

Idioms

English idioms, proverbs, and expressions are an important part of everyday English. They come up all the time in both written and spoken English. Because idioms don't always make sense literally, you'll need to familiarize yourself with the meaning and usage of each idiom you come up with.

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. 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.

Types of idioms

Type of idiom	Example	Meaning
1) verb-based	take advantage of sth get nowhere	= make good use of sth = make no progress, or have no success
2) prepositional phrases	in that case in charge (of sb/sth)	= used to say what you will do sth = having control or command (of sb/sth)
3) noun phrases	a piece of cake	= a thing that is easy to do
4) sayings/proverbs	better late than never	= it is better to arrive late than not at all
5) fixed phrases with two key words, usually joined by <u>and</u> or <u>or</u>	bright and early more or less	= early in the morning = almost or approximately
6) idiomatic phrasal verbs	get through (to sb) laugh sth off	= make contact with sb by phone = joke about sth to show you think it is not serious or important
7) exclamations or short spoken phrases	don't ask me thank heavens	= used to say that you don't know the answer to sth = used to say that you are pleased and relieved about sth

Idioms and their origins

Butter someone up

Meaning: to praise or flatter someone, usually to gain a favor

Origin: A customary religious act in ancient India included throwing butter balls at the statues of gods to seek good fortune and their favor.

Sleep tight

Meaning: used to tell someone to sleep well

Origin: One possible origin of this phrase dates back to when mattresses were supported by ropes; sleeping tight meant sleeping with the ropes pulled tight, which would provide a well-sprung bed.

Turn a blind eye

Meaning: to consciously ignore unwanted information

Origin: The phrase "to turn a blind eye" is said to originate with Admiral Horatio Nelson, who allegedly looked through his telescope using his blind eye to avoid signals from his superior telling him to withdraw from battle.

Idioms and their origins

Minding your Ps and Qs

Meaning: being on your best behavior

Origin: There are many origin stories for this one, but perhaps the one that is most fun is that bartenders would keep track of the pints and quarts consumed by their patrons with the letters "P" and "Q."

Let the cat out of the bag

Meaning: to mistakenly reveal a secret

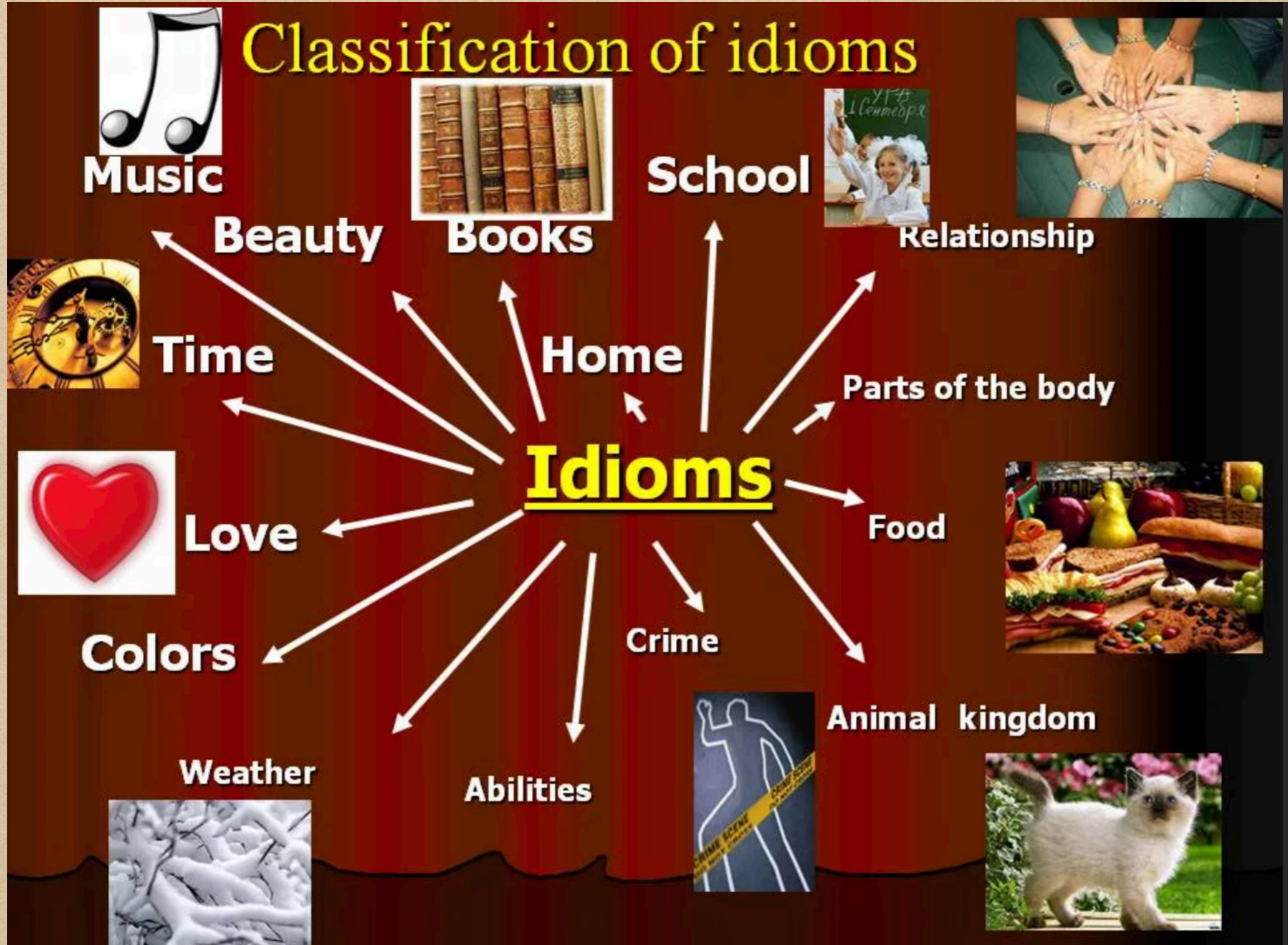
Origin: Up to and including in the 1700s, a common street fraud included replacing valuable pigs with less valuable cats and selling them in bags. When a cat was let out of a bag, the jig was up.

Bite the bullet

Meaning: to perform a painful task or endure an unpleasant situation

Origin: In the 1800s, patients would literally bite on a bullet to cope with the pain of having surgery before anesthesia was common.

Classification of idioms



HOME Idioms

FAMILY Idioms

PEOPLE Idioms

FOOD Idioms

LOVE Idioms

BOOK Idioms

ANIMAL Idioms

WEATHER Idioms

COUNTRY Idioms

NUMBER Idioms

HUMAN BODY Idioms

TIME Idioms

COLOUR Idioms

Idioms about the House

Smoke like a chimney

Smoke a lot



Go out the window

No longer exist, disappear



Lead (someone) up the garden path

Deceive someone



Everything but the kitchen sink

Take a lot of things when you go somewhere



There's no place like home

Your home is a special place



Make yourself at home

Make yourself comfortable



Close to home

Affect someone in a strong and personal way



Be home and dry

Have successfully completed something, as a project or activity



Home in on

Become closer to your target



As safe as houses

Be very safe



Eat out of house and home

Eat everything in somebody's house



Get your own house in order

Solve your problems or get organized



House of correction

Prison



Wear the pants in the house

Be the boss in the house, run a household



Throw in the towel

Quit, give up



Throw money down the drain

Waste money



Skeleton in the closet

An embarrassing or shameful secret



Hit the roof

Become very angry



A mama's boy

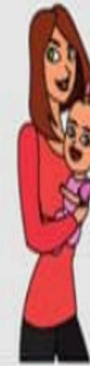


A boy or man who allows his mother to have too much influence on him.

At your mother's knee

If you learned to do something when you were a young child.

Everyone and his mother



Used to express a large number or a majority of people.

A mother hen

A person who looks out for the welfare of others, especially to an overprotective degree

Like mother, like daughter



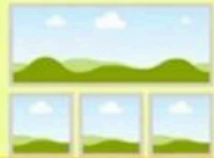
Daughters tend to do what their mothers did before them.

The mother of all

A large collection of a particular type of thing

Spitting Image

Have a strong resemblance, often familial



Accident Of Birth

Luck in something due to family good fortune



Bob's Your Uncle

The rest is easy; you're almost finished



Flesh and Blood

Blood relatives, close relatives



Helicopter Parenting

Overattentive child-raising



Pop the Question

Propose marriage



My Old Man

My spouse



Run in the Family

Be inherited (as a trait) by multiple members of a family



Like Father, Like Son

Sons inherit their fathers' traits and preferences



People Idioms: Children & Babies

Bun in the Oven

Pregnant



Babe In Arms

A baby being carried



Babe In The Woods

An innocent, naïve person



Born on the wrong side of the blanket

Born to parents who were not married



Child's Play

A very easy task



Wet Behind the Ears

Inexperienced, immature, new to something



Sleep like a baby

To experience a very deep and restful sleep



Chip off the Old Block

Someone who resembles a direct ancestor



Like a kid in a candy store

To be so excited about one's surroundings that one acts in a childlike



Slimeball

a disgusting, horrible, person who deserves to be hated.

Big cheese



a person who has a lot of power and influence in an organization.

A bad egg

someone as a bad egg means that they cannot be trusted.



Social Butterfly

an extroverted person who loves to socialize



Armchair Critic

a person sitting on an armchair and passing comments, doesn't help at all.



Cheapskate

a person who hates to spend much money





Like two peas in a pod

Very similar



To be as thick as thieves

Be very close or friendly



To bury the hatchet

End a conflict



To clear the air

Defuse the tension



A shoulder to cry on

Someone who listens to your problems



Friends in high places

Has friends who have important or influential positions



To see eye to eye with someone

Agree with someone



To know someone inside out

Know someone very well



To build bridges

Promote friendly relations between people or groups



Strike up a friendship

Become friends

A bite at the cherry

Meaning: An opportunity to achieve something:

E.g. He definitely wants a bite of the cherry.



A plum job

Meaning: Very good job

E.g. He got a plum job in an insurance company.



Apples and oranges

Meaning: To be different from each other

E.g. My mom and my mother-in-law are just apples and oranges



Lemon

Meaning: A vehicle that does not work properly

E.g. The car dealer sold me a lemon.



Best Thing Since Sliced Bread

An innovative development



Big Cheese

An important person in a company or organization



Bottom of the Barrel

Low-quality choices



Cherry-Pick

To present evidence selectively to one's own advantage



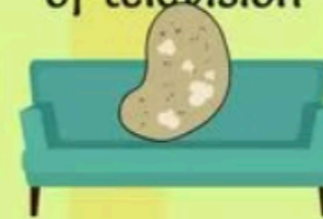
Chew the Fat

Chat for a considerable length of time



Couch Potato

A lazy person who watches a great deal of television



Cut the Mustard

Do something adequately



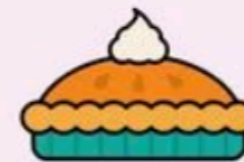
Eat Someone's Lunch

Defeat someone thoroughly



Eat Humble Pie

To admit defeat or error, to accept humiliation



Tough Nut to Crack

A difficult problem



(A) Baker's Dozen

Thirteen



Egg on One's Face

Be embarrassed, feel foolish



All One's Eggs In One Basket

Rely on a specific course of events



Grain of Salt

Be skeptical of a statement



Bigger Fish To Fry

To have more important things to do



Above The Salt

Of high standing or honor.



All The Tea In China

Great wealth, a large payment



Bad Egg

Someone who is not to be trusted



have your cake and eat it too



have two good things at the same time that are impossible to have together

comparing apples to oranges



comparing things that are extremely different

apple of my eye



someone you admire

proof is in the pudding



try something to know the true value of it

corny



embarrassing or not funny

cool as a cucumber



very relaxed

spill the beans



say something you shouldn't

couch potato



a person who watches a lot of television

easy as pie



very simple to do

you're a peach



a wonderful person

smart cookie



an intelligent person

food idioms

an expression that cannot be taken literally

cut the mustard



meet expectations

go nuts



extremely angry OR do whatever you want

go bananas



go wild or crazy

piece of cake



very easy

greatest thing since sliced bread



a really wonderful idea

butter me up



flatter someone to get something from them

two peas in a pod



two people who get along really well

in a pickle



in a difficult situation

life is just a bowl of cherries



life is good

full of baloney



full of nonsense

buy a lemon



doesn't function well or needs a lot of repairs

put all your eggs in one basket



focus all your efforts on one thing

use your noodle



use your brain

bring home the bacon



earn money to support yourself and/or others

crying over spilled milk



Apples to Zippers

Be head over heels

Be in love with somebody very much



Fall in love with

Start feeling love towards somebody



Hook, Line, and Sinker

To be completely deceived



Break up/ Split up

End the relationship



Have the hots for somebody

Finding somebody extremely attractive



Kiss and make up

Make peace after an argument



Love rat

Somebody who cheats on his/her partner



Tie the knot

Get married



Main Squeeze

Committed romantic partner



A closed book

A topic or person about which/whom very little is known



An open book

Someone that is easy to know about because nothing is kept secret.



Read someone like a book

To understand easily what someone or thinking or feeling



The oldest trick in the book

A dishonest action that has been used many times before



In someone's good books

Used for saying that someone is pleased with you



By the book

Following all the rules for doing something in a strict way



Bring someone to book

To punish someone when they have done wrong



Take a leaf out of someone's book

To copy what someone else does because they are successful at doing it



Don't judge a book by its cover

Not to form an opinion about someone only from their appearance



Cook the books

To change accounts and figures dishonestly, usually to get money





CAT IDIOMS

(Like) Herding Cats

Difficult to coordinate (said of members of a group)



(There's) More Than One Way to Skin A Cat

(There are multiple ways to accomplish this task)



A Cat Has Nine Lives

(Cats seem to get away with dangerous things)



A Cat Nap

(A short sleep during the day)



Bell the Cat

(Take on a difficult or impossible task)



Cat Fight

(A fight between two women)



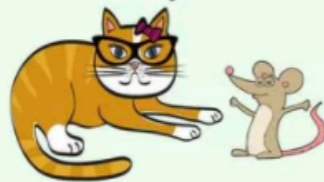
Cat Got Your Tongue?

(Don't you have anything to say?)



Cat On A Hot Tin Roof

(Be extremely nervous)



Cat-and-Mouse (adj.)

(In a toying way; playful in an unpleasant way)



Cat's Paw

(A person being used by someone else, a tool)



DOG Idioms

Dog-Eat-Dog

(Intensely competitive)

Rain Cats and Dogs

(Rain very heavily)



Dog-and-Pony Show

(A flashy presentation, often in a marketing context)

Fight Like Cat and Dog

(Continually arguing with each other)



(The) Tail That Wags the Dog

(A small part of something that controls the whole thing)

Every Man and His Dog

(Many people)



Go to the Dogs

(To become disordered, to decay)

Have a Dog in the Hunt

(Fight, Race)

(To support a certain person in a competition)



Puppy Dog Eyes

(A begging look)

My Dogs Are Barking

(My feet hurt)



Fat Cat

A highly placed, well-paid executive



Feather One's Nest

To take advantage of one's position to benefit oneself



Fight like cat and dog

Continually arguing with each other



Fish for Compliments

Try to manipulate people into praising you



Flat Out Like a Lizard Drinking

Very busy



Flew the Coop

Left, escaped



Get One's Ducks in a Row

Have everything organized; get oneself organized



Get Someone's Goat

To irritate someone deeply



Go to the Dogs

To become disordered, to decay



Kangaroo Court

A court of law where proper procedures are not followed at all



Kill a Fly With an Elephant Gun

Approach a problem with excessive measures



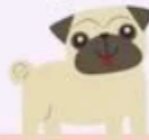
Kill Two Birds with One Stone

Act in such a way as to produce two desirable effects



Let Sleeping Dogs Lie

To avoid stirring up a problem; to leave things alone



Lion's Den

Any dangerous or frightening place.



Loaded for Bear

Prepared for problems, well prepared for a challenge



Loan Shark

A predatory lender



Mad As A Box Of (Soapy) Frogs

Extremely mentally unstable; psychotic; detached from reality.



One-Trick Pony

Someone who has only a single talent



A Cold Day In

July

(Something that) will never happen



A snowball's chance

in hell

To be very unlikely to succeed at something



All Wet

Completely mistaken



Blood and Thunder

A dramatic, spectacular performance



Spit into The Wind

Wasting time on something futile



Chase Rainbows

To pursue unrealistic goals



Come rain and

shine

Do regularly, whatever the circumstances



Steal Someone's

Thunder

Upstage someone



Dead of winter

The coldest, darkest part of winter



take French leave

to leave work without permission
The driver had taken French leave.

excuse/pardon my French

used to say sorry for using offensive language
That's just bullshit. Pardon my French.

go Dutch

to share the cost of something equally
We always go Dutch on dinner.

Indian summer

a period of unusually warm weather in autumn
We are currently enjoying an Indian Summer.

it's all Greek to me

I cannot understand it at all
He tried to explain the rules, but it's all Greek to me.

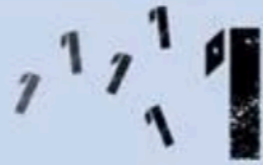
when in Rome (do as the Romans do)
when you are visiting a different country,
you should behave like the people who live there



10 number idioms

all in one piece

safely



He got home from the party all in one piece.



back to square one

back to the start

The project failed,
we're back to square one.

have one too many

drink too much alcohol



I can't drive, I had one too many.



on cloud nine

very happy

When my mom bought me a computer,
I was on cloud nine.

one for the road

have a drink before leaving



Let's have one for the road!

six feet under

dead and buried



I'm going to be six feet under by 2100.

ten to one

something very likely

10 TO 1

Ten to one I'm going to win.

kill two birds with one stone

solve two problems with one move



I'll drop you off on the way to work,
we'll kill two birds with one stone.

a million and one

very many

1 000 001

I have a million and one ideas.

put in one's two cents

say your opinion



I put in my two cents at the meeting.

All in one piece	Safely	He got home from the party all in one piece.
Back to square one	Back to the start	The project failed, we're back to square one.
Have one too many	Drink too much alcohol	I can't drive, I had one too many.
One for the road	Have a drink before leaving	Let's have one for the road!
Six feet under	Dead and buried	I'm going to be six feet under by 2100.
Ten to one	Something very likely	Ten to one I'm going to win.
A million and one	Very many	I have a million and one ideas.
Put in one's two cents	Put in one's two cents	I put in my two cents at the meeting
Cast the first stone	To be the first to criticize or attack someone	OK, fine, I'll cast the first stone—that movie was awful!

10 IDIOMS ABOUT THE HUMAN BODY

Head start

Meaning: An advantage over everyone else

Sight for sore eyes

Meaning: A sight that makes you happy

A weight off your shoulders

Meaning: You no longer worry about something or deal with something difficult

Pain in the neck

Meaning: Someone or something making your life difficult

Gut feeling

Meaning: A sense or impression that your subconscious has about a person or situation

Hands are tied

Meaning: You are prevented from doing something. It is not within your power.

Weak at the knees

Meaning: To feel emotion so strongly that it makes you feel unstable on your feet.

Joined at the hip

Meaning: To be exceptionally close to someone

Achilles heel

Meaning: A weakness that can result in failure

Find your feet

Meaning: To adjust to a new place or situation



Finger-Pointing

Blame; a situation within a group where each member attempts to blame others

Not Lift a Finger

Do nothing to help



Point the Finger At

Blame (someone)



Someone's Fingerprints Are All Over

Someone's influence is evident



Work One's Fingers to the Bone

Work very hard over an extended period

Have a Finger in Every Pie

To be involved in many activities and to have influence over a lot of people

Keep One's Fingers Crossed

To wish for good luck

Have Your Fingers on the Pulse

Meaning: To be/stay familiar with the most recent changes or improvements

a bad hair day
a day in which everything seems to go wrong
let your hair down
relax and enjoy yourself
get in one's hair
annoy someone, especially by staying around all the time
Keep your hair on!
Stop being angry or upset!

Bare-Bones

Simplest, stripped-down



Joined at the hip

To be exceptionally close to someone



Birthday Suit

Nakedness



Brain Drain

Departure of talented, well-educated individuals from a place



Blood Is Thicker Than Water

Family relationships take precedence over others



Breathe Easier

Feel (more) secure after a period of difficulty



No-Brainer

A decision that's easy to make



Put Muscle Behind

Exert one's power in support of something



On the Blink

Not working, intermittently not working



Fit as a Fiddle

In very good health



Forty Winks

A short nap



Elbow Grease

Hard physical effort



On the Nod

Without a formal vote



On Your Toes

Alert



Pat on the Back

Public recognition for an accomplishment



Toe the Line

To follow regulations



Pop Someone's Cherry

To break the hymen; to lose one's virginity



Tear One's Hair out

Be extremely worried or frustrated.



Blue Moon

Very rarely



Cold Light of Day

From a realistic rather than wishful perspective



Time is money

Time is valuable, so don't waste it.



About Time

Far past the desired time.



Ahead Of The Curve

Innovative, devising new ideas in advance of others



Around the Clock

At all times



In the Nick of Time

Just in time; with no time to spare



In the Dark

Unaware of something



Month of Sundays

A long time, many months



Time to hit the road

Time to depart



A devil of a time

A difficult or frustrating time



Around the clock

At all times



As time goes by

As time passes or moves



For the time being

At the present moment; for now



Bad time

An inconvenient moment or an unfortunate experience



Lose track of time

To be unaware of what time it is



Kill time

To do something while waiting



Caught in a time wrap

Unchanged in an antiquated or obsolete way



Have a time of it

To experience particular trouble or difficulty

Feel blue	to have feelings of deep sadness or depression
Black and white	to say that something is in black and white means that there is written proof of it
White lie	lie to protect another person's feelings
See red	be very angry
Paint the town red	have a good time
To be in the red	to be in debt
Tickled pink	be very pleased, delighted
A golden opportunity	a great opportunity that might never come again
Black gold	the term black gold refers to the black colour and high value of oil.
Blue-eyed boy	a blue-eyed boy is someone's favourite.
Green with envy	very jealous
Pink elephants	this term refers to hallucinations or strange imaginary things seen by people as a result of heavy drinking or the use of narcotics.
With flying colours	with distinction



Law, crime and punishment

Caught Red-Handed

Apprehended while committing a crime



Five-Finger Discount

Shoplifting



Foul Play

Crime, typically murder



Throw The Book At

Prosecute legally as strongly as possible



Stick It to the Man

Do something that frustrates those in authority



Shot Across the Bow

A warning of more serious actions to come



Up in Arms

Angry, protesting (usually said of a group)



Scorched Earth

Ruthless, extremely destructive



Pin Someone Down

Demand a decision or clear answer



Bang to Rights

Caught in an unlawful or immoral act without any mitigating circumstances.



Above The Law

Exempt from the laws that apply to everyone else.



Act Of Congress

Hard to get, said of authorization



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Bail Out

To rescue someone from a bad situation



Ball and Chain

One's spouse (derogatory but often affectionate)



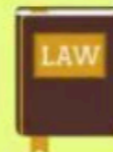
Letter of the Law

The explicit meaning of a law, as opposed to the "spirit" of the law



Open-and-Shut Case

A situation, especially a legal proceeding, with a clear, certain outcome



Take the Fifth

Refuse to answer because answering might incriminate or cause problems for you





10



ROYAL IDIOMS

QUEEN BEE

A woman who thinks she is the most important person in a group

CROWN JEWELS

The most impressive or valuable possession you own

PRINCE CHARMING

An attractive and kind man that one dreams will make their life perfect

A ROYAL PAIN

Something or someone who is annoying or bad

DRAMA QUEEN

Someone who tends to treat situations as more serious or exciting than they really are

LIVE LIKE A KING

To live in a very comfortable way and with a lot more money than you need

KING'S RANSOM

A very large amount of money

BUILD CASTLES IN THE AIR

To have dreams that are unlikely to become real

TO HOLD COURT

To talk to a group of people who are all paying you a lot of attention because you are interesting, funny or important

TO BE KING OF SOMETHING

A man who is the best at doing a particular thing

Common idioms

- all the way up -to be at the pinnacle of your emotional spectrum.

- let's hug it out means - let's end our argument.

- Bitter pill to swallow — bad news that you have to hear and accept.

-Egghead — a person that always tries to look clever in the eyes of others

Tie the Knot — get married

Let sleeping dogs lie — not to disturb someone or not to remember problems that happened in the past

It takes two to tango — something cannot be done by only one person; therefore two people should deal with the situation

Be snowed under — to be loaded with work

Weather the storm — survive hard times

Under a cloud — be suspected or not be trusted by others

Bet your bottom dollar — be sure that something will happen;