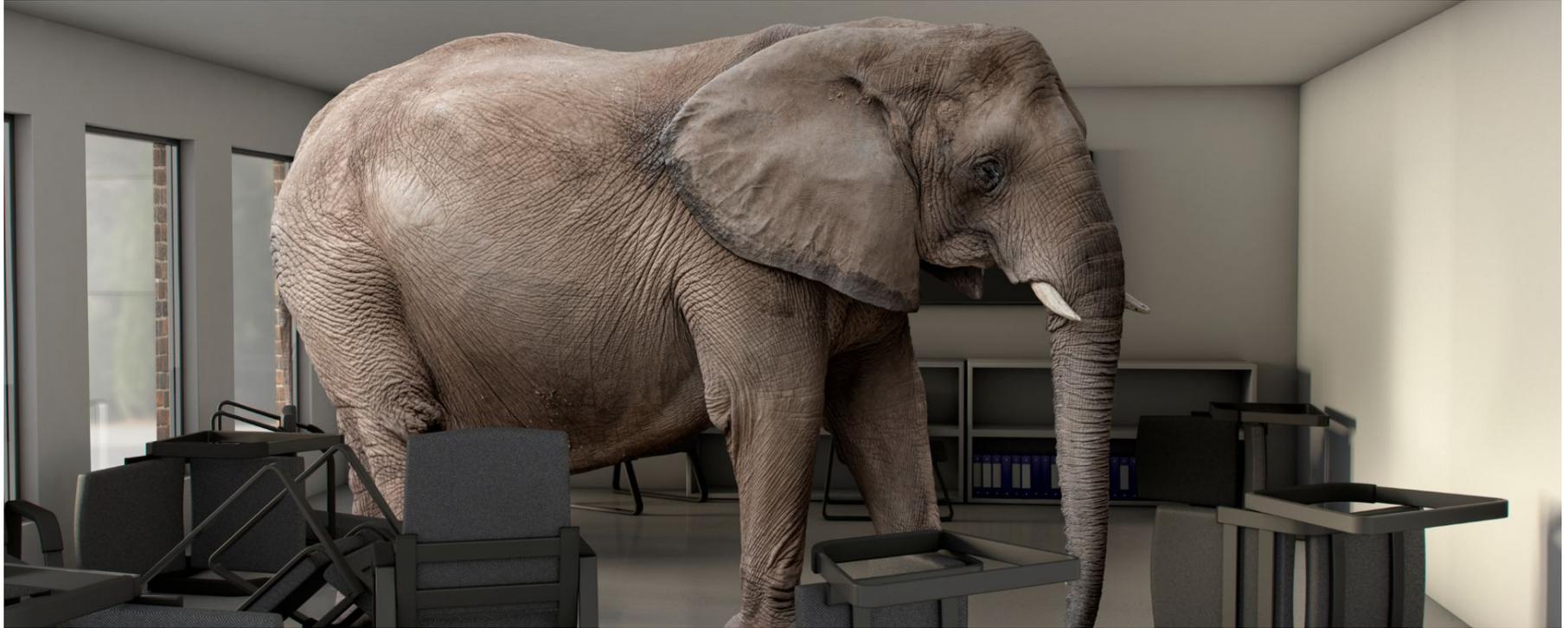


A large elephant is standing in a modern office environment. The elephant is the central focus, with its trunk resting on a desk. The office has large windows on the left, several desks with chairs, and a bookshelf in the background. The lighting is soft and even.

C1 - Idioms and unusual word order

Learn some common idioms and how to use and understand 'inversion' and 'adjective inversion'

Do you know the idiom depicted here?



Answer the following questions

1. Do you often use idioms when speaking in your first language?
2. Have you ever heard an English idiom and misunderstood it?
3. Why do people use idioms? Can they be problematic?
4. What's an idiom or phrase that really stuck with you?
5. Do idioms make a speaker sound more fluent?



Keeping up isn't easy ...

Ariana had always been the type to put on a brave face, even when her wallet was running on empty. Her friends seemed to be living the dream — spa weekends, rooftop brunches, and spontaneous getaways to Europe. Meanwhile, Ariana was juggling student loan payments, rent, and a job that paid just enough to keep the wolf from the door.

Last Friday, her best friend invited her on a shopping spree. “Just a few things for the summer!” she’d chirped. Ariana smiled and nodded, but inside, she was drowning in anxiety. How could she admit she didn’t have the cash to burn?

Later that evening, Ariana checked her bank app and sighed. She knew it was time to face the music. She called her friend and explained everything. To her surprise, her friend was understanding. “Why didn’t you say something earlier?” she said. “We could’ve done something more low-key.”

That was the moment Ariana realised — she didn’t need to bend over backwards to fit in. True friendship, she thought, should never come at the cost of financial peace.

Comprehension check: true or false?

1. Ariana enjoys spending money freely with her friends.
2. She hides her financial stress from her friends.
3. Her friend becomes angry after Ariana's confession.
4. Ariana has been avoiding her friends completely.
5. The story ends with Ariana feeling more at peace.



Idioms in the reading activity

a. Put on a brave face

1. Make great effort to help or please others.

b. Keep the wolf from the door.

2. Pretend everything is fine when it isn't.

c. Drowning in anxiety.

3. Extra money to spend freely.

d. Face the music.

4. Confront an unpleasant truth or consequence.

e. Bend over backwards.

5. Just manage to survive financially.

f. Cash to burn.

6. Feeling overwhelmed with worry.

Unusual word order [1 of 2]

We can change the usual S + V + O word order for special effect, emphasis, or for stylistic purposes.

Negative adverbials (inversion in conditional, time, and frequency):

1. **Never have I seen** such a stunning view. {I have never seen such a stunning view}
2. **Rarely does she complain.** {She rarely complains.}
3. **Only after he left did she realise.** {She realised after he left.}

Structure: (Negative adverb/expression) + auxiliary + subject + main verb

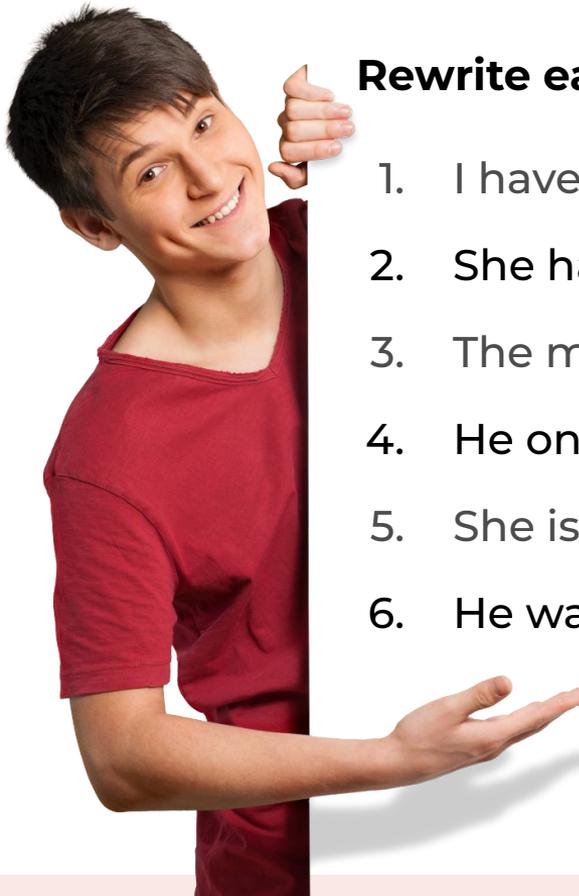
Unusual word order [2 of 2]

Adjectives are usually positioned before the noun in English. However, sometimes they can be positioned after. If they are, the meaning becomes different:

1. The café has free Wi-Fi.
2. The café is a Wi-Fi-free zone.



Transformation activity: Use inversion



Rewrite each sentence using inversion:

1. I have never been more embarrassed in my life.
2. She had barely finished her sentence when he interrupted.
3. The meal was so delicious that we ordered more.
4. He only realised the mistake after he submitted the form.
5. She is rarely late for class.
6. He was extremely angry when he heard the news.

Can you guess the idiom meanings?

Dialogue 1: Office conflict

Jordan: “Ugh, this new policy is driving me up the wall.”

Mia: “Tell me about it! We’re already stretched thin.”

Jordan: “I tried raising it with management, but it went in one ear and out the other.”

Mia: “Classic. They nod and smile, then sweep it under the rug.”

Dialogue 2: Planning a trip

Liam: “I want to go to Thailand, but flights are through the roof.”

Noah: “Let’s keep our eyes peeled for discounts.”

Liam: “Good idea. I’m not made of money!”

Noah: “Don’t worry. I’ll help you plan — we’ll do it on a shoestring.”

Idioms from the two dialogues

1. **Driving me up the wall:** To make someone very annoyed, irritated, or angry.
2. **In one ear and out the other:** Someone is not paying attention or is quickly forgetting what is being said to them.
3. **Sweep it under the rug:** To conceal or hide something, especially a problem or unpleasant situation, rather than deal with it directly.
4. **Through the roof:** (of prices or figures) reach extreme or unexpected heights.
5. **Keep your eyes peeled:** Telling someone to watch very carefully.
6. **Not made of money:** Someone doesn't have a lot of money and can't afford to spend it freely, especially on expensive or extravagant things.
7. **On a shoestring:** To do something with very little money or a very small budget.



Thank you for your support.

YouTube: @elucidatedenglish