

ESL 065 idioms summary

Meeting New People

1. **Baby Boomer:** someone born between 1945-1960 after World War II when many returning soldiers had many children creating a large population of children, or boom.

Example: My dad was born in 1948 after WWII. He's a **baby boomer**.

2. **Beating a dead Horse:** If someone is trying to convince people to do or feel something without any hope of succeeding, they're beating a dead horse. This is used when someone is trying to raise interest in an issue that no-one supports anymore; beating a dead horse will not make any difference.

Example: You've told me that story about your bad experience many times. I still think it's your fault. Stop **beating a dead horse**.

3. **Bet your bottom dollar:** If you can bet your bottom dollar on something, you can be absolutely sure about it.

Example:

Bob: Do you really think the Golden State Warriors will win the championship?

Joe: You bet your bottom dollar they will!

4. **Horse of a different color:** If something is a horse of a different color, it's a different matter or separate issue altogether.

Example:

Tim: So how is your girlfriend doing?

John: She's fine. By the way, did you ever ask your brother about that business deal?

Tim: Not yet. But that's a **horse of a different color**.

5. **It's been a slice:** When someone leaves and you have said your goodbyes it is usually the last thing you may say.....It's been a slice. I use it after a visit where we have had a good time.

Example:

Sarah: It was great seeing you again. **It's been a slice**. I have to go. See you later.

6. **My dogs are barking:** When someone says this, they mean that their feet are hurting.

Example: I worked for 10 hours today. I'm so tired! **My dogs are barking**.

7. **Nickel Tour:** If someone gives you a nickel tour, they show you around a place. ('Fifty-cent tour' is also used.)

Example: I wish I had more time to show you San Francisco, but I have work today. I'll just have to give you **the nickel tour**.

8. **Paint yourself into a corner:** If someone paints themselves into a corner, they get themselves into a mess/difficult situation/embarrassing situation.

Example:

Kelly: Hi Carla. Aren't you supposed to be at work today? The boss said you have a meeting today.

Carla: Oh no! I completely forgot about that. I was at the salon getting my hair done.

Kelly: I think you've **painted yourself into a corner**.

9. **Run around the bush:** If you run around the bush, it means that you're taking a long time to get to the point and should focus on talking about the main idea.

Example: Ok you've been telling me this story for 20 minutes. Can you please get to the point and **stop running around the bush**?

10. **Talk a blue streak:** If someone talks a blue streak, they speak quickly and at length. ('Talk up a blue streak' is also used.)

Example: My friend Sally loves to talk. She can **talk a blue streak**.

11. **Wallflower:** A shy person who is not asked to dance is a wallflower. This expression is also used in general to describe a shy person.

Example: Tina is so shy, she's such a **wallflower**.

12. **Whistling Dixie:** If someone is whistling Dixie, they talk about things in a more positive way than the reality.

Example:

Mark: Don't listen to Tim. He tries to make every situation sound overly positive. He's always **whistling Dixie**.

1. **Clear the air:** To get rid of doubts and bad feelings by being honest.

Example:

Dan: I know you haven't talked to me in weeks. I know something is wrong. Let's please **clear the air**.

John: ok.

2. **Fair weather friend:** A fair weather friend is someone who is only your friend when everything is good, but no longer are your friend when the situation becomes difficult.

Example:

Carla: I don't think you should meet with Sally.

Tina: Why not?

Carla: Because she only likes you when everything is good. She's never there to support you when things are bad. She's a **fair weather friend**.

3. **In the dark:** You don't know anything.

Example: I know the math teacher wants to give us a test, but I have missed 2 weeks of class, so I am **in the dark** about how to study for it.

4. **It's raining cats and dogs:** When there is heavy rain, people say it's raining cats and dogs.

Example: Oh look outside. Look at all that rain. I can't see anything but rain. It's **raining cats and dogs**.

5. **On cloud nine:** A person on cloud nine is said to be very happy, usually over something wonderful happening in life.

Example: I just won the lottery today. I'm **on cloud nine**.

6. **Set someone or something straight:** To advise someone very strongly that what they are doing is wrong, and try to convince them to do something else.

Example: My sister wants to marry a bad man. I need to stop her. I need to **set her straight**.

7. **Under the weather:** this expression is used to describe when someone is feeling sick/ill.

Example:

Tom: Hey Jim. You don't look so good.

Jim: I don't feel so good. I think I may be sick. I'm **under the weather**.

8. **Any port in the storm:** This means that in an emergency, any solution will do, even one that would normally be unacceptable.

Example: When my company was drowning in debt, I had to make very difficult choices. **Any port in the storm would do**.

9. **As the crow flies:** This idiom is used to describe the shortest possible distance between two places.

Example: That store is very close to here **as far as the crow flies**.

10. **(Something) is going/gone south:** This idiom describes when a situation becomes worse for someone or something.

Example: When many stores closed, the economy **went south**.

11. **Blue Skies:** An overly enthusiastic outlook or disposition. The sales team had blue skies projections for their deals, although not many of those deals were signed.

Example: My sister is a big optimist. She always thinks the best of every situation. She has a **blue skies** outlook on life.

12. **Bolt from the blue:** If something happens unexpectedly and suddenly, it is a bolt from the blue. This is used from weather where you get lightning in a clear blue sky.

Example: I haven't seen my brother in five months, but yesterday he came to my house unannounced like a **bolt from the blue**.

13. **Burning daylight:** if someone says, you're burning daylight; they mean you are wasting time.

Example:

Mom: Stop playing video games! You have a report due tomorrow in school. You're **burning daylight**.

14. **The calm before the storm:** A calm time immediately before a period of violent activity or argument is the calm before the storm.

Example: When my mom got my report card before dinner. I knew it was **the calm before the storm**.

1. **The Bee's Knees:** Something that is the bee's knees is excellent.

Example: This bread is the best bread I've ever tasted. It's **the bee's knees**.

2. **The cat's pajamas:** Something that is the cat's pajamas is excellent.

Example: This bread is the best bread I've ever tasted. It's **the cat's pajamas**.

3. **Duck soup:** If something is duck soup, it is very easy.

Example: I'm very good at reading. Reading a long book is **duck soup**.

4. **Eat crow:** If you eat crow, you have to admit that you were wrong about something.

Example: Ok Joe. You said your sports team would win, but they lost. Now, **eat crow**.

5. **Being carded/Getting carded:** Being checked for identification.

Example: My friend Fred looks very young. When he goes to a bar, he's always **getting carded**.

6. **Breaking bread:** Sharing food or eating together.

Example: It's good to see everyone is here. Let's eat. Let's **break bread**.

7. **Chopped liver:** Ignored or unimportant.

Example: My mom prefers my brother. What about me, am I **chopped liver**?

8. **Comfort food:** Food that gives a sense of well-being. The kind of food easily prepared for informal gatherings and good times.

Example: My mom's famous pot roast is my favorite **comfort food**. She makes it for me when I'm sad.

9. **Dead meat:** In serious trouble.

Example: Watch out Dan. You broke mom's favorite vase. Now, you're **dead meat**.

10. **Eating out:** Eating at a restaurant, or somewhere else, instead of at home.

Example: I'm too tired to cook today. Let's **eat out**.

11. **Food for thought:** Something to think about.

Example: When my friend told me I need to be more considerate of other people, it gave me some **food for thought**.

12. **Free range:** A chicken or other farm animal that's raised on a farm, not in a cage, and is free to roam around.

Example: Most people in California prefer to eat **free range** food because free range animals are treated more humanely.

13. **Have one's cake and eat it, too:** When you say: You can't have your cake and eat it, too, you mean something like: You can't do both; It's either this or that; You can't have it both ways; You can't always have everything.

Example: My brother wants to be a famous musician and wants to live alone in the mountains. I told him that's not possible to have both. He can't **have his cake and eat it too**.

14. **Having a lot on one's plate:** Having a lot to do. Having a lot of things to deal with.

Example: I'm so busy this week. I **have a lot on my plate**.

15. **Hot potato:** Too hot to handle a controversial issue.

Example: Don't talk to Steve about his relationship with his girlfriend. It's a **hot potato**. They may break up soon.

History Idioms

1. **Achilles' Heel (adj. phrase):** A person's weak spot is their Achilles' heel.

Example: I'm a horrible cook. That's my **Achilles heel**.

2. **Actions speak louder than words (expression):** This idiom means that what people actually do is more important than what they say. People can promise things but then fail to deliver.

Example: You can promise to clean your room, or you can actually clean your room. I think **actions speak louder than words**.

3. **Ahead of time (prepositional phrase):** If something happens ahead of time, it happens early or before the set time.

Example: I'm so happy I finished my homework very early. I'm finished **ahead of time**.

4. **All roads lead to Rome (expression):** This means that there can be many different ways of doing something.

Example: There are many ways to read. In the end, what matters most is that you understand what you read. **All roads lead to Rome**.

5. **As you sow, so shall you reap (expression):** This means that if you do bad things to people, bad things will happen to you or good things if you do good things.

Example: (1) I'm so happy you helped that man find a job. **As you sow, so shall you reap**. I think good things will happen for you.

Example: (2) You should not have stolen money from your mother. **As you sow, so shall you reap**. You be careful. Bad things may happen to you.

6. **Bad Blood (adj. phrase):** If people feel hate because of things that happened in the past, there is bad blood between them.

Example: There is **bad blood** between me and my friend Carla. She stole my boyfriend a few years ago. Now, I hate her.

7. **A clean slate (adj. phrase):** If you start something with a clean slate, then nothing bad from your past is taken into account.

Example: I used to be a bad student. Now in college, I hope to start with **a clean slate**. I'm going to try to be the best student I can be.

8. **A day in the sun (expression):** If you have your day in the sun, you get attention and are appreciated.

Example: When I work, I don't feel very appreciated. I hope one day, I'll have **my day in the sun** too.

9. **Dwell on the past (phrasal verb):** Thinking too much about the past, so that it becomes a problem is to dwell on the past. Usually we tell people not to dwell on the past. It will not help you solve your problems.

Example: I keep telling my sister that she shouldn't **dwell on the past**. She is no longer a teenager who made many mistakes. She is now an adult and should think about her adult life.

10. **Eleventh hour (adj. phrase):** If something happens at the eleventh hour, it happens right at the last minute. This idiom is used especially when you must finish something by a specific time, and you are late or just finish on time.

Example: My boss wanted me to finish my report by 11pm tonight. I was afraid I wouldn't finish in time, but I finally finished it at the **eleventh hour**.