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## **What are idioms?**

### **Definition**

An idiom (also called idiomatic expression) is an expression, word, or phrase that has a figurative meaning conventionally understood by native speakers. This meaning is different from the literal meaning of the idiom's individual elements. In other words, idioms don't mean exactly what the words say. They have, however, hidden meaning.

### **OR**

An idiom is a phrase, saying or a group of words that has a metaphorical (not literal) meaning, which has become accepted in common usage.

### **Examples**

"Kick the bucket"

"Spill the beans"

The meaning of these expressions is different from the literal meaning or definition of the words of which they are made. Their meaning are however used figuratively. They mean respectively:

"to die "

"to tell people secret information"

## **Introduction**

An idiom's symbolic sense is quite different from the literal meaning or definition of the words of which it is made. There are a large number of Idioms and they are used very commonly in all languages. There are estimated to be at least 25,000 idiomatic expressions in the English language.

Idioms in fact, evolve the language; they are the building blocks of a language and civilization. They also have great intensity to make a language interesting and dynamic. Idioms bring a spectacular illustration to everyday speech. They provide interesting insights into the use of words, languages and the thought processes of their speakers. They have a sense of mystery and fun about them.

## **So what makes idioms difficult?**

The answer is their "meaning". Idioms are not easy to understand - especially for non-native speakers, because their meanings are usually metaphorical. This characteristic of idioms makes them strange and difficult to understand for English learners.

# 10 COMMON IDIOMS

List of 10 most common English idioms and phrases, with their meaning and examples for students and teachers. They are also frequently asked in competitive exams. Though the popularity of the idioms may vary from region to region, still the list is rather popular around the globe.

## 1. A hot potato

**Meaning:** a controversial issue or situation that is awkward or unpleasant to deal with.

**Example:** The subject of bullying and fighting in my school is a hot potato.

## 2. Piece of cake

**Meaning:** something that is easy to do

**Example:** Learning English is a piece of cake as long as you do it with our website.

## 3. Once in a blue moon

**Meaning:** very rarely

**Example:** I go to visit my grandfather only once in a blue

moon; he lives in a remote farm house.

#### **4. A bed of roses**

**Meaning:** easy option

**Example:** Taking care of my younger sister is no bed of roses; she is very silly.

#### **5. Raining cats and dogs**

**Meaning:** raining very heavily

**Example:** I wanted to go to play outside, but it was raining cats and dogs yesterday.

#### **6. When pigs fly**

**Meaning:** something that will never happen or is impossible.

**Example:** William will keep quiet only when pigs fly.

#### **7. Devil's advocate**

**Meaning:** one who presents a counter argument

**Example:** Hey Jack! You're always playing devil's advocate! Give it a rest and mind your own business.

#### **8. Miss the boat**

**Meaning:** miss the chance.

**Example:** Peter wanted to enter the drawing competition, but he was too late to enter, and he missed the boat.

## 9. Apple of eye

**Meaning:** someone very precious or dear

**Example:** Every kid in the world is the apple of their parents' eye(s).

## 10. Zip your lip

**Meaning:** to stop talking

**Example:** I don't want to hear another sound out of you. Now do as you're told and zip your lip.

## ☆ LATEST IDIOMS!

### ☆ when life gives you lemons

**Meaning:** make the best out of a difficult situation

**Example:** She tried to live by the motto 'when life gives you lemons, make lemonade.'

### ☆ topsy-turvy

**Meaning:** with the top at the bottom.

**Example:** Everything has been topsy-turvy since we moved in. I can't find anything until I unpack properly.

☆ **goose egg**

**Meaning:** zero

**Example:** We had a good game, but the score was goose egg.

☆ **keep promise**

**Meaning:** be faithful to your word

**Example:** How on earth can I marry him when he can't keep his promises?

☆ **in light of**

**Meaning:** because of

**Example:** In light of what happened last week, please take care on the escalators.

## **THE ROLE OF IDIOMS IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNING**

The most widely used English idioms are considered in the present paper, their role in English language learning is analyzed as well.

The significance of idioms in the modern English language is impossible to underestimate since they make a colloquial speech lively and rich. And, without doubt,

idioms are actually used by native speakers in their everyday language.

Consequently, it is necessary to pay a particular attention to these lexical units studying a foreign language.

Furthermore, some ways of learning idioms individually as well as by means of various communicative types of activity under the guidance of a teacher are also considered in the research.

**Keywords:** idioms, lexical units, learning process, educational activity.

English is considered to be not only the most popular and demandable language in the world but also one of the most beautiful languages.

Moreover, the English language is particularly rich in lexis. Without doubt, idioms play

a great role in the enrichment of the English language. Idioms represent unique cultural and historical information as well as broaden people's understanding and manipulation of English.

Native speakers use idioms to make their speech more colorful and alive.

That is why it is definitely important for non-native speakers

to learn not only grammar and new lexical units as well as acquire reading, listening and writing skills but also pay attention to idioms in the process of English language learning.

This work is focused on considering the most popular English idioms and their role for non-native speakers as a part of mastering the English language. Let us consider a definition of the term «idiom».

According to Oxford dictionary, an idiom refers to a group of words established by usage as having a meaning not deducible from those of the individual words.

In other words, an idiom is an expression, whose meaning cannot be deduced from the literal definitions, but refers to a figurative meaning that is known only through common use.

Idioms are often used in all types of languages, colloquial and formal, spoken and written; they are a part of business English, education and the media.

It is necessary to consider the origin of the most widely used idioms. There is a great variety of idioms which come from the vocabulary concerning different topics such as:

**Work and jobs:** to put in for (to make an official request for smth.), a blue collar worker (a working class person who performs manual labor), a white collar worker (a person



belonging to the ranks of office and professional workers whose jobs generally do not involve manual labor), a slave driver (a cruel employer who demands excessive work from the employees), to burn oneself out (to work too hard), to work for peanuts (to work for practically no money at all), to carry the can (to take the blame or responsibility for something that is wrong or has not succeeded), a golden handshake (a large sum of money which is given to someone when they leave a company, especially if they are forced to leave) and etc.

**Animals:** the black sheep of the family (a disreputable or disgraced member of a family), to take the bull by the horns (to confront a problem head-on and deal with it openly), as awkward as a cow on roller skates (very clumsy), as crooked as a dog's hind leg (very dishonest), to have ants in one's pants (to be unable to sit still or remain calm out of nervousness or excitement), eager beaver (a person who is excited about doing certain work), to let the cat out of the bag (to reveal a secret) etc.

**Rural life and transport:** to strike while the iron is hot (to take advantage of favorable conditions), to put the cart before the horse (to do things in the wrong order), to miss the boat (to fail to take advantage of an opportunity), to paddle one's own canoe (to do what smth. without help or interference from anyone), to drive up the wall (to do something that greatly annoys or irritates all the people around), to hit the road (to begin a journey) etc.

**The world of entertainment:** to make a clown of yourself (to make yourself appear foolish or stupid), to be in the limelight (to be the centre of attention), a museum piece (something that is very old-fashioned and should no longer be used), a show stopper (an event that provokes such a strong reaction that it stops whatever's happening) etc.;

**feelings and emotions:** to bare one's heart (or soul) to someone (to reveal one's innermost thoughts and feelings to someone), to be bent out of shape (to become annoyed or upset about something that is usually not important), to come apart at the seams (to be extremely upset or under severe mental stress), to get hot under the collar (to feel annoyed, indignant or embarrassed), to lick one's wounds (to try to recover one's confidence or spirits after a defeat, failure or disappointment) etc.

Actually it is almost impossible to consider all the existing idioms because the English language possesses thousands and thousands of idiomatic expressions. Surely, some of them are old-fashioned and not used in live communication any more. But there are more than one hundred idioms which can be referred to the so-called often-used lexical units.

Consequently, idioms should become an integral part of foreign language acquisition for the non-native speakers who are really eager to apply their language skills

and knowledge in practice communicating with native speakers.

Let us consider the importance of idioms in the learning process from the view point of future prospects for the learners.

Nowadays young people have many opportunities to take part in various students' exchange programs, undertake a traineeship in the English-speaking countries and even make a successful career abroad. So they should possess good communication skills to avoid misunderstandings and a language barrier. But in the reality, most of the people who have already had experience of studying and working abroad, confirm that they have faced some serious problems in communicating with native speakers due to idioms.

The truth is that they did not simply understand the meaning of unknown idioms which were widely used by native speakers in their everyday speech. As a result, most of the non-native speakers make a conclusion that learning idioms is one of the most important issues in the process of English language acquiring.

Since the native speakers use idioms all the time in all the situations, foreign students being abroad often feel confused and frustrated because they do not understand their interlocutors. So, a large number of idioms and their high frequency in the communication make them a vital aspect of

English language learning.

The next issue of the present paper is considering the ways of learning idioms. To begin with, there are a lot of relevant dictionaries which provide the learners with various often-used idioms. Then, idioms can be learned through the films, sports and news programs, by means of modern Internet technologies. And, the learners can acquire idioms in the English language lessons using different activities such as dialogues and role plays.

Let us consider them in more details. The appropriate dialogues can provide the learners with the situations to practice ordinary routine conversation so the students have good practice with principal communication skills in context.

First of all it is necessary to look through some new idioms, then examine some examples and read the relevant dialogues containing the idioms under consideration. The students should analyze the correct use of them, to see how the idioms are practiced in speech. The next step is to act out the similar dialogues to reinforce the acquired skills.

In general, dialogues and role plays are definitely helpful learning activities for the learners of various ages and levels of proficiency as they do not only help the students learn new idioms and expand their vocabulary but also dialogues are an efficient way of oral practice in general. As a result

dialogues offer learners the opportunities to act out everyday life situations and practice communication skills before they enter the real English language environment.

And finally the acquired knowledge concerning some particular idioms must be consolidated through the written exercises based on the meaning of the idioms. The learners are supposed to complete the final tasks individually to show their teacher the results of the learning process. There is a great variety of activities which can be used to consolidate using the learned idioms in practice.

Dealing with the matching tasks, learners have to match the idioms with their meanings or even with mother tongue equivalents. Working with the paraphrasing tasks, students should rewrite the given sentence by means of the relevant idiom keeping the main idea of the original sentence.

And of course students can make up their own sentences or even a whole story using the idioms they have recently learnt.

In conclusion it should be mentioned that non-native speakers, who learn idioms, can be involved into the real English language environment.

Everyone is able to speak natural English but it is idioms in the language that give it a bright, conversational and creative feeling. Consequently, if non-native speakers want to speak

English fluently,  
they have to learn idioms to improve their communication  
skills and feel confident talking to native speakers.