# Common Idioms in English

Free list and worksheet for ESL teachers and students, to learn idioms or prepare ESL lesson plans.

Dear ESL teacher, to create a customized worksheet for your lesson, you can:

1. Copy a selection of idioms to another document or remove some idioms from this document.
2. Delete the meanings or examples for the idioms in this document and let the students find out and write for themselves.

## More Resources

Find more worksheets about English idioms on our website: <https://jimmyesl.com/free-english-idioms-worksheets/>

To receive updates on ESL resources and tips for ESL teacher, please join the JimmyESL mailing list:   
<https://jimmyesl.com/newsletter/>

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| 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. | *My Verizon plan cost an arm and a leg each month.* |
| **At the drop of a hat** | Without any hesitation; instantly. | *He will argue about politics at the drop of a hat.* |
| **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. | *One day he is going to get hurt because he is always barking up the wrong tree.* |
| **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. | *You hit the nail on the head! Jennifer is sad because she misses her boyfriend.* |
| **Let the cat out of the bag** | Share information that was previously kept a secret. | *Once he lets the cat out of the bag, his life will never be the same.* |
| **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 drink red wine once in a blue moon.* |
| **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 am still on the fence about this company.* |
| **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. | *He is a little bit crazy, so you have to take whatever he says with a grain of salt.* |
| **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. | *The ball is in your court! You decide how the company should be managed!* |
| **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 have no idea what he is talking about. Your guess is as good as mine.* |
|  |  |  |
|  |  |  |
|  |  |  |