

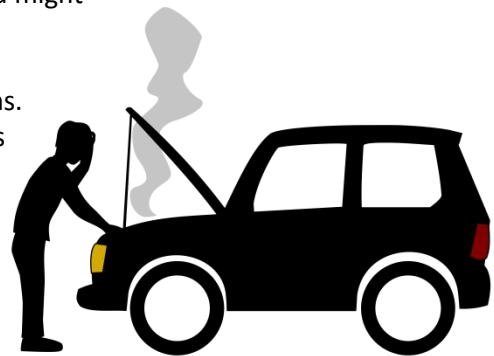
Slowing Down And Stopping Progress

As we all know, things don't always run smoothly, and it is very easy to **run into problems**. There are so many dangers out there which can stop your progress. Something unexpected can **come up** at any time, which can cause a project to **stall** and slow down temporarily. If it is something more serious, then a project might **grind to a halt** completely. If you are not able to **overcome** the situation, then you might need to **go back to the drawing board** and start again completely.

With any project or plan, there are always several **obstacles** which are necessary to overcome, whether that is in relation to budgets, deadlines, personnel problems or legal issues. All of these issues could really slow down or **inhibit/stifle** your progress.

A company needs to **overcome many setbacks** if it wants to be successful. If a company stops growing, then it **stagnates** or **treads water**. Sometimes a company might reach a point at which it can go no further. It might **hit a ceiling** because it does not have funds in order to continue growing. This could be the same in your career development. Sometimes you might reach a point at which you feel you cannot progress within a company. Maybe the company isn't big enough, so you might have hit a ceiling.

Another area of business full of obstacles is negotiations. Talks between companies can easily **stall** if both parties are struggling to come to an agreement. If this continues, then one party might **pull out of** the deal and then the deal might **fall through** completely, meaning that it doesn't happen at all. Plans and events can also **fall through**, meaning that they fail to happen completely.



A) Match the phrases to the definitions

Based on the context of the article, can you match the words in the box to the definitions listed below? Then add the word into the example sentence. You may need to change the form of the word to fit the meaning of the sentence.

to come up	to stall	to grind to a halt	to overcome
an obstacle	a setback	to stagnate	to hit a ceiling
to pull out	to go back to the drawing board	to inhibit/stifle	to fall through

1. To slow down gradually and then stop completely: _____

"The construction project _____ due to a lack of funding."

2. To stop making progress, potentially only temporarily: _____

"Trade talks between the two countries have _____ due to disagreements."

3. Something which takes you back in your progress: _____
"My career suffered a real _____ when I didn't get my expected promotion."
4. To appear unexpectedly (a situation or a problem): _____
"Unfortunately, I must cancel the meeting later because something has _____."
5. To withdraw from something, to stop being involved in something: _____
"Some investors have _____ of the project, which is a complete disaster for us. We need to find new investment quickly."
6. To reach a height from which you cannot go any further: _____
"The business has _____. I don't see how we can really grow without significant investment."
7. To slow down the progress of something, or to prevent the progress of something: _____
"Personally, I think that these excessive meetings are really _____ our progress."
8. Something that gets in the way: _____
"There are several _____ which we need to overcome if we want to break into this new market. Budgeting issues, increased competition are 2 of the main _____ that we need to overcome."
9. To start something again because the first plan failed: _____
"Unfortunately, this system isn't working. I suggest that we should _____."
10. To succeed in dealing with or getting past something: _____
"I am very proud of my team for _____ so many setbacks along the way."
11. To stay the same without growing or making progress: _____
"I realised that my career was _____ at my previous country, so I decided to make a change."
12. To fail to happen (a plan, a deal, negotiations, an event): _____
"Our plans _____ at the last minute, because not enough people were able to attend the event."

B) Key Words in a New Context

Below you can find a paragraph. Can you fill in the gaps in the paragraph with the words from the box below? You may need to change the form of some of the verbs in order for them to fit into the sentence.

obstacles	to stall	to overcome
setbacks	to stagnate	hit a ceiling
to go back to the drawing board	to inhibit	to fall through

The Troubled Expansion

[Scene: The executive team of a retail company are sitting in a meeting. The company has discussing the problems facing the company's plan to expand by opening more stores in shopping centres around the country.]

Moderator: Good morning, everyone. Thank you for coming to this meeting to discuss the problems we're facing with our plan to expand our retail stores. Let's start by discussing the _____ that we've experienced so far.

Alan (CEO): As we all know, the Covid-19 pandemic caused our expansion plans to _____. Our plans to open 2 new stores in London and 1 in Liverpool in 2020 _____ due to covid, and we lost a lot of revenue as a result. My ambition is to see us open stores in these locations in the next year, but further problems have _____, and we need to find a solution.

Deborah (CFO): Yes, we're facing serious financial problems. As Alan mentioned, covid 19 seriously dented our revenue, and we are now also dealing with supply chain problems, a decrease in customers due to difficult economic times, and soaring energy costs for running our stores. These are all huge _____ standing in the way of expanding any further.

Alan (CEO): As a result, we've _____ in terms of what we can accomplish with our current resources. We need more investment if we are going to continue to expand.

Deborah (CFO): To be honest, I think we need to scrap our expansion plans completely and _____. We need a completely new strategy whereby we focus on a smaller number of stores in key locations. This could help us generate revenue more quickly and build momentum for future growth at a time when the economic situation is more stable. There are just too many potential problems at the moment which could be impossible to _____.

Alan (CEO): I see your point, but the company has been _____ for so long. We have been going nowhere and customers are starting to get bored of us. I believe

that scaling back our expansion would mean less exposure, thereby _____ the development of the brand itself at a time of intense competition. I think we need to remain ambitious. We would be better off looking into alternative financing options. For example, we could look at leasing our new stores instead of buying the properties outright. This could help us reduce our upfront costs and free up capital for other areas of the business.

Moderator: These are both valid options. Let's meet again next week, and each of you come up with a potential roadmap. Alan, if you could draw up a plan for targeting new investment; and Deborah, how about you draw up a potential strategy for narrowing our focus to a few stores. We'll weigh up the pros and cons of each before coming to a decision.

C) Comprehension Questions

1. Deborah mentions that covid 19 seriously 'dented' the revenue of the company. Based on the context, what do you think she means by the verb 'dented'?

2. Deborah also mentions the fact that energy costs are 'soaring'. Based on the context, what do you think this verb means?

3. Why does Alan advocate for a more ambitious and risky strategy?

4. At the end of the discussion, what does the moderator ask Alan and Deborah to do?

5. Based on what you have read in the short discussion, do you agree more with Alan or with Deborah?

D) More Uses of Selected Key Words**To come up**

When something unexpected appears, we often don't have time to explain exactly what it is. Therefore it is perfectly normal and natural just to say that 'something' has come up:

"Apologies, I have to cancel our meeting later. Something really urgent has come up."

If we say that something 'has' come up (present perfect tense), it means that something has come up, but we haven't had the chance to solve it yet. If we have already solved something, we can say that 'something came up' (past simple tense).

"Sorry for being late. Something rather important came up, but we've solved it now."

A setback

Here are the main collocations used with setback:

To suffer a setback / to have a setback / to experience a setback / to encounter a setback / to face a setback / to deal with a setback / to overcome a setback / to recover from a setback / to learn from a setback / to avoid a setback

To inhibit / stifle

To inhibit is also an excellent Business English phrase with many collocations:

to inhibit innovation / to inhibit creativity / to inhibit growth / to inhibit progress / to inhibit collaboration / to inhibit motivation / to inhibit performance / to inhibit flexibility

The opposite of this word is to 'foster', meaning to encourage the development of something. We can use 'foster' with all of the collocations above.

"Our creative brainstorming sessions really foster innovation."

To fall through

We use the phrase 'to fall through' for anything which failed to happen. In business this is mainly used with events, plans and deals.

"Unfortunately, the project fell through due to budget constraints."

"We wanted to take the staff on a trip abroad, but our plans fell through due to the pandemic."

"The deal fell through because we failed to agree on some crucial terms."

E) Idioms + 'regarding'

To go back to the drawing board regarding..

"We had to go back to the drawing board regarding the rebrand. Our original idea just didn't resonate with our customers at all."

F) Glossary of words to talk about slowing down and stopping progress

to run into problems
to come up
to stall
to grind to a halt
to overcome
an obstacle
a setback

to stagnate
to hit a ceiling
to pull out
to go back to the drawing board
to inhibit
to stifle
to fall through