

## Sound Professional When Talking About Uncertain Times

We all face situations where everything is **up in the air** and we have no idea what is going to happen next. Maybe the economy is in a **turbulent** or **volatile** period, changing rapidly and unpredictably. Maybe some unforeseen chaos in your life or career has caused you to **deviate from** the plans that you had originally made, or maybe your plans have gone completely **out the window**.

Whenever you start something new, whether this is a new job, a new project or even when you move to a new town, you are **in uncharted waters**, so problems can **come up out of the blue** all the time and completely **derail** your plans.

The key for any business or individual is to plan for such **unforeseen circumstances** as best as possible. Having a plan B as it is otherwise known, is a wise choice for anyone regardless of how calm you think the future will be. Plans often have to change according to how a situation develops, which is why it is a good idea to **play it by ear** even if you would feel more comfortable with a fixed, rigid strategy. Management are sometimes guilty of **moving the goalposts**, changing the aims of your project or changing your targets, and you have no choice but to adapt.

Sometimes, no matter how much you prepare, you will face a situation whereby there is nothing that you can do. In such cases, you will simply have to tell the customer that **your hands are tied**.



### 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.

up in the air	turbulent/volatile	to deviate from	to come up
to go out of the window	out of the blue	in uncharted waters	
unforeseen circumstances	to derail	to play it by ear	
to move the goalposts	my hands are tied		

1. Completely unexpectedly: \_\_\_\_\_

*"Her resignation came completely \_\_\_\_\_."*

2. To prevent a plan from succeeding: \_\_\_\_\_

*"The covid 19 pandemic completely \_\_\_\_\_ our company expansion plans."*

3. Completely uncertain and unresolved: \_\_\_\_\_

*"The potential deal is completely \_\_\_\_\_ at the moment. We can only wait and see what their next move is going to be."*

4. To appear unexpectedly (often referring to a problem): \_\_\_\_\_

*"I'm sorry, I need to cancel our meeting. Something important has just \_\_\_\_\_."*

5. To change the rules, targets or conditions unfairly: \_\_\_\_\_

*"We are desperate to secure this deal, but they keep \_\_\_\_\_."*

6. Likely to change unpredictably: \_\_\_\_\_

*"The markets are really \_\_\_\_\_ at the moment, so we need to be extremely cautious with our investments."*

7. To change from your original plan: \_\_\_\_\_

*"We have had to \_\_\_\_\_ from our original plan, because it wasn't working as we expected."*

8. Events that we were not able to predict or see beforehand: \_\_\_\_\_

*"Due to \_\_\_\_\_ related to the venue, we will unfortunately have to cancel the event later."*

9. In a completely new situation that we have never been in before: \_\_\_\_\_

*"The economy is moving into \_\_\_\_\_ as we exit from the pandemic."*

10. To proceed according to circumstances or results as opposed to a fixed plan: \_\_\_\_\_

*"We don't really know how keen they are going to be in the negotiation. We just have to \_\_\_\_\_."*

*"I'm not sure what I'm going to do this weekend. I think I'm just going to \_\_\_\_\_. I guess it depends on the weather and how I am feeling."*

11. Not free to behave or act in a way that I would like because something is preventing it: \_\_\_\_\_

*"I wish that I could help you with your problem, but unfortunately I cannot legally assist you with this. \_\_\_\_\_."*

12. To stop being used completely: \_\_\_\_\_

*"Due to massive budget cuts, our plans have \_\_\_\_\_."*

**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.

up in the air	volatile	to deviate	to play it by ear
to go out of the window	out of the blue	in uncharted waters	
goalposts	hands were tied	Moving the goalposts	

## Investing in Our Chaotic World

Investors around the world are currently fighting with a \_\_\_\_\_ market. The aftermath of the pandemic, geopolitical tensions, and economic uncertainties have combined to create an environment that is difficult to predict and challenging to navigate. Indeed, everything seems to be \_\_\_\_\_ at the moment, and investors are struggling to make sensible decisions.

One tactic that investors like to use in such environments is to look back into the past. "History doesn't necessarily repeat itself but it rhymes," said one economist when asked about whether it is possible to say that the world economy really is in \_\_\_\_\_, or whether it is just following a predictable pattern. According to his statement, the economy might \_\_\_\_\_ slightly from past patterns, but it will follow a general trend as a result.

It is not necessarily the economy which is the unpredictable factor here, instead it is the political and social changes which cause the \_\_\_\_\_ to keep moving. Most of these changes start brewing over a period of time, meaning that it is possible to foresee them at least to some extent. However, in 2019, the pandemic hit, completely \_\_\_\_\_, which sent markets plummeting around the world. Investment strategies, normal business practices, even normal life \_\_\_\_\_ within weeks. Investors' \_\_\_\_\_ to a much greater extent than usual. Governments kept \_\_\_\_\_ with regards to when lockdowns were going to end, or just be eased, or get stricter. Investors had no choice other than to \_\_\_\_\_ much more than was comfortable.

Hopefully, such a devastating event will not occur again, at least for another generation. However, market volatility is going to continue for some time, so it is important to be cautious. Investors have to keep an eye on geopolitical and economic developments remembering the mantra: "History doesn't repeat itself but it rhymes."

**C) Comprehension Questions**

1. In paragraph 3, what contrast is suggested between standard political/ social changes and the coronavirus pandemic ?  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_
2. Based on the context of paragraph 3, what do you think the verb 'brewing' means?  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_
3. Based on context, can you think of a synonym for the verb 'plummeting' in paragraph 3?  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_
4. What do you think is meant by the phrase 'History doesn't repeat itself but it rhymes'? To what extent do you agree with that statement both in terms of the economy or history in general?  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

**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."*

**Up in the air**

When we talk about a situation being up in the air, we don't normally describe the whole situation. Instead, it is perfectly acceptable and normal to say 'everything is up in the air' or 'things are up in the air'.

*"It is hard to make important decisions at the moment. Everything is up in the air."*

**In uncharted waters**

Here are some uses of 'in uncharted waters'

Entering into uncharted waters:

*"The economy is entering into uncharted waters."*

Sailing through uncharted waters:

*"The company is currently sailing through uncharted waters in this new and exciting market."*

We can also say 'uncharted territory' with the same meaning:

*"We have never seen losses as bad as this. We are in completely uncharted territory."*

**E) Idioms + regarding**

If we want to use the idioms in the middle of a sentence, it is better to follow these with the word 'regarding'

**Up in the air regarding**

*"Everything is up in the air regarding the state of the economy at the moment, so we are being very cautious with our investments."*

*"Things are up in the air regarding how many staff members will be laid off."*

**In uncharted waters regarding**

If we want to use this in a sentence related to the economy, for example, we can say that the economy is in uncharted waters. However, it is better to say that we are in uncharted waters:

*"We're currently in uncharted waters regarding the economy."*

*"The company is currently in uncharted waters regarding the number of layoffs that it has had to make."*

**To play it by ear regarding**

Rather than 'playing something by ear', it is always better to use 'it' in the middle of this idiom - 'play it by ear regarding':

*"We would be best of playing it by ear regarding the negotiations, because we don't know what they are going to offer."*

*"We should play it by ear regarding the launch date. Let's wait 3 months to see how the product is developing before we set a fixed date."*

**To move the goalposts**

*"Management keep moving the goalposts regarding the launch date. It is proving*

*to be really detrimental to the project.”*

**My hands are tied regarding**

*“Unfortunately, my hands are tied regarding redundancies. There is nothing that I can do to prevent them.*

**F) Glossary of words for sounding professional when talking about uncertain times**

**up in the air**

**turbulent**

**volatile**

**to deviate from**

**to come up**

**to go out of the window**

**out of the blue**

**plummeting**

**in uncharted waters**

**unforeseen circumstances**

**to derail**

**to play it by ear**

**to move the goalposts**

**my hands are tied**

**brewing**