

## Sounding Professional When Talking About Being Busy and Prioritizing



We all go through periods when work or life seems to be moving too fast. Maybe the busy period in the industry is **picking up**, your workload is increasing and you are struggling to keep up. Eventually, there are more and more **pressing** tasks which have to be completed immediately, meaning that you have to prioritize quickly and **put off** any less urgent tasks. If this continues for too long then you might become **overwhelmed** with your workload. It is also possible to become overwhelmed by emails, requests, questions, offers and information. If it continues over an extended period of time, then you may start to damage your health and suffer burn-out. Hopefully, things will **wind down** long before you reach that point, and your workload will decrease.

There is certainly an art to **juggling** different tasks, and some people are very good at it. However, it is important not to **take on** too many tasks, because if your number of tasks is too much for you to handle, you will **spread yourself too thin**. In order to avoid this, it is important either to **drop** some tasks or to delegate tasks to other team members.



As a company or as a team, it is also important not to take on too many clients, otherwise you will spread yourselves too thin and you might need to **bring in** some new team members, either by hiring them or by bringing them in from another department.

Sometimes you might not be able to attend a meeting or a social event because you are completely **snowed under**. Or you might be **tied up** with a specific task or project, meaning that you have to prioritise your tasks and appointments.

### 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 pick up	pressing	to put off	overwhelmed
to wind down	to juggle	to take on	to spread yourself too thin
tied up	to bring in	to drop	snowed under

1. Feeling as if something is too much for you to handle: \_\_\_\_\_

*"I am feeling a little \_\_\_\_\_ with my workload at the moment."*

2. To increase in speed, amount or intensity: \_\_\_\_\_

*"The summer season is approaching, and business is \_\_\_\_\_."*

*"The number of visitors usually \_\_\_\_\_ around May."*

3. To deal with many different tasks at the same time: \_\_\_\_\_

*"I am currently \_\_\_\_\_ two projects at the moment, so I'm certainly feeling a lot of pressure."*

4. To be busy with a specific task meaning that you cannot do something:  
\_\_\_\_\_

*"Unfortunately, I won't be able to attend the meeting later because I'm a little bit \_\_\_\_\_ with this event which is taking place tomorrow."*

5. To try to do too many things at the same time, meaning you cannot pay the necessary attention to all of them: \_\_\_\_\_

*"We are currently \_\_\_\_\_ with our huge portfolio of clients. We either need to drop some clients or hire more staff."*

6. To add a new responsibility, task or client to your schedule: \_\_\_\_\_

*"I decided to \_\_\_\_\_ a few new clients in order to earn some extra money."*

*"I'm happy to \_\_\_\_\_ that task."*

7. To have so much work to deal with: \_\_\_\_\_

*"Unfortunately, I will not be able to come on the trip at the weekend. I am completely \_\_\_\_\_ with work."*

8. To decrease in speed or intensity: \_\_\_\_\_

*"My day usually \_\_\_\_\_ at about 4pm, so I should be free for a meeting at around 4.30 if it works for you?."*

*"Business is starting to \_\_\_\_\_ for the Christmas holidays."*

9. Requiring immediate attention: \_\_\_\_\_

*"As this is a really \_\_\_\_\_ matter, we would appreciate your assistance as soon as possible."*

10. To delay or postpone something (this can be used with events, but it is great to use with tasks): \_\_\_\_\_

*"We need to \_\_\_\_\_ this task \_\_\_\_\_ until next week. We have more pressing matters to deal with now."*

11. To start to involve someone new in a particular activity: \_\_\_\_\_

"We need to \_\_\_\_\_ some staff from other departments to deal with this heavy workload."

12. To stop doing an activity: \_\_\_\_\_

"I need to \_\_\_\_\_ this project in order to free up some extra time."

### 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? For some gaps, there is more than one word which could fit. You may need to change the form of some of the verbs in order for them to fit into the sentence.

To pick up	Snowed under	to take on	to put this off	overwhelmed
Pressing	to bring in	tied up	to wind down	to juggle

## Preparing For The Summer Tourist Season

Good afternoon everyone, I wanted to have a little chat with you all regarding the upcoming Summer season in our tour company, and how we can organise our city tour guides effectively for a successful season.

Unfortunately, our main guide John can't join us today because he is a little \_\_\_\_\_ with other projects at the moment, but I'll update him with everything that we have discussed in the meeting today.



As you know, the summer season is fast approaching, and we need to be ready for the number of bookings to skyrocket very soon. Last year, we had five times as many tourists during the summer season as during the winter season, and to be honest, we were a little \_\_\_\_\_ with the number of bookings that we received. As a result, we received a lot of complaints regarding cancelled tours, and tours with too many people to make it enjoyable. It also had a really detrimental effect on some of our tour guides. Some of them had to \_\_\_\_\_ too many tours and a few of them were almost suffering from burn-out by the time the season started \_\_\_\_\_ in October.

As you know, we are heading into mid-April, and the number of tourists in the city is higher than at this point last year. This suggests that the season is already \_\_\_\_\_, and we are likely to see a bigger summer season than last year.

Consequently, this is already a very \_\_\_\_\_ issue, for which I think we need an action plan in place by the end of this meeting.

We need to \_\_\_\_\_ at least 6 new tourist guides immediately. Many of

our temporary guides from last summer have decided not to join us for this summer due to their bad experiences last year. I am aware that we have a few months before peak season, but we simply can't afford to \_\_\_\_\_ any longer, because we need all guides to be fully trained and to know their tours perfectly within 3 weeks. If visitor numbers continue on the same trajectory, we could already be \_\_\_\_\_ by the the end of May, and I really don't want that to happen.

Ideally, we need 3 volunteers from you, our year-round guides, to train up 6 new summer guides. You will each receive overtime pay for your work. Who would like to \_\_\_\_\_ this task?

### C) Comprehension Questions

1. What is going to happen very soon with the number of bookings that the company is likely to receive?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
2. Based on the context of the sentence, what do you think that the adjective 'detrimental' means in paragraph 3?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
3. What happened to some of the guides near the end of last year's summer season, and what is the main consequence of that for the company going into this new season?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
4. What are the 2 main reasons why it is necessary to bring in new tourist guides immediately?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

## D) More Uses of Selected Key Words

### To pick up / To wind down

We often use these words to talk about how things are generally increasing or decreasing in speed and intensity. Therefore, don't be afraid to use the word 'things' with these phrasal verbs:

*"The new business is really going well. Things are really picking up"*  
*"We decided to leave the event at midnight because things were winding down."*  
*"Things start to wind down at around 5pm, so I usually finish at around 5.30."*  
*"The restaurant opens at 5pm, and things start to pick up around 6.30."*

With the same general meaning, we also use the word 'business':

*"Business has finally started to pick up again after the pandemic."*

### To put off

We can 'put off something' or 'put something off', but when we use a pronoun ('it' or 'this') we must put it in the middle of the phrasal verb:

*"We won't manage to finish this today, let's put it off until tomorrow."*  
*"We can't keep putting this off, we need to get it done as soon as possible."*

We can also 'put off doing something':

*"I decided to put off making the decision until the next week."*  
*"I couldn't concentrate, so I decided to put off writing the proposal."*  
*"I always put off cleaning the kitchen."*

### Overwhelmed

If something causes us to feel overwhelmed, we can describe it as 'overwhelming':

*"My workload was so overwhelming; I just couldn't keep up."*  
*"Presenting in front of all those people was so overwhelming."*

### To spread yourself too thin with

We can 'spread ourselves too thin with something'. We also use this often in the present continuous to talk about something happening currently:

*"We're spreading ourselves too thin with too many clients."*

---

We can also use this in the future continuous:

*"We can't take on any more clients because we'll be spreading ourselves too thin."*

**E) Glossary of words for sounding professional when talking about being busy and prioritizing**

to pick up

to wind down to

pressing

to put off

overwhelmed

to juggle

detrimental

to take on

spread yourself too thin

tied up

to bring in

to drop

snowed under