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BSc Degree

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Basic English
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Phrases and Idioms- Part 1

Welcome back. Guess what we are going to discuss today? Well, we are going to look at a few phrases and idioms that can make our conversation more expressive and impressive. Let's get started.

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PHRASES AND IDIOMS

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- In common usage, a phrase is usually a group of words with some special idiomatic meaning or other significance, such as "all rights reserved", "economical with the truth", "kick the bucket", and the like. It may be a euphemism, a saying or proverb, a fixed expression, a figure of speech, etc.
- A euphemism is a polite word or expression that is used to refer to things which people may find upsetting or embarrassing to talk about, for example sex, the human body, or death.
- A proverb is a simple, concrete, traditional saying that expresses a truth based on common sense or experience.
- A saying is any concisely written or spoken expression that is especially memorable because of its meaning or style.
- Idioms. 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. An idiom's symbolic sense is quite different from the literal meaning or definition of the words of which it is made.

So let us first understand what phrases are, what are the different kinds of phrases. So let me start with the definition of a phrase. A phrase is usually a group of words with one specific idiomatic meaning or other significance such as all rights reserved, economical with the truth, kick the bucket, and the like. It may be a euphemism, a saying, a proverb, a fixed expression, or a figure of speech.

What is a euphemism? A euphemism is a polite word or expression that is used to refer to things which people may find upsetting or embarrassing to talk about—for example, sex, the human body, death. For example, kicked the bucket means dead; make love means sex, so these are examples of euphemism.

What is a proverb? A proverb is a simple, concrete, traditional saying that expresses a truth based on experience or common sense. An apple a day keeps the doctor away is an example of a proverb. Well, what does that mean? Well, it says that if you have one apple a day,

because of the nutritional content of the apple, you can stay fit and healthy and therefore, keep the doctor away.

Now, what is a saying? A saying is any concisely written or spoken expression that is especially memorable because of its meaning or style. Now, what are idioms? An idiom is a phrase, saying, or a group of words that has a metaphorical meaning which should not be taken literally. And this metaphorical meaning is accepted as common usage.

An idiom's symbolic sense is quite different from the literal meaning or the definition of the words of which it is made, for example, kicked the bucket means dead; break a leg means not to go and break someone's leg but wishing somebody best of luck. So you say, 'hey chap, break a leg' means hey chap, good luck.

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COMMON PHRASES

- 1. A dark horse – unexpected winner
- 2. Bite a bullet – to force yourself to do something that is unpleasant or difficult, or be brave in a difficult situation.
- 3. Break a leg – Good luck
- 4. Make a mountain out of a molehill – to exaggerate a minor difficulty
- 5. Kill two birds with one stone – achieve two aims with single effort
- 6. Move heaven and earth – to make maximum efforts
- 7. Keep the ball rolling – to continue the work
- 8. Be in the driving seat – Bearing all responsibilities
- 9. Out of my league – the other person is superior, better, at a higher level
- 10. Blessing in disguise – a good thing that seemed bad at first

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Now, let us look at some common phrases that are used in English. The first one is a dark horse. A dark horse means an unexpected winner. Let us check the usage. The movie is a dark horse for the award. Well, what does this say? It says that nobody expected that movie would get an award, so you say the movie is a dark horse for the award.

Now, the second one; bite a bullet means to force yourself to do something that is very unpleasant or difficult or to be brave in a difficult situation. Let us check the usage. Shweta has to learn to bite the bullet and face her fear of the dark. Let me repeat that again for you. Shweta has to learn to bite the bullet and face her fear for darkness.

Let us look at the third usage, break a leg. It means to wish somebody good luck. Let us check the usage. Oh, this is your first audition, isn't it? Break a leg man. Let me repeat that again for you. Oh, this is your first audition, break a leg man.

Now the fourth phrase is make a mountain out of a molehill, which means to exaggerate a minor difficulty. If someone exaggerates a minor difficulty if someone whines about a small difficulty then you say to make a mountain out of a molehill. Now, let us check the usage. She just asked you to lower down your pitch; it is nothing to make a mountain out of a molehill.

So someone has asked to lower the voice, and for that, someone else gets offended, and therefore, that person seems to be fully upset and is making a scene out of that. So then, a third person says that she just has asked you to lower down your tone, it is nothing to make a fuss about. Instead of using fuss about there, the expression that you can use is make a mountain out of a molehill.

The next phrase is kill two birds with one stone. What does that mean? Means to achieve two aims with single effort; never kill a bird, do not take that literally. Let me repeat the meaning again. Kill two birds with one stone means to achieve two aims with a single effort.

Let us check the usage. Whenever I jog, I like listening to English audiobooks. In that way, I kill two birds with a single stone; I stay fit, and I improve my English language skills. Let me repeat that again for you. Whenever I go jogging, I listen to English audiobooks. In that way, I kill two birds with one stone; I stay fit, and I also improve my English language skills.

Now, the sixth phrase is to move heaven and earth. It means to make maximum efforts. Let us check the usage. His friends had to move heaven and earth to bring him out of prison, which means his friends had to work really hard to make sure that their friend comes out of prison.

The seventh phrase is to keep the ball rolling, which means to continue the work. Let us check the usage. I have started the preparations for the party, but it is up to you to keep the ball rolling, which means the person is saying that I have done my part of the work, now you must continue the rest; continue with the rest.

The next phrase is to be in the driving seat, means bearing all the responsibilities. Let us check the usage. At 70, he is firmly in the driving seat of the company as ever, meaning at the age of 70, he is still able to take all the responsibilities and continue working.

The ninth phrase is out of my league, it means the other person is superior, better at a higher level. Let's check the usage, I won't propose to her, she is the most beautiful, rich and intelligent girl I have ever met, she is out of my league. So someone here says, that because that person is much more superior to him in terms of beauty, in terms of money, in terms of intelligence that he feels inferior and therefore he doesn't want to propose to her. He feels that she is out of his league.

The tenth phrase is blessing in disguise, which means a good thing that seemed bad at first. Let me repeat that again for you, blessing in disguise means a good thing that seemed bad at first. Let's check out the usage. My car broke down again but maybe it was a blessing in disguise because I have been wasting too much time and money driving around anyway. Here the person is saying that though the car has broke down, which is a bad thing to happen, it's in a way good because he has been spending a lot of time and money driving around here and there.

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COMMON PHRASES

1. A piece of cake – very easy
2. Money burns a hole in your (one's) pocket – to spend money quickly
3. Cut ones coat according to ones cloth – to live within one's means
4. Once in a blue moon – rarely
5. Put in cold storage – to keep a work pending
6. Look for a needle in a haystack – to seek what is impossible to find
7. To miss the boat – to miss the opportunity to do something
8. Pull yourself together – calm down and act normally
9. To hear on the grapevine – to hear a rumour or an unconfirmed story
10. Cut corners – To do something in the fastest and the cheapest way

Now let's check the next phrase, A piece of cake means very easy. Ram found the project to be a piece of cake because it was incredibly easy. Because it was really easy Ram found the project a piece of cake.

The next phrase is money burns a hole in your pocket or you could also say money burns a hole in one's pocket, which means to spend money very quickly. Let us check the usage. He can't hold on to money, it always burns a hole in his pocket. Here someone is saying that the other person cannot hold on to money for a long time, meaning he ends up spending it quickly. Let us look at the next phrase. Cut one's coat according to one's cloth. We would like a bigger

house, but we must cut our coat according to the cloth. What does that mean? To live within one's means. Here, the person says that she would like a bigger house, but that is beyond her earnings. Therefore, she would like to live within her means, and therefore, she would like to get a house according to how much she has been able to save.

The next phrase is once in a blue moon, which means rarely. Let us check the usage. I do not know why she bought that car; she uses it once in a blue moon, which means someone is looking at a car and is saying that let us imagine it is a neighbour. The neighbour is looking at the car, and he feels why did she even buy that car because she rarely uses that, because she uses that once in a blue moon.

The next phrase is put in cold storage, which means to keep work pending. Let us look at the usage. We can't consider these design changes now, let us put them in cold storage for a year or so, which means here, let us assume that the boss, the project manager is telling that we do not want these design changes or the plans, change of plans at this time. Maybe we should keep it on hold and revisit that a year after. So put in cold storage means to keep work pending.

The next phrase is to look for a needle in a haystack. It means to seek what is impossible to find. Let us check the usage. We have been looking for an apartment here for a month now, and it is like finding a needle in a haystack, which means someone is just tired of hunting for a house, and he has not been able to find it, and it is a very tedious task. So he thinks that it is close to impossible to find a good flat there. Therefore he says, it seems like finding a needle in a haystack.

Let us look at the next phrase. To miss the boat. It means to miss the opportunity to do something. Let us check the usage. The discounted price sale ended today, and I just missed the boat on making a great deal. So someone is feeling bad that they have missed the discounted price sale and therefore, they have missed the boat, that is, they have missed the opportunity.

The next phrase is to pull yourself together, which means to calm down and act normally. Let us check the usage. Roy is finding it difficult to pull himself together after that accident, which means Roy has met with an accident, and he is finding it difficult to calm himself and get back to his normal life.

The next phrase is to hear on the grapevine; this is my favourite, which means to hear a rumour or an unconfirmed story. This is not an easy idiom, isn't it? Let us check the usage. I heard on the grapevine that Jahan and Rumaisa are getting married, which means someone is saying that I heard a rumoured story that Jahan and Rumaysa are getting married.

Or it also means that you got to know from a third person, from an unconfirmed source that Jahan and Rumaisa are getting married. So this is a tricky one, keep this in mind; to hear on the grapevine means to hear a rumour or an unconfirmed story.

The next phrase is to cut corners. It means to do something in the fastest and the cheapest way. Let us check the usage. When the boss found that the accounting department was cutting corners, he fired them all.



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The slide has a yellow header bar with the text 'COMMON PHRASES'. In the top right corner, there is a logo of IIT Madras with the text 'IIT Madras ONLINE DEGREE'. The main content area contains a list of 10 phrases:

1. Between the devil and the deep sea – between two difficult situations
2. Beat around the bush – avoid saying what you mean usually because it is uncomfortable
3. Better late than never – It is better to arrive or do something later than expected than to not arrive or not do something at all
4. Out of order – not working properly
5. Out of place – to feel or look different from other people in a specific place
6. Flog a dead horse – waste ones effort
7. Actions speak louder than words – what someone actually does means more than what they say they will do
8. Bite off more than you can chew – try to do something that is too difficult or too much for you
9. Out of character – behaving differently than usual
10. To get a taste of your own medicine – get treated the way you have been treating other people

The next phrase is between the devil and the deep sea. It means between two difficult situations. Now, let us check the usage. He is caught between the devil and the deep sea when his wife and mother fights. So here, someone is saying that when a fight erupts between a person's mother and his wife, he is caught up in between that, in between the fight or in between those situations and that makes it really difficult.

The next phrase is beat around the bush, which means avoid saying what you mean usually because it is uncomfortable or avoid saying something directly. Let us check out the usage. Do not beat around the bush; state your case in simple and direct words. So here, someone is saying that do not beat around the bush, do not be so indirect, just state what you want to say in clear and simple terms.

The next phrase is better late than never. This is again, one of my personal favourites. What does this mean? It means it is better to arrive or do something late than expected than to not arrive or not do at all. Let us check the usage. It took me a long time to learn but better late than never. So someone is saying that it took something a long time for him to learn, but he feels it is okay because it is better late than never.

The next usage is out of order, which means not working properly. Let us check the usage. The elevator is out of order again. You must have heard this; this is quite common, right? The next phrase is out of place, which means to feel or look different from other people in a specific place. Usage; let us check out the usage. The velvet sofa is out of place on the porch,

which means on the porch, there is a velvet sofa, and that sofa looks so out of place; it does not fit in with the entire ambience of the place.

The next phrase is flog a dead horse, which means waste one's effort. Let us check out the usage. We have all moved on from that problem, so there is no use flogging a dead horse. So someone is saying that all of us have moved on from that specific problem, so there is no point revisiting that, or there is no point wasting one's effort revisiting that topic again.

The next phase is actions speak louder than words. What does this mean? It means what someone actually does, means more than what they say they will do. Let us check out the usage. Do not tell me how to do this; show me; action speaks louder than words. So someone is telling, let us assume, it is a boss telling her employee, do not tell me what to do and how you are going to do it, just show me. Just show me, just do it and show me; action speaks louder than words.

The next phrase is bite off more than you can chew. It means to try to do something that is too difficult or too much for you. Let us check the usage. By accepting two part-time jobs, he is clearly biting off more than what he can chew.

So let us assume a man is talking about his friend who has taken two part-time jobs and feels it is too much for him to handle. And therefore, he says taking two part-time jobs is actually, in taking two part-time jobs, his friend is actually biting off more than what he can chew is doing something that is way more difficult for him or that is too much for him.

The next phrase is out of character. It means behaving differently than usual. Let us check out the usage. Ann's remark was quite out of character; it was out of character for Ann to act so stubbornly. It means that Ann is a very understanding person, and it was very out of character for Ann to act very stubbornly. So someone is perplexed, and that person makes this remark that it is completely out of character for Ann to act so stubbornly because that is not expected from Ann.

So the final phrase of today's class is to get a taste of your own medicine. This is again, one of my personal favourites, which means to get treated the way you have been treating other people.

Let us check out the usage. I do not feel sorry that people are calling you names, you are getting a taste of your own medicine, which means someone here is telling to their friend that, well, you call people names, and now, you should not be surprised or upset that people are

calling you names. Why? Because in the process, he is actually getting the taste of his own medicine, which means he is getting treated the way he has been treating other people.

So with that, our class comes to an end today. I will see you with a different module on a different day. Until then, stay safe, have a nice day. Bye.

