky Thinking

- What it means: Brainstorming creative ideas without being limited by practical constraints.
- Example: "For the first half hour, let's do some blue sky thinking on how to approach this."

Circle Back

- What it means: To return to a topic or issue at a later time.
- Example: "Good question. I don't have the answer now, but I'll circle back with you tomorrow."

Close of Play (COP) / End of Play (EOP)

- What it means: The end of the working day, typically around 5:00-5:30 PM.
- Example: "I need that report on my desk by close of play today, please."

Drill Down

- What it means: To investigate an issue in greater detail.
- Example: "These top-level numbers look fine, but we need to drill down into the specifics."

Ducks in a Row

- What it means: To be well-organised and prepared for a task or meeting.
- Example: "Let's get our ducks in a row before we present to the stakeholders."



CHAPTER ONE: PHRASES FOR DISCUSSING PROJECTS, IDEAS, AND STRATEGY

Has Legs

- What it means: An idea, plan, or project that has the potential to be successful or continue for a long time.
- Example: "The focus group loved the concept; I think this idea has legs."

Low-Hanging Fruit

- What it means: The easiest tasks or goals that can be accomplished first to show quick progress.
- Example: "Let's tackle the low-hanging fruit first to build some momentum."

On the Same Page

- What it means: To have a shared understanding or be in agreement with others.
- Example: "Before we proceed, let's have a quick chat to ensure we're all on the same page."



Park That / Put a Pin in It

- What it means: To postpone discussion on a topic until a later time.
- Example: "That's a valid point, but let's put a pin in it for now and stick to the agenda."



Run it up the Flagpole

- What it means: To present an idea to gauge the reaction from others, especially senior staff.
- Example: "It's a bit unconventional, but I'll run it up the flagpole and see what management thinks."



Take it Offline

- What it means: To discuss a topic in private after a group meeting.
- Example: "This is only relevant to our team, so let's take it offline."

Throw a Spanner in the Works

- What it means: To do something that suddenly stops a plan or process from succeeding.
- Example: "The last-minute budget cut really threw a spanner in the works for the project."

CHAPTER TWO: DECODING THE LANGUAGE OF THE INBOX

Email & Written Communication

Action (as a verb)

- What it means: To do something; to complete a task.
- Example: "Thanks for the notes. Can you action these points by tomorrow?"

As Per My Last Email (Passive-aggressive)

- What it means: A polite way of saying "You clearly didn't read what I already wrote."
- Example: "As per my last email, the attachments are included for your review."

Best Practice

- What it means: The most effective and efficient way of doing something, according to internal standards.
- Example: "Please use the shared server for all files; it's best practice."

For Info / FYI

- What it means: "For Your Information." Signifies that no action is required from the recipient.
- Example: "I've cc'd you on this email FYI."

Kind Regards (vs. Regards)

- What it means: "Kind regards" is a standard, friendly closing. "Regards" can be interpreted as more curt or formal.
- Example: It's safer to use "Kind regards" with colleagues you don't know well.

Ping Me / Drop Me a Line

- What it means: Send me a quick message, usually via email or an instant messenger app.
- Example: "Ping me when you have an update."

To Be Actioned (TBA)

- What it means: A task that needs to be done. Often seen in meeting minutes.
- Example: "Item 4: Send client updated proposal (To be actioned by Sarah)."

CHAPTER THREE: UNDERSTANDING THE SUBTLETIES OF PERFORMANCE-RELATED LANGUAGE

Praise, Criticism & Feedback

A Bit of a Stretch

- What it means: Describes a goal or task that is very difficult, perhaps even unrealistic.
- Example: "Finishing this by Friday is a bit of a stretch, but I'll do my best."

Food for Thought

- What it means: An idea or comment worth serious consideration.
- Example: "Her feedback on the user experience gave us some real food for thought."

Hit the Ground Running

- What it means: To start a new role or project with immediate effectiveness, requiring little training.
- Example: "Our new starter has years of experience, so we expect her to hit the ground running."

It's Fine

- What it means: A potentially ambiguous phrase. It can mean "it's genuinely okay," or it can mean "it's not okay, but I don't want to discuss it."
- Example: "Don't worry about being late." "Are you sure?" "It's fine." (Tone is critical here).

Manage Expectations

- What it means: To make it clear what is realistic and achievable, often to prevent future disappointment.
- Example: "We need to manage the client's expectations; we can't deliver the project that quickly."

With the Greatest Respect...

- What it means: A formal preface to a strong disagreement or criticism.
- Example: "With the greatest respect, I believe your data is out of date."

CHAPTER FOUR: GENERAL DAY-TO-DAY CHAT, REQUESTS, AND OBSERVATIONS

Around the Office

Bandwidth

- What it means: The capacity to take on more work.
- Example: "I can't help with that right now as I don't have the bandwidth."

Bog-Standard

- What it means: Completely ordinary, basic, with no special features.
- Example: "We don't need the premium model; the bog-standard version will do."

Botch Job / Bodge Job

- What it means: A piece of work that has been done badly or carelessly.
- Example: "He made a real bodge job of the presentation slides."

Do the Needful

- What it means: An instruction to do whatever is necessary to complete the task.
- Example: "The client's payment is overdue. Please do the needful."

Knuckle Down

- What it means: To start working very hard and seriously on a task.
- Example: "The deadline is approaching, so it's time to knuckle down."

On My Radar

- What it means: Something that you are aware of and considering.
- Example: "Yes, the pending invoice is on my radar; I'll chase it up today."

Ropey

- What it means: Of poor quality, or feeling slightly unwell.
- Example: "I wouldn't use that supplier again, their work was a bit ropery."

Touch Base

- What it means: To make contact or have a brief check-in.
- Example: "Let's touch base next week to see how you're getting on."

CHAPTER FIVE: THE INFORMAL LANGUAGE OF TEA BREAKS AND BUILDING RAPPORT

Social & Banter

Bite Your Arm Off

- What it means: To be extremely enthusiastic about an offer.
- Example: "If you offer him a spare ticket, he'll bite your arm off."

Bob's Your Uncle

- What it means: A phrase meaning "and there you have it" or "it's as simple as that."
- Example: "Copy the file, paste it here, and Bob's your uncle, you're done."

Brew

- What it means: A cup of tea or coffee.
- Example: "I'm just popping to the kitchen, fancy a brew?"

Cheeky

- What it means: Describes something slightly audacious or mischievous, but in a charming way.
- Example: "Let's leave five minutes early for a cheeky Friday pint."

Chuffed

- What it means: Very pleased or happy about something.
- Example: "She was absolutely chuffed with her promotion."

Dodgy

- What it means: Suspicious, unreliable, or of questionable quality.
- Example: "I'm not sure about this data source, it looks a bit dodgy."

Donkey's Years

- What it means: A very long time.
- Example: "I've been working here for donkey's years."



CHAPTER FIVE: THE INFORMAL LANGUAGE OF TEA BREAKS AND BUILDING RAPPORT

Gutted

- What it means: Extremely sad or disappointed.
- Example: "He was gutted when he heard they cancelled the project."

Knackered

- What it means: Extremely tired or exhausted.
- Example: "It's been a long week, I'm absolutely knackered."

Pants

- What it means: Rubbish or nonsense.
- Example: "To be honest, the WiFi signal in here is a bit pants."


Quid

- What it means: A slang term for one pound sterling (£).
- Example: "Could you lend me a couple of quid for the vending machine?"

Taking the Piss / Taking the Mickey

- What it means: To mock or make fun of someone, usually in a light-hearted, non-malicious way.
- Example: "He's not being serious, he's just taking the piss."



A background image showing a group of diverse students in a university setting. A young woman in a floral dress is in the center, smiling and looking at a book. To her right, a young man in a blue sweater is also smiling and looking at a book. Other students are partially visible on the left and right edges. The background is slightly blurred, showing a building and some trees.

**You don't have
to see the
whole staircase,
just take the
first step.**

CONCLUSION

Just The Beginning

Mastering the jargon is a great start. But what about the culture behind it?

Understanding what is said is one thing. Understanding how to build relationships, navigate feedback, and progress in your career is another.

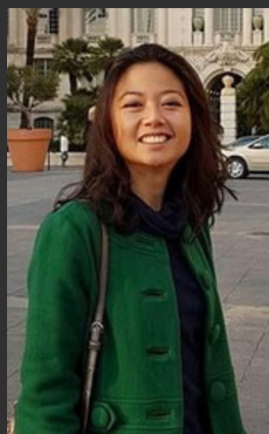
Language is just the first step in the 'Adapt' phase of your UK journey. To truly thrive, you need a strategy for all four stages:

- **Prepare:** Starting with a clear plan.
- **Adapt:** Integrating seamlessly into the culture.
- **Transform:** Turning your international experience into a unique strength.
- **Harness:** Building long-term career momentum and success.

At Critical Path Finder, we provide a dedicated system designed for ambitious international professionals like you. We help you move beyond just surviving in the UK workplace to truly succeeding in it.

Ready to build your complete pathway to success?
Book a complimentary, no-obligation consultation to discuss your journey and see how the PATH system can work for you.

— Karla and
Stephanie





Critical Path Finder

info@criticalpathfinder.co.uk

CriticalPathFinder.co.uk

[@criticalpathfinder](https://www.instagram.com/criticalpathfinder)