
BBC LEARNING ENGLISH

The English We Speak

All hands on deck



This is not a word-for-word transcript.

Feifei

Hello and welcome to The English We Speak, where we explain expressions used by fluent English speakers so that you can use them, too! I'm Feifei, and I'm joined by Georgie. How are you?

Georgie

I'm very well, thank you, Feifei. How are you?

Feifei

I'm very well, thank you Georgie.

Georgie

Well, that's good news. Now, my friend used an interesting phrase at the weekend, and I thought it would be a good one to share. It's 'all hands on deck'.

Feifei

Oh yes, I know this one, but tell us the story of how they used it.

Georgie

So, I was on holiday with a group of friends, and a few of us went food shopping. When we got back, we wanted the others to help unload the car and put everything away. My friend went in the house and shouted, "All hands on deck!"

Feifei

Right, so in other words, everyone in the group needs to help. And 'all hands on deck' comes from a boating context, doesn't it?

Georgie

Yes, it does. A deck is the top part of a boat – the flat bit that you can walk on. So if someone on a boat shouts "all hands on deck", sometimes in an emergency, it means everyone must go to the deck and help fix a problem.

Feifei

So, your friend used the phrase as a command – she was telling everyone to come and help. But we can also use it as an adjective, for example, 'We needed an all-hands-on-deck approach to fix the problem at work'. Let's listen to more examples.

Examples

I helped my friends move house at the weekend. It was all hands on deck, but we got it done quite quickly.

I had a really fun party at the weekend, but there was a lot of mess afterwards, so it was all hands on deck to clean up.

I helped out with a workshop at work and Georgie was saying "all hands on deck" because she really needed everyone to help out.

Feifei

Now, this phrase is about teamwork, isn't it? Are there any other phrases about people working together?

Georgie

Yes! You've got a fun rhyming one which is 'Teamwork makes the dream work', and 'Many hands make light work'. Both of these mean that a task may seem big if you're doing it by yourself, but when lots of people work together, it can be completed more quickly or easily.

Feifei

OK. Let's recap. We learnt the phrase 'all hands on deck' which we use when we need everyone in a group to help do a task or fix a problem. We also learnt 'Teamwork makes the dream work', and 'Many hands make light work'. Thanks for joining us.

Georgie

Goodbye.

Feifei

Bye bye!