
50 Most Common English Idioms

What are idioms?

Idioms are commonly used expressions by native speakers of English to make the language to be so fluent. How can you use idioms to learn English?

It's very important to know the most common idioms because you can't miss them in conversations. Mastering and learning how to use common idioms will make your English to sound more native. Because of their metaphoric nature, people use them to make the language more colorful especially to express something briefly and imaginatively. However it's important to note that idioms are mostly used in informal exchanges. Below is a list of the most common English idioms with simple explanations:

1. Add fuel to the flames

Adding fuel to the flames simply means doing or saying something that makes the current situation worse.

2. All ears.

Whenever someone says that they are all ears, it simply means they are so keen.

3. Answer nature's call

Answering a call of nature simply means that a person is wants to go to the toilet.

4. Accidentally on purposedt refers to when somebody does something deliberately and then pretends that it was an accident.

5. Badger someone

When you badger someone, you nag or pester them persistently until you get what you want.

6. Balancing act

Whenever there are two or more people with different needs and then you help them

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settle their scores by making all of them happy you perform a balancing act.

7. Be one's best bet

The most likely action to bring success is always somebody's best bet.

8. Bare your soul

Baring your soul to someone is an act of revealing your innermost feelings and intentions to them.

9. Binge drinking

This expression refers to the consumption of large amounts of alcohol by young people within a short period of time.

10. Biting the hand that feeds you If you are so harsh to someone who has done a lot for you and they are kind to you then they can say you are biting the hand that feeds you.

11. Breathing down someone's neck

When you breathe down somebody's neck it means that you are having a keen and close eye on them which can make them feel uncomfortable.

12. Clinch a deal

Clinching a deal is when you reach a certain agreement over some business proposal you had with another party.

13. A done deal

Whenever people have arguments over something and they don't seem to reach an agreement, a decision might finally be made on the matter. If the decision is made which is satisfactory to both, then that's a done deal.

14. In black and white

Whenever you say that something is in black and white it means that you have proof to show for it.

15. Gentleman's agreement

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When two parties decide not to have a written agreement because they mutually trust each other completely then that is a gentleman's agreement.

16. No strings attached

There are no strings attached whenever something comes without certain conditions.

17. With one voice

When you have two or more organizations speaking with one voice it means that they are in complete agreement on the matter.

18. Like the back of one's hand Whenever you have a complete knowledge of something it means you know it like the back of your hand.

19. Back into shape

Let's say you weighing a lot right now and you need to exercise to lose some calories to be fit and healthy, then that would mean that you want to get yourself back into shape.

20. Back on your feet

When you are healthy again after some sickness it means you are back on your feet.

21. Up in arms Whenever somebody is up in arms, they are so angry over something.

22. Get off my back

At times in life you find people who like discouraging you and criticizing every single thing you do. All they do is see faults in everything you lay your hands on. You might want to tell them to get off your back.

23. Bite someone's head off

There are things that people do and they don't make sense to us. We don't care about the effort they make and everything they do is wrong, and you keep telling them so without caring about what they feel. That means you are biting their heads off.

24. Be in a black mood

People handle their anger issues differently. When some people are so angry sometimes it would be advisable to keep off them because they are in a black mood.

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25. Blow a fuse

When somebody's temper comes so sudden and they get very angry, they are said to have blown a fuse.

26. Bone to pick with someone

When you are angered and irritated by someone, you might want to go meet them and quarrel or talk to them about it. Whenever you do that then it means you have a bone to pick with someone.

27. Come down to someone like a ton of bricks

If you do something wrong to someone and then they continuously and strongly criticize you for doing so it means they have come down to you like a ton of bricks.

28. Dressed to kill

When men and women are dressed to kill they are wearing outfit that are expensive and fashionable with the intention of seeking attention from others.

29. Down at heel

When you see somebody with an untidy appearance because of neglect or lack of money to buy glamorous clothes, they are simply down at heel.

30. Face like a bulldog chewing a wasp

When you see someone who is not appealing to you because of an ugly expression on their face, then it means the person has a face like a bulldog chewing a wasp.

31. Mutton dressed as a lamb

This expression refers to older women trying to look younger dressed in clothes that are meant for younger people.

32. Big fish in a small pond

This refers to a person who has a position of authority in a small organization or company and they often enjoy being authoritative in those small organizations.

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33. Bring to heel

Young boys can be mischievous sometimes and they often lack discipline when it comes to some issues. Therefore you might want to force them to behave in a disciplined manner. By doing so, means that you are bringing them to heel.

34. Bulldoze someone into doing something

Sometimes when you ask young people to do something for you, they can decline it without reason. But to teach them some lesson you have to stamp some authority by bullying or intimidating them to do it, and it means you will be bulldozing them to do it.

35. Call the shots

In families the person who calls the shots is the man, who is the head of the family. He or she makes all the decisive decisions on the matters that arise. He is basically the one in control.

36. Too many chiefs, not enough Indians

Sometimes when people are given work to do you might find most of them trying to give instructions and mostly the work is at standstill because less people are working. It means that there are too many chiefs, not enough Indians.

37. Crack the whip

Cracking the whip means to use you authority by threatening others to follow certain commands or do the work whenever they refuse or become uncooperative.

38. Dancing to someone's tune

Whenever you are following orders from someone or doing things you are told to do without questioning them then it means you are dancing to someone's tune.

39. Drawing a line in the sand

We can do all we can but when it gets to some things we have to slow down a little because there are boundaries established beyond which we will be breaking certain rules which are punishable. Therefore drawing a line in the sand means those actions that go beyond the established limits cannot be entertained.

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40. Force someone's hand

When you force someone's hand you will make them to do things that they never intended or planned to do.

41. At all costs

To achieve something at all costs means that you are willing to get it regardless of whatever you have to go through.

42. Having a bee in your bonnet

To have a bee in the bonnet means your thoughts are constantly occupied by a certain idea.

43. Blood, sweat and tears

Something that involves blood, sweat and tears is something that takes more than just luck to do. It requires total dedication and hard work.

44. Having something on your brain

To have something on your brain means that you have something that you think of all the time.

45. Explore all avenues

Exploring all avenues is to exhaust all the available possibilities for you to find a solution.

46. Catch 22

Being in a catch 22 situation means to be faced with a situation where you can't do one thing without the other and you can't do the second without the first.

47. Embarrassment of riches

Embarrassment of riches refers to when it's so difficult to make a choice because there are many other choices.

48. on the fence

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When somebody is sitting on the fence it means he or she is faced with a situation which they haven't reached a decision on yet.

49. Horns of a dilemma

If somebody is on the horns of dilemma it's said that they are faced with two alternatives which are not pleasant at all.

50. Come to a bad end

Whenever somebody comes to a bad end it means he or she has done something which is going to be disastrous.

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