

Common Idioms in English

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2. Delete the meanings or examples for the idioms in this document and let the students find out and write for themselves.

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Idiom	Explanation	Example usage
A hot potato	An issue which many people are talking about and which is usually disputed	
A penny for your thoughts	A way of asking what someone is thinking	
Actions speak louder than words	People's intentions can be judged better by what they do than what they say.	
Add insult to injury	To further a loss with mockery or indignity; to worsen an unfavorable situation.	
An arm and a leg	Very expensive or costly. A large amount of money.	<i>My Verizon plan cost an arm and a leg each month.</i>
At the drop of a hat	Without any hesitation; instantly.	<i>He will argue about politics at the drop of a hat.</i>
Back to the drawing board	When an attempt fails and it's time to start all over.	
Barking up the wrong tree	Looking in the wrong place. Accusing the wrong person.	<i>One day he is going to get hurt because he is always barking up the wrong tree.</i>
Be glad to see the back of	Be happy when a person leaves.	
Beat around the bush	Avoiding the main topic. Not speaking directly about the issue.	
Best of both worlds	All the advantages.	
Best thing since sliced bread	A good invention or innovation. A good idea or plan.	
Bite off more than you can chew	To take on a task that is way too big.	
Blessing in disguise	Something good that isn't recognized at first.	

Burn the midnight oil	To work late into the night.	
Judge a book by its cover	Judge something primarily on appearance.	
Caught between two stools	When someone finds it difficult to choose between two alternatives.	
Costs an arm and a leg	This idiom is used when something is very expensive.	
Cross that bridge when you come to it	Deal with a problem if and when it becomes necessary, not before.	
Cry over spilled milk	When you complain about a loss from the past.	
Curiosity killed the cat.	Being Inquisitive can lead you into an unpleasant situation.	
Cut corners	When something is done badly to save money.	
Cut the mustard	To succeed; to come up to expectations; adequate enough to compete or participate	
Play Devil's Advocate	To present a counter argument (although it might not be one's own opinion).	
Don't count your chickens before the eggs have hatched.	Don't make plans for something that might not happen.	
Don't give up the day job.	You are not very good at something. You could definitely not do it professionally.	
Don't put all your eggs in one basket	Do not put all your resources in one possibility.	
Drastic times call for drastic measures.	When you are extremely desperate you need to take drastic actions.	
Elvis has left the building.	The show has come to an end. It's all over.	
Every cloud has a silver lining.	Be optimistic, even difficult times will lead to better days.	
Far cry from	Very different from.	

Feel a bit under the weather	Feeling slightly ill.	
Give the benefit of the doubt	Believe someone's statement, without proof.	
Hit the nail on the head	Meaning: to say something that is exactly.	<i>You hit the nail on the head! Jennifer is sad because she misses her boyfriend.</i>
Let the cat out of the bag	Share information that was previously kept a secret.	<i>Once he lets the cat out of the bag, his life will never be the same.</i>
Off one's rocker	Crazy, demented, out of one's mind, in a confused or befuddled state of mind, senile.	
On the ball	When someone understands the situation well.	
Once in a blue moon	Something happens very rarely.	<i>I drink red wine once in a blue moon.</i>
A Picture paints a thousand words.	A visual presentation is far more descriptive than words.	
Piece of cake	A job, task or other activity that is easy or simple.	
Put wool over other people's eyes	To deceive someone into thinking well of them.	
See eye to eye	Two (or more people) agree on something.	
Sit on the fence	Someone does not want to choose or make a decision.	<i>I am still on the fence about this company.</i>
Speak of the devil!	When the person you have just been talking about arrives.	
Steal someone's thunder	To take the credit for something someone else did.	
Take with a grain of salt	Not to take what someone says too seriously.	<i>He is a little bit crazy, so you have to take whatever he says with a grain of salt.</i>
Taste of your own medicine	Something happens to you or is done to you, that you have done to someone else.	
The ball is in your court	It is up to you to make the next decision or step.	<i>The ball is in your court! You decide how the company should be managed!</i>

To hear something straight from the horse's mouth	To hear something from the authoritative source.	
Whole nine yards	Everything. All of it.	
Wouldn't be caught dead	Would never like to do something.	
Your guess is as good as mine.	To have no idea, do not know the answer to a question.	<i>I have no idea what he is talking about. Your guess is as good as mine.</i>