

Commonly used Idioms

Idiom: an idiom is a manner of speaking that is natural to native speakers of a language

Every language has its own collection of wise sayings. They offer advice about how to live and also transfer some underlying ideas, principles and values of a given culture / society. These sayings are called "idioms" - or proverbs if they are longer. These combinations of words have (rarely complete sentences) a "figurative meaning" meaning, they basically work with "pictures".

Examples:

A hot potato

Speak of an issue (mostly current) 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.

At the drop of a hat

Meaning: without any hesitation; instantly.

Back to the drawing board

When an attempt fails and it's time to start all over.

Ball is in your court

It is up to you to make the next decision or step

Barking up the wrong tree

Looking in the wrong place. Accusing the wrong person

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

Meaning: 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 to big.

Blessing in disguise

Something good that isn't recognized at first.

Burn the midnight oil

To work late into the night, alluding to the time before electric lighting.

Can't judge a book by its cover

Cannot 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 spilt 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 [possibly derived from "cut the muster"]

To succeed; to come up to expectations; adequate enough to compete or participate

Devil's Advocate

To present a counter argument

Don't count your chickens before the eggs have hatched

This idiom is used to express "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

Meaning: Feeling slightly ill.

Give the benefit of the doubt

Believe someone's statement, without proof.

Hear it on the grapevine

This idiom means 'to hear rumors' about something or someone.

Hit the nail on the head

Do or say something exactly right

Hit the sack / sheets / hay

To go to bed.

In the heat of the moment

Overwhelmed by what is happening in the moment.

It takes two to tango

Actions or communications need more than one person

Jump on the bandwagon

Join a popular trend or activity.

Keep something at bay

Keep something away.

Kill two birds with one stone

This idiom means, to accomplish two different things at the same time.

Last straw

The final problem in a series of problems.

Let sleeping dogs lie

Meaning - do not disturb a situation as it is - since it would result in trouble or complications.

Let the cat out of the bag

To share information that was previously concealed

Make a long story short

Come to the point - leave out details

Method to my madness

An assertion that, despite one's approach seeming random, there actually is structure to it.

Miss the boat

This idiom is used to say that someone missed his or her chance

Not a spark of decency

Meaning: No manners

Not playing with a full deck

Someone who lacks intelligence.

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

Happens very rarely.

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

This means to deceive someone into thinking well of them.

See eye to eye

This idiom is used to say that two (or more people) agree on something.

Sit on the fence

This is used when someone does not want to choose or make a decision.

Speak of the devil!

This expression is used 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

This means not to take what someone says too seriously.

Taste of your own medicine

Means that something happens to you, or is done to you, that you have done to someone else

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

Synonyms

Synonyms: They are words and expressions that have a similar meanings. We can use synonyms in the writing exams, for example.

Words	Synonyms
Hi	Hello
Goodbye	Take care
A lot of	Lots of
Looking forward to seeing you soon	Can't wait to see you next time
Big	Large, enormous
Center	Middle
Dangerous	Risky
How're you doing?	How are you?
Shop	Store
Not miss	Forget
Start	Begin
Enjoy	Like
Loads	A lot of
The other day	One day

Wedding	Marriage
Strange	Astonishing
Amazing	Incredible, unbelievable
Angry	Furious
Ask	Question
Beautiful	Gorgeous, lovely
Brave	Courageous, valiant
Break	Crash
Dangerous	Unsafe
End	Finish
False	Fake
Fast	Quick
Famous	Well-known
Funny	Amusing
Good	Excellent, fine
Interesting	Fascinating
Kill	Murder
Part	Piece
Right	Correct
Show	Present
True	Right

Wrong	Incorrect
Scared	Afraid
New	Recent
Movie	Film
Kid	Child
Listen	Hear
Fantastic	Great
Finish	Complete
Close	Shut
Possibility	Opportunity
Rock	Stone
Sad	Unhappy
Use	Utilize
Shy	Introverted
Honest	Honorable

Example

This is a text from the book.

Hi Jessica,

How're you doing? It was good to see you last time you came home from university.

Working in a clothes **shop** is great - I **don't miss school** at all. As soon as I **started** working there I **enjoyed** it. I get **loads** of discounts on clothes. It's also really **funny** sometimes. **The other day**, for example, a man **came** into the shop saying g

he **wanted** some trousers for a **wedding**. He went into the changing rooms to try them on. When he came out I realized they were really baggy. Anyway, I tried to tell him but he said he was in a hurry and wanted to **pay**. I asked for the price label inside the trousers and said that he'd have to take them off. I expected him to go into the changing rooms again but he took his trousers off in the shop!

Last Saturday, while I was cleaning up at the end of the day, **a couple of** teenage girls came in. It was late and we were about to close but I let them have a look around. They were looking at the leggings when one of them took her jeans off to try a pair on! I couldn't believe it.

I **used to think** people invented stories like this but something **strange** happens every day. Well, you know what they say: it takes all sorts to make a world!

Can't wait to see you next time you're back. Drop me a line soon,

Take care, love Bea X

The next text is the same text, but it has synonyms.

Hello Jessica,

How are you? It was good to see you last time you came home from university.

Working in a clothes **store** is great - I **forget** **institute** at all. As soon as I **began** working there I **liked** it. I get **a lot of** discounts on clothes. It's also really **amusing** sometimes. **One day**, for example, a man **entered** into the shop saying he **needed** some trousers for a **marriage**. He went into the changing rooms to try them on. When he came out I realized they were really baggy. Anyway, I tried to tell him but he said he was in a hurry and wanted to **buy** trousers. I asked for the price label inside the trousers and said that he'd have to take them off. I expected him to go into the changing rooms again but he took his trousers off in the shop!

Last Saturday, while I was cleaning up at the end of the day, **two** teenage girls came in. It was late and we were about to close but I let them have a look around. They were looking at the leggings when one of them took her jeans off to try a pair on! I couldn't believe it.

I **thought** people invented stories like this but something **astonishing** happens every day. Well, you know what they say: it takes all sorts to make a world!

Looking forward to seeing you soon. Drop me a line soon,

Goodbye, love Bea X