



American Expression E2633 On the drawing board

IOTS Publishing Team
International Online Teachers Society
Since 2011

The phrase “on the drawing board” is an idiomatic expression used to describe something that is still in the planning or design stage. When an idea or project is said to be on the drawing board, it has not yet been completed or put into action. Instead, it is being carefully considered, shaped, and refined. The expression conveys a sense of preparation and creative development before practical implementation.

The origin of the phrase comes from the world of architecture and engineering. Before the advent of digital design software, architects and engineers used large drawing boards to sketch blueprints and plans. Complex structures such as buildings, bridges, and machines began as detailed drawings spread across these boards. If a project was “on the drawing board,” it literally meant that it existed only as a plan, not yet as a physical structure.

In modern language, the phrase extends far beyond construction and engineering. Businesses often use it to refer to new products or strategies that are being developed but not yet launched. For example, a company might announce that a new service is on the drawing board, signaling innovation while managing expectations. In this context, the phrase communicates potential and creativity without guaranteeing immediate results.

The expression also suggests flexibility. When something is on the drawing board, it can still be revised or redesigned. Changes are easier to make during the planning stage than after implementation. This aspect of the phrase highlights the importance of thoughtful preparation. It implies that careful consideration now can prevent costly mistakes later, reinforcing the value of strategic thinking.

On a personal level, individuals may use the phrase to describe life plans or aspirations. Someone might say that a career change is on the drawing board, meaning they are exploring possibilities but have not yet taken action. This usage reflects the broader human process of imagining futures before committing to them. It captures the space between intention and execution.

There is also a sense of anticipation embedded in the phrase. Projects on the drawing board often carry excitement about what might come next. At the same time, they remain uncertain, as not all plans move beyond this stage. The expression therefore balances optimism with realism, recognizing both the promise and the fragility of early ideas.

In conclusion, “on the drawing board” symbolizes the creative and preparatory phase of any endeavor. Rooted in the practical image of architects sketching blueprints, it has evolved into a versatile expression for ideas still being shaped. It emphasizes planning, flexibility, and possibility, reminding us that every completed achievement once began as a concept carefully outlined before becoming reality.

Questions for Discussion

1. What advantages are there to keeping an idea “on the drawing board” before putting it into action?
2. How does the planning stage influence the long-term success of a project?
3. Can spending too much time on the drawing board prevent progress? Why or why not?
4. In your experience, what kinds of ideas are best refined carefully before execution?
5. How does the metaphor of a drawing board shape the way we think about creativity and preparation?