

A

Buildings

To **build something/someone up** can be used metaphorically to mean to praise someone or something in a way that will increase expectations of them: The press has **built up** the young footballer so much that it must be extra pressure on him.

Note how **cement** is used to fix bricks firmly in place and to make relationships more solid. It can be used in this way both as a noun and a verb: Let's have a drink together **to cement** our partnership.

To come up against a brick wall is used metaphorically, meaning to meet a barrier: When I tried to find out who had opened my letters, I **came up against a brick wall**.

Ceiling can be used to suggest a limit to something: They put a **ceiling** on the number of planned redundancies.

The **glass ceiling** is a phrase used to refer to an invisible barrier that stops people, especially women, from rising to top positions at work.

Roof is used in a number of common metaphors: The **roof fell in** on my world on the day he died. [My world collapsed ...]

Conversely, the **floor** can **give way** metaphorically when you faint.

The informal phrase **go through the roof** is used about prices, meaning to increase in a rapid, uncontrolled fashion.

Hit the roof means get very angry: My mother will **hit the roof** when she sees what we've done.

Window, both literally and metaphorically, means an opening.

A **window of opportunity** is a chance to do something special: If you see a **window of opportunity**, then take advantage of it.

If a quality or idea **goes out (of) the window**, it means it departs: Once the boys started going around together, common sense **went out of the window**.

As a very tall building, **tower** conveys an idea of distance from ordinary people. If someone lives in an **ivory tower**, he/she does not know about the unpleasant and ordinary things that happen in life: Academics are often criticised for living in their **ivory towers**.

If a person is a **tower of strength**, they are extremely strong (in an emotional rather than a physical sense): Our friends were a **tower of strength** when our house burnt down.

If a person or thing **towers above** something or someone, they are either outstandingly tall or outstanding in some other positive way: Lauren **towers above** all her classmates, although she is actually one of the youngest students.

B

Entrances

Gateway is used metaphorically in the phrase **be a gateway to**, meaning give an opportunity to get somewhere: A degree in law is a **gateway to** a well-paid job.

Door can also be used in a similar way to gateway above, but it is also used in many other metaphorical phrases as well: Failing his final exams **closed/shut** a lot of **doors** for him. Knowing several languages **opens doors** when it comes to finding work. The new year gives us the opportunity to **close the door on** the past and make a fresh start. Doing something **through/by the back door** suggests doing it unofficially: Jack came into the business **by the back door** – the manager knew him from university. Doing something **behind closed doors** suggests secrecy: Unfortunately, the decision was taken **behind closed doors** and no one knows exactly why it was made.

Key can be used as a noun to suggest the importance of something: This research may **provide/hold the key to** developing a cure for cancer. Knowing the right people is **the key to success** in that country.



Exercises

30.1 Match up the words to make metaphors. Explain what each metaphor means.

- | | | |
|-------------|--------------------------|---------------|
| 1 glass | <input type="checkbox"/> | a strength |
| 2 ivory | <input type="checkbox"/> | b opportunity |
| 3 brick | <input type="checkbox"/> | c ceiling |
| 4 back | <input type="checkbox"/> | d tower |
| 5 window of | <input type="checkbox"/> | e wall |
| 6 tower of | <input type="checkbox"/> | f door |

30.2 Complete these sentences with the appropriate verb.

- 1 The price of fuel has through the roof.
- 2 We hope that this scientist's work may the key to solving the problem.
- 3 A degree in economics the door to a number of interesting job opportunities.
- 4 Whenever you try to initiate something in this company you find that, sooner or later, you up against a brick wall.
- 5 Lucy's father the roof when he saw that she'd dyed her hair purple.
- 6 Ben over all the other lawyers in his firm. He is by far the most able.
- 7 Her argument with the board last year has, unfortunately, a lot of doors for her in this company.
- 8 The roof in on their world the day that war was declared.

30.3 Rewrite the underlined parts of these sentences using one of the expressions on the opposite page.

- 1 My brother is always enormously supportive whenever I have a problem.
- 2 We'll never know what the US and Russian Presidents said to each other when they met in private.
- 3 The fee for this work will depend on the time it takes, but cannot be more than \$20,000.
- 4 The cost of petrol has risen dramatically in the last six months.
- 5 Having children often makes a marriage stronger.
- 6 Winning an Olympic medal can provide an opportunity to develop a career in the media.
- 7 The most important decision we have to take now is where to locate our business.
- 8 The professor has spent all his life in one university or another and really finds it very difficult to cope in the real world.
- 9 Lena has always said what an incredible person Max is – I hope I won't be disappointed when I meet him.

30.4 Here are some more metaphors based on aspects of buildings. Can you guess what the underlined expressions mean and rewrite them?

- 1 He earns very little, barely enough to keep the wolf from the door.
- 2 The speaker's request for questions was met with a wall of silence.
- 3 Working on this project together should help to lay the foundations for a good relationship in the future.
- 4 Nathan's prolonged illness left his business in ruins.
- 5 This government should clean up its own backyard before criticising other countries.

30.5

Over to you

Which of the metaphors in this unit also work as metaphors when translated literally into your own language? Look at exercise 30.4 as well as the opposite page.