

Colours in business English

In business English there are many idiomatic expressions involving the whole range of colours and the word *colour* itself. They are used in a wide range of business sectors including finance, human resources, banking, etc. Some phrases are used very frequently, even in formal and official contexts.

A Let us first look at the idioms containing the word *colour*. Match the idioms in the left-hand column with their definitions in the right-hand column.

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| 1. with flying colours | a. to pretend to be someone else in order to deceive people |
| 2. to nail your colours to the mast | b. exaggerated or biased |
| 3. to sail under false colours | c. with great success, with distinction |
| 4. to see the colour of someone's money | d. to feel queasy or slightly ill |
| 5. to see someone in their true colours | e. traditional features of a place |
| 6. highly coloured | f. to make sure someone can pay before you let them have something |
| 7. to give colour to something | g. to see what someone's real character is, especially when it is unpleasant |
| 8. to feel off-colour | h. to publicly state one's opinions about a subject |
| 9. local colour | i. something totally separate and different |
| 10. a horse of a different colour | j. to make something more credible or more believable |

Key: 1c, 2h, 3a, 4f, 5g, 6b, 7j, 8d, 9e, 10i

B Complete the following definitions with one of the following colour words: *black, pink, green, silver, blue, white, red, grey, golden, brown*.

1. In the U.S., _____ *slip* is a notice of the termination of employment or layoff that an employee receives in his pay envelope.
2. If you describe something as a _____ *elephant*, you mean that it is a waste of money because it is completely useless.
3. You say that something is *in* _____ *and white* when it has been written or printed, and not just said.
4. If a person or company, or if their bank account is *in the* _____, they have spent more money than they have in their account and therefore they owe money to the bank.
5. If someone in authority *gives a* _____ *light* to something, they give permission for it to happen or to be done.
6. A _____ *opportunity* is a great opportunity that might never come again.
7. If something happens *out of the* _____, it is completely unexpected and it often happens very suddenly.

8. A _____ *area* is something that is not clearly defined and does not conform to an existing set of rules, neither one way nor another way.
9. Food that you take to work with you to eat for your lunch is called _____-*bag lunch*.
10. When you want to emphasise that every difficult or unpleasant situation has some advantages, you say that *every cloud has a _____ lining*.

Key: 1. pink, 2. white, 3. black, 4. red, 5. green, 6. golden, 7. blue, 8. grey, 9. brown, 10. silver

B. Complete the following sentences with one of the following colour words: *golden, blue, blanche (white in French), black, white, red, green, silver, rose, yellow*.

1. The company has been *in the _____* since they began to cut costs. (= profitable)
2. The new manager was given *carte _____* to change the policies in the company. (= permission)
3. I want to start a new business but the _____ *tape* involved is very frustrating. (= bureaucracy)
4. She told her supervisor *a _____ lie* and said that she was ill yesterday when actually she wasn't. (= unimportant)
5. Their daughter hasn't worked a day in her life. She *was born with a _____ spoon in her mouth*. (= rich)
6. The company manager received a huge _____ *handshake* on retiring. (= sum of money)
7. The young man is rather _____ and does not have enough experience to write the report. (= inexperienced)
8. My mom's always *looked at life through _____-tinted glasses*. (= unrealistic view)
9. The recession hit _____-*collar workers* much harder than white-collar workers. (=factory workers)
10. The man has a _____ *streak* and he will not defend you if you are having a problem. (= is cowardly)

Key: 1. black, 2. blanche, 3. red, 4. white, 5. silver, 6. golden, 7. green, 8. rose, 9. blue, 10. yellow