

Catch Word #259 – Back in the saddle

Episode description

In this Catch Word episode, Andrew and Kassy teach you two idiomatic expressions you can use when talking about something returning to normal: back in the saddle and back in business. Study with this vocabulary lesson and improve your English listening and speaking.

Catch Word is the Culips vocabulary series where you can learn idioms, expressions, and phrasal verbs that native speakers use all the time. Improve your English fluency with Catch Word!

Fun fact

The Sarmatians are credited with designing the first saddle for horseback riding over 2000 years ago!

Expressions included in the study guide

- Back in business
- AAA
- In no time
- Back in the saddle
- To be onto something
- The wheels are in motion



Transcript

Note: The words and expressions that appear in **bold text** within the transcript are discussed in more detail in the Detailed Explanations section that follows the transcript. The transcript has been edited for clarity.

Andrew: Hello there, everyone. My name's Andrew.

Kassy: And I'm Kassy.

Andrew: And this is the Culips English Podcast.

Hey there, friends. Welcome back to Culips. This is Catch Word, the series for intermediate and advanced English learners where we teach you idioms, phrasal verbs, and expressions that will help improve your English listening and speaking. Joining me today to teach this lesson is my cohost, Kassy. Hey there, Kassy.

Kassy: Hey, Andrew, and hey, listeners. Today we're going to teach you two expressions that are about recovering and returning to normal after a break or a setback.

Andrew: A break or a setback. OK, sounds good. And, guys, don't forget that there's a study guide and transcript for this episode that's available to all Culips members. And we think following along with the guide while you listen to this lesson is a great way to learn with us. If you're not a member yet but you want to join, you can learn all of the details and sign up by visiting our website, which is Culips.com. C-U-L-I-P-S.com.

And before we get started, we also want to give a shout-out to one of our listeners who left us a five-star rating and a kind review on Apple Podcasts.

Kassy: Yes, one of our listeners from the USA with the username Morningbreezeme wrote, "For me, Culips is the best podcast to learn English. I like the way they talk and laugh. And it's so charming and clear, so you want to listen to them again and again. Thank you for creating such a wonderful, high-grade podcast for us." Wow, thanks for the fantastic review, Morningbreezeme. We're glad you're learning a lot with us. And we want to give a big thank you to everyone out there who's been liking, subscribing, rating, and reviewing Culips on all the various apps and social media platforms. Keep it up. It helps us a lot and lets other English learners from around the world connect with us and improve their English with us.

Andrew: Kassy, I love that username, Morningbreezeme. That's a great one.

Kassy: I know. It's like, oh, it's like poetic.

Andrew: Very poetic. I agree. So, thank you, Morningbreezeme.

And let's kick things off by introducing our first expression for this episode, which is to be **back in business**, OK? The expression is **back in business**. And then we use it with the verb to be, so the full expression to be **back in business**. And now remember, everyone, that the theme for this lesson is returning or recovering, to do something again after taking a break or maybe being inactive for a period of time. Or maybe even you had a setback. And a setback is what happens when a problem occurs and that problem stops your progress.

So, for example, if you were maybe planning to open a café. You wanted to open a café and have a business, and you are almost ready to open the doors. You built the café, you decorated the café, you bought the coffee machine, you made the menu, you're all ready to go. But then suddenly you go to apply for your business license and the business license was denied. Well, that would be a setback.

Kassy: That would be a pretty huge setback. But then if you're able to solve the problem and get approved for your business license, well, then you would be **back in business**.

Andrew: **Back in business.** All right. So, the café plan that was temporarily stopped is continuing again. It's progressing as normal. And in that situation, you could say, well, I'm **back in business**, OK?

So, Kassy, we gave the example of an actual business, right? It's a café and is almost ready to open, there was a setback, and the problem was solved. And now they're **back in business**. And that makes sense to me. It's like, you know, we have the word business right in the expression. It's kind of clear in that situation.

But we also use this expression in many different situations, not just about operating a business, but it could be in any kind of situation where things are progressing normally, but then something happens. Maybe there's a problem, a setback, or maybe you even just lose interest and stop doing it. There's something that stops the progress but then, when things recover and progress is continued, in that situation, you are **back in business**.

Kassy: Yeah, this could be used in so many situations, maybe you're on a road trip, and your car gets a flat tire. So, you have to, you know, get off the road, call **AAA** and get them to help you put a new tire onto your car. Once that new tire is installed, you can start your journey again. Then you could use this expression, we're on the road again, we're **back in business**.

Andrew: Exactly. Or your example of a road trip made me think of driving in Canada. Because Canada is such a big country sometimes when you go on a road trip and you drive, you can fall outside of cell phone coverage areas. Now, this might sound crazy to some people that live in small countries. But in a big country like Canada, when you really get out to the sticks, to the countryside, sometimes there can be no cell phone coverage, and you have no signal.

And I've had this happen to me before and suddenly you realize how dependent you are on your phone when you can't check it all the time. You're like, oh, come on, come on, there's no signal here. But then suddenly, when you drive into an area where there is signal, you're **back in business**, the signal is back, and you can use your phone as much as you would like.

Kassy: Those are both great examples that use the phrase **back in business** but have nothing to do with an actual business.

Andrew: Exactly. Well, I think we're ready to take a listen to a couple of example conversations now. So why don't we check out the first one?

Kassy: Let's do it.

Coworker 1: Could you help me with my computer? It seems to be frozen. I don't know what's happening. Do you know what's going on?

Coworker 2: Why don't you try hitting Control-Alt-Delete and then resetting your computer?

Coworker 1: Control-Alt-Delete. OK, I'm doing that now.

Coworker 2: Is it working?

Coworker 1: Yes, we're **back in business**. All right, thanks.

Coworker 2: No prob.

Andrew: So, in that example conversation, we heard two coworkers trying to solve a computer problem. One of the worker's computers was frozen. And he was able to unfreeze it with the advice of his coworker, who told him to hit the Control-Alt-Delete button combination that solves many computer problems. So he did that and the computer reset and was working again. And he said, "Yeah, we're **back in business**. OK, the problem is solved. We're good to go."

And, Kassy, I have a question for you. I think it's very interesting here that the speaker said, "We're **back in business**." Why didn't he say "I'm **back in business**"? Because it's kind of funny, like, it's his computer and his coworker doesn't really have anything to do, that wasn't her problem. She was just helping him. But then he says, "Yeah, we're **back in business**." Why does he say we are **back in business** in that situation?

Kassy: I think it's because she helped him to fix his computer problem. So they were a team now, in a way. And when his computer started working again, he wanted to celebrate together with his coworker by saying, you know, we're **back in business**, we did it, it's fixed.

Andrew: And you'll find that English speakers do this a lot with this expression, even though it might be an individual problem. If they get help from someone else, well, when the problem is solved, they'll say we're **back in business**. I thought that was interesting and worth mentioning.

Kassy: On that note, let's listen to example #2.

Andrew: Let's do it.

Friend 1: So, are you still training for that fall marathon? How's that going?

Friend 2: I am, but unfortunately, I sprained my ankle last week. So I've had a bit of a setback, but I hope I can continue my training as soon as possible.

Friend 1: Ouch. That sounds painful. Well, just rest for a bit and take it easy. You'll be **back in business in no time**.

Friend 2: That's good advice. I'm going to do that.

Kassy: OK, in this example conversation, two friends are talking about a fall marathon. One friend is training for this marathon. And, unfortunately, in the middle of his training, he sprained his ankle and he hit this setback. He can no longer train, he's unable to run. But the other friend consoled him by saying, "Ah, just rest for a bit, you'll be fine. You'll be **back in business in no time**."

Andrew: Exactly. So, you'll be **back in business in no time** in this context means you will be running and training for that marathon again **in no time**. And **no time** means very, very quickly, right? That could be a little bit of a confusing expression in itself, **no time**. But it just means very, very quickly.

Kassy: Yeah, **no time** doesn't mean zero time, it means a little bit of time.

Andrew: Yeah. And actually, we usually say **in no time**, right? And we use it often when we're talking about wishes and hopes for the future. And when we're communicating those to other people, like, oh, you will improve your English **in no time** means you'll improve your English very quickly, I think.

One final note from this conversation before we move on is about that injury that the runner suffered. Since I'm a runner myself, I thought I would explain this one, because if there are any runners that are out there listening, this is great vocabulary to know. Spraining an ankle, I sprained my ankle. So, that's an injury that occurs when you twist your ankle and you put pressure on it. And it results in a very, very painful ankle where you can't really walk or move on it without a lot of discomfort. So you didn't really break the bone, you just twisted it really severely. That is the injury that we call a sprained ankle.

Kassy: I think it's one of the most common sports injuries.

Andrew: Yeah, well, I kind of sprained my ankle lightly almost every day just walking around.

Kassy: Oh, no.

Andrew: I don't even need to run to do it.

OK, Kassy, why don't we move on to the second key expression for this episode. And I have to say, it's very similar to the first expression, both in form and meaning. So, in the way that the expression is set up and in the meaning of the expression. So, key expression #2 is to be **back in the saddle**. To be **back in the saddle**. And the word saddle is not a common, everyday word, so we should maybe explain it. It's spelt S-A-D-D-L-E. And a saddle has two meanings. The first meaning is the device that we put on the back of a horse when we want to ride that horse. That is called the saddle. And so you can imagine somebody riding on a horse sitting in, it's usually made of leather, I think, Kassy, a saddle?

Kassy: Yup.

Andrew: Yeah. That is the first meaning. And it also has an additional meaning of a bike seat, a bike seat. So we can call it a saddle on a bicycle, and maybe even on a motorcycle as well. I'm not sure if motorcyclists call it a saddle, but I can imagine maybe some people calling it a saddle. So a saddle is just a place that you sit, and it's placed on a horse or on a bike.

So then, Kassy, could you put all the pieces together for us here? What does it mean, then, if you're **back in the saddle**. It doesn't mean that you're riding a horse again. What exactly does it mean?

Kassy: Actually, it kind of could mean a little bit like riding a horse again. Literally, it means to start doing something, again that you stopped doing for a period of time. And I imagine that a long time ago, they might have used this expression for riding a horse. Maybe you got injured or you were sick for a while and you weren't able to ride a horse, literally. So when they got **back in the saddle**, it means they were literally able to start riding again. But we don't have to use this only with horses. You can use **back in the saddle** to describe any activity that you start doing that you haven't done for a while or you haven't been able to do for a while.

Andrew: Yeah, I think **you're probably onto something** there, Kassy, because now that I think about it, I've even heard some people say things like I'm back on my horse again to talk about doing an activity again after pausing for a while, I don't think that's a very common expression, but I have heard it before.

So there's something to this idea about being back on a horse or being **back in the saddle**, meaning to resume doing an activity that you stopped. And it could be for whatever reason. There could be thousands of different reasons why people stop doing things. Maybe you lost motivation. Maybe you had a setback. Maybe you got injured or sick, who knows, but something stopped you from doing something. But then when you have recovered and you are continuing again that activity after the break, then in that situation we can say, "I'm **back in the saddle**, I'm **back in the saddle again**."

Kassy: Well, I think on that note, we should take a listen to our first example conversation.

Andrew: All right, let's do it.

Student 1: Want to play some video games later tonight?

Student 2: I thought you quit gaming, though?

Student 1: Oh, that was just for the exam period. But now that finals are finished. I'm **back in the saddle** again.

Student 2: Ah, cool. Sounds good to me. Is 10 pm OK?

Student 1: Yeah, perfect. I'll catch you online then.

Andrew: In that example conversation, we heard two classmates talk about video games. And they decided that they are going to play video games tonight because the exams are finished, the final exam period is finished. So one of the friends quit gaming for the final period while he had to write his exams. But now that he's finished, the summer vacation is here, he is **back in the saddle** again. He is going to play video games again. He sounds like a good student, Kassy.

Kassy: Yeah. I mean, he has a lot of willpower to stop playing video games, even if it's just for a short amount of time.

Andrew: Exactly. Shall we listen to example conversation #2 with this expression?

Kassy: Let's do it.

Interviewer: I saw a rumour on the internet that you're **back in the saddle** again and have started writing the follow-up to your latest novel. Is it true?

Writer: It's true. It's been a decade since *The Sky Over the Countryside* was released. But I finally started to write its sequel.

Interviewer: That's so exciting. I can't wait to read it.

Writer: Well, it will still be a couple of years before it's in readable condition. But **the wheels are in motion**, at least.

Kassy: In this example conversation, we have a radio host and a famous writer discussing his new sequel to his famous book, *The Sky Over the Countryside*. Now, this original book, *The Sky Over the Countryside*, was released a decade ago, 10 long years ago. And this writer is finally starting to write the sequel. He is **back in the saddle**. He's starting to write once again after a long period of writer's block.

Andrew: Yeah, I imagine like if you write a popular novel and then you publish it, you're kind of like, OK, I can relax for a little bit. But if you're not careful, maybe a decade could fly by and then you're, like, I should start writing again. Especially if the book was like really, really popular, then, well, maybe you could retire for life. But, you know, artists they like to create and he said that he is back writing again. He's **back in the saddle**. And **the wheels are in motion**. That's another expression that we use when we're talking about something is happening now. So, **the wheels are in motion**, he is writing the novel right now.

Kassy: I wish him luck.

Andrew: Kassy, one last note before we wrap up this episode. That is for any music fans out there that there are a couple of classic rock songs that contain these expressions. So, if you like, kind of, classic metal and rock music from the '80s and '90s, then you guys should check out these tunes on YouTube or your favourite music streaming app. There is a song by AC/DC called **Back in Business**. And there's a song by Aerosmith called **Back in the Saddle**. So if you want to practice these expressions through some classic rock music, you could do that.

Kassy: Andrew, you have good taste in music.

Andrew: Yeah, there we go. Well, everyone, that's going to bring us to the end of this episode. And let's just do a quick recap here. We learned two expressions that you can use when you resume doing something after taking a break or facing a setback or even having a period of inactivity. So those two expressions are **back in business** and **back in the saddle**.

So thanks for listening. We hope you learned a lot with us today and we hope that you are able to use these English expressions in your future conversations.

Kassy: Our website is Culips.com. If you want to get the study guide, including the transcript and practice exercises for this episode, check out the website to download it.

Andrew: Becoming a Culips member is a great way to support us, but it's not the only way. You can also support us by leaving us a five-star rating and a positive review on your favourite podcast app, by telling your friends about Culips, or by following us on social media.

Kassy: We'll be back soon with another brand-new episode. Talk to you then. Bye.

Andrew: Bye.

Detailed Explanations

Back in business

Idiom

To be **back in business** means to return to normal after a period of inactivity. We can use this expression whenever something returns to its original working condition after being broken or shut down. We can also use it to talk about people who have recovered from an injury or sickness and are feeling healthy again.

So, if you take a break from something (because you're sick or injured or because something breaks and needs repairing) and then you start doing that thing again, then you're **back in business**.

For example, you could say, "I'm **back in business**!" after recovering and fully healing from a broken leg. Or if you dropped your phone on the sidewalk and broke the screen, you would take your phone to the repair shop to get the screen replaced. After getting your repaired phone back, you could say, "All right! I'm **back in business**." In other words, your phone is back and working normally again.

Here's one more example with **back in business**:

Manuel: Want to go for a cruise tomorrow afternoon? I was thinking we could take the bike down to the ocean and drive down Beach Ave.

Lillie: On your motorcycle? I thought it broke down. Or is it **back in business** now?

Manuel: It was in the shop for a couple weeks, but I just got it back. Come on, let's take it out. The weather's supposed to be great tomorrow.

Lillie: OK, sounds fun.

Manuel: Perfect! I'll pick you up at 2:00.

Lillie: See you then.

AAA

Acronym

In this episode, Kassy talks about a driver that gets a flat tire and pulls over to the side of the road to call **AAA** for help. **AAA** (pronounced triple A) is an acronym for the American Automobile Association.

AAA is a service that provides roadside assistance to drivers in the United States. If you subscribe to **AAA**, then you can get help if you have a problem while driving. Some of the services that **AAA** provides include jump-starting a car if the battery dies, towing a vehicle if it breaks down, helping to change a flat tire, providing some gas to drivers who have run out of fuel, and unlocking car doors for people who have locked themselves out.

The Canadian equivalent of the **AAA** is the CAA (pronounced C-A-A) or Canadian Automobile Association. They provide roadside assistance to Canadian drivers.

So, when you hear North American English speakers talking about **AAA** or CAA, they are talking about a service they can call for help with their cars when they encounter a problem on the road.

Here's one more example with **AAA**:

Telephone conversation

Dominick: Hello?

Kristen: Hey, Dominick. It's Kristen. I'm just calling to say that I don't think I'll be able to meet up with you this afternoon. When I was on my way to your place, my car broke down on the highway.

Dominick: Oh my! Are you OK? Do you need any help?

Kristen: No, no. I'm fine. I called **AAA** and they're coming to tow my car to the repair shop. I don't think I'll be able to get it fixed in time to meet you later, though.

Dominick: That's totally fine. We can meet up a different time. Good luck with your car. I hope it's an easy fix.

Kristen: I hope so, too. Thanks again and talk soon. Bye!

Dominick: OK, bye.

In no time Idiom

We hear an example in this episode about a guy who sprained his ankle while running. His friend tries to cheer him up by telling him, "You'll be back in business **in no time**." **In no time** is an idiomatic expression that means very quickly or surprisingly quickly. So, in other words, the friend says that he will feel better and recover from the injury very soon.

When something happens **in no time**, it happens extremely soon and faster than expected. For example, if you buy something online and the package is delivered the same day, then you could say that it arrived **in no time**. Or if you take your car to the mechanic for a tune-up (which is checking your car to make sure everything is working correctly) and the mechanic tells you, "Your car will be ready **in no time**," then this means that your car will be ready very quickly and that the tune-up will not take a long time to do.

A similar expression is **in no time at all**. This has the exact same meaning and can be used in the same situations as **in no time**.

Here are a couple more examples with **in no time**:

While driving in a car together

Shay: So, how long will it take us to get there?

Margot: It's not far. If we're lucky and there's no traffic, we'll get there **in no time**. If there's traffic, though, then it could take around 45 minutes.

Shay: It's not quite rush hour yet, so I think we might avoid any traffic.

Margot: I'll turn on the radio and we can listen to the traffic report.

Shay: Good idea!

Lucien: We have our book club meeting next week. Did you finish reading the book yet?

Montana: Yeah, I finished it last night. It was excellent. What about you?

Lucien: No, I haven't started it yet. I need to start soon. It's almost 500 pages!

Montana: It's a long book, but you'll finish it **in no time**. It's really entertaining and easy to read.

Lucien: Great! I'm looking forward to reading it.

Back in the saddle

Idiom

Back in the saddle means to resume doing an activity again after taking a long break. This expression was originally used to describe horseback riders who recovered from an injury. After getting injured, a rider would have to stop riding until they felt better. After fully recovering, the rider would be able to start riding again and would be **back in the saddle**. A saddle is the leather seat placed on a horse's back that a rider sits on. Over time, this expression started to be used to talk about resuming any activity after taking a long break from doing it.

For example, if band takes a long break after releasing an album but then many years later returns to the recording studio to make a new album, that band could say that **they're back in the saddle**. Or if someone starts dating after being single for a long time, then that person could say they're **back in the saddle**. So, whenever you resume an activity after not doing it for a long time, you are **back in the saddle**.

Here are a couple more examples with **back in the saddle**:

Shanna: I can't wait for tonight's baseball game!

Clinton: Yeah, it's going to be great! I'm so excited because I heard Juan Rodriguez will be the starting pitcher.

Shanna: Really? I thought he was injured.

Clinton: Yeah, he missed almost 50 games because of a shoulder injury, but he's **back in the saddle** and fully recovered now.

Shanna: That's great!

Emmie: Don't you think it's time to get **back on the saddle** and start dating again? It's been almost 5 years since you broke up with Billie.

Teejay: Has it really been that long? I guess I should try to meet someone new, but I don't even know where to start.

Emmie: I have a friend I want to introduce you to. She's so fun, cute, and kind. I think you guys would get along great. Can we all have coffee together next week?

Teejay: OK, that sounds fun, actually. I'm in!

To be onto something

Idiom

To be onto something means to have found or created something new, interesting, or effective. In this episode, Kassy says she thinks the origin of the idiom to be back in the saddle is related to horseback riding. In response, Andrew says, “I think **you’re probably onto something**.” In other words, Andrew acknowledges that Kassy has discovered an interesting explanation for the origin of the idiom.

We often use this idiom when someone has a good idea that could lead to a larger or more important discovery with more time, work, or thought. For example, a scientist might **be onto something** while doing research in the lab. With more time and effort, that initial discovery could lead to a bigger result. Or a colleague might **be onto something** during a brainstorming meeting at the office. This means the colleague has a great idea and, with more time and development, that great idea could turn into a successful project. So when someone is **on to something**, it means that they have a good idea or have discovered something interesting, and more time developing that good idea can lead to an even greater result or success.

Here’s one more example with **to be onto something**:

Elis: Sales went up over 50% after we started the new advertising campaign you created.

Cari: Wow, that’s incredible!

Elis: How were you able to create such an effective advertisement?

Cari: Well, my team and I did a lot of research and development, but we knew we **were onto something** after one of our social media posts went viral.

Elis: Amazing! You all are doing a great job. Keep up the fantastic work!

The wheels are in motion

Idiom

In this episode, we hear an example conversation where a writer talks about a new book that he is writing. He says the book won't be finished for a couple of years, but **the wheels are in motion**. When **the wheels are in motion**, it means an event is progressing or developing right now. So, in other words, the writer means that he is currently writing and working on finishing the book.

We use this expression often when talking about projects that take a long time to complete, such as construction projects or new government policies, projects that have been started but are not yet finished. For example, you could say that **the wheels are in motion** when talking about new school in your neighbourhood. This means that construction on the school has started but isn't finished yet. Or if you say **the wheels are in motion** when talking about a government plan to provide financial assistance to new parents, it means that the government has agreed to help new parents but hasn't started to do so yet.

Here are a couple more examples with **the wheels are in motion**:

Arla: I heard you're going to go back to school to do a master's degree. Congratulations!

Devin: Thanks! But that's not exactly true. I've applied to a few schools, but I haven't been officially accepted to any yet. **The wheels are in motion**, though. So, if I do get accepted, it's true I'll be a student again.

Arla: I'm sure you'll get accepted to all the schools you applied for.

Janelle: Have you heard any updates about when we'll be getting new computers for the office? My computer is so old and slow, it's hard to do any work with it.

Micah: I talked to head office about it last week. They told me **the wheels are in motion** for getting our new computers, but it will still be a few weeks before they arrive.

Janelle: That's good news. I hope they arrive sooner than later. I don't know how much longer I'll be able to work with this one.

Quiz

1. In which situation would you be back in business?

- a) you leave your food in the oven too long and burn it
- b) you miss the bus
- c) your computer breaks but then your friend helps you fix it
- d) your friend calls you and cancels the plans you made together

2. In which situation would you call AAA?

- a) when your computer won't turn on
- b) when your car breaks down
- c) when your air conditioner won't turn off
- d) when you lose your phone

3. What does back in the saddle mean?

- a) to take horseback riding lessons
- b) to stop doing an activity
- c) to start doing an activity for the first time
- d) to resume doing an activity after taking a long break

4. What does the wheels are in motion mean?

- a) something is in progress
- b) something is paused
- c) something is finished
- d) something hasn't started yet

5. Fill in the blank with the best option. If there's no traffic, then we'll be able to get there _____.

- a) before time
- b) after time
- c) in no time
- d) in front of time

Writing and Discussion Questions

1. Can you think of a time when you were back in business? Describe what happened.
2. Have you ever called AAA (or a similar service) because your car broke down? What happened? If this has never happened to you, why do you think that is?
3. Can you think of a project where the wheels are in motion, but it hasn't finished yet? Talk about it.
4. Brainstorm some situations where someone could be back in the saddle again. What difficulties might someone face when returning to normal in those situations?
5. What are some things that you can finish in no time? Make a list and then talk about why you're able to do those things so quickly.

Quiz Answers

1.c 2.b 3.d 4.a 5.c

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