

List of 100 Idioms and Phrases with Meaning and Example:

1. Acid Test-

**Meaning** - Acid test proves the effectiveness of something.

**Example** - I practiced hard at the dance sessions but the acid test will come when the master will assess our solo performances.

2. Cut the ground from under feet-

**Meaning** - When you cut the ground from under someone's feet, you do something which weakens their position.

**Example** - When team India hit more than 350 runs in the ODI, they cut the ground from under the opponent's feet.

3. Chase your tail-

**Meaning** - Spending a lot of time and energy doing a lot of things but actually achieving too little.

**Example** - He's been chasing his tail all week collecting data but the report is still not ready

4. Whole bag of tricks -

**Meaning** - Means trying all the clever means to achieve something.

**Example** - It was really difficult to find the information even after applying the whole bag of tricks.

5. Deliver the goods -

**Meaning** - Do what is expected or promised.

**Example** - I have given my car to a new mechanic for repair, hope he delivers the goods.

6. Fine-tooth comb -

**Meaning** - Examining something carefully to not miss out any details.

**Example** - The boss examined my report with a fine tooth comb before submitting it to the senior management.

**7. Explore all avenues-**

**Meaning** - Trying out every possibility to get a result.

**Example** - It is a difficult thing to do but if we really want it done, we must explore all avenues.

**8. Fast track something -**

**Meaning** - Rating something higher on your priority list to achieve the desired result.

**Example** - In view of the seriousness of the crime, the civil society is pressing up on a fast track decision from the court.

**9 . Get ducks in a row -**

**Meaning** - Getting your things well organized.

**Example** - To ensure a successful product launch, we must get our ducks in a row.

**10. Get the show on the road -**

**Meaning** - Putting up a plan or idea into action.

**Example** - Now that we have completed all the legal formalities, let's get the show on the road.

**11. Keep your fingers on the pulse -**

**Meaning** - Being constantly aware of the most recent developments.

**Example** - An entrepreneur must keep his fingers on the pulse of the market to be successful.

**12. Mean business -**

**Meaning** - Being serious about what you announce.

**Example** - Now that all our policies about work are put up on intranet, we mean business.

**13. Think on your feet -**

**Meaning** - Adjusting quickly to changes and making fast decisions.

**Example** - A good sales man must be able to think on his feet to close the deal.

14. Sail through something -

**Meaning** - Being successful in doing something without difficulty.

**Example** - The presentation at the national conference was extremely important for the company. We sailed through it.

15. Tricks of the trade:

**Meaning** - Clever or expert way of doing something.

**Example** - Being into the construction business for last 10 years, I know all tricks of the trade.

16. Not let grass grow under feet -

**Meaning** - Don't delay in getting something done.

**Example** - As soon as he finished all the registration formalities, he put the house on sale. He doesn't let the grass grow under his feet.

17. Work like a charm -

**Meaning** - Works very well or has the desired effect.

**Example** - I had cloves from my sore throat and they worked like a charm.

18. Back-room boys -

**Meaning** - People who perform important work but have no contact with the public.

**Example** - Our back room boys deserve applause for the success of this advertisement.

19. Dead wood -

**Meaning** - People or things which are no longer useful or necessary.

**Example** - The Company bought in a lot of new computers. They no longer want the dead woods.

20. Get the axe -

**Meaning** - lose the job.

**Example** - The projects team was undergoing a major restructuring, recruitment executives were the first to get the axe.

21. Plum job -

**Meaning** - Desirable position which is well-paid and considered relatively easy.

**Example** - This looks like a plum job but it has its own bunch of complications.

22. Shape up or ship out -

**Meaning** - This expression is used to warn someone that if they do not improve their ways, they will have to leave their job.

**Example** - When Tom started neglecting the customers, he was told to shape up or ship out.

23. Golden handshake -

**Meaning** - Big sum of money given to a person when they leave a company or retire.

**Example** - The management of various PSUs wanted to cut down on the man power. They offered a golden hand shake to many of their aged employees.

24. Separate sheep from goats -

**Meaning** - Examining a group of people and deciding their suitability

**Example** - Audition test was conducted by the director to separate sheep from goats.

25. Waiting in the wings -

**Meaning** - Waiting for an opportunity to take action, mostly to replace someone else in their job.

**Example** - The senior manager is going to retire in next 2 months. Two of his juniors who are waiting in the wings will have a fierce competition.

26. Eat, sleep and breathe something -

**Meaning** - Being so enthusiastic and passionate about something that you think about it all the time.

**Example** - My son has recently learnt cycling. He eats, sleeps and breathes it now.

27. With bells on -

**Meaning** - When you are delighted and eager to go somewhere, you are said to go with bells on.

**Example** - The New Year party at the beach is most awaited. I will be there - with bells on.

28. Fever pitch -

**Meaning** - When a feeling is very intense and exciting, it is said to be at a fever pitch.

**Example** - His love for music had reached a fever pitch before he became a world known musician.

29. Blood, sweat and tears -

**Meaning** - Something that requires a lot of effort and hard work.

**Example** - Being the team of Indian cricket team is not just a matter of luck for him, it is his blood, sweat and tears which has got him here.

30. Have on the brain -

**Meaning** - Thinking or talking about it all day long.

**Example** - He has just got engaged. Now, he has his fiance on his brain all the time.

31. Fling yourself into -

**Meaning** - Doing something with a lot of energy and enthusiasm.

**Example** - Flinging himself into the exercise routine is the reason for his good physique.

32. Raring to go -

**Meaning** - Being very eager and enthusiastic about the idea of doing something.

**Example** - My kids wish to see the animals. They are raring to go to zoo.

**33. Xerox subsidy -**

**Meaning** - Using the office photocopier for personal use.

**Example** - The office now has a strict policy about Xerox subsidy.

**34. Get a grip on yourself -**

**Meaning** - Controlling your feelings to deal with a situation.

**Example** - Reema saw her jewelry and cash missing from the almirah. After the initial shock, she got a grip on herself and called up the police.

**35. Hang on by fingernails -**

**Meaning** - Continuing to do something in a very difficult situation.

**Example** - The market of watches has suffered a big loss after the arrival of mobile phones. The survivors are just hanging on by their fingernails.

**36. Pull out all the stops -**

**Meaning** - Doing everything you can to make something successful.

**Example** - The deadline for the project is fast arriving; we have pulled out all the stops for timely completion.

**37. Buckle down -**

**Meaning** - Doing some hard work with determination and full attention.

**Example** - Getting through the exam for civil services is possible when you have buckled down yourself.

**38. First out of the gate -**

**Meaning** - Being the first one to make a start at something.

**Example** - John and his friends had decided to voice their opinion against the new economic policy. John was the first one to be out of the gate.

39. Going places -

**Meaning** - Exhibiting talent and ability that will lead to a successful future.

**Example** - Rakesh was a performer at the school sports club. It was obvious that he was going places.

40. Have one's heart set on -

**Meaning** - Possessing a determination to obtain something.

**Example** - He has not become a renowned cardiologist just by chance. He has his heart set on it after his father passed away with a cardiac arrest.

41. Make headway -

**Meaning** - Progress in what you are trying to achieve.

**Example** - The police have made headway with their investigation in the terror attack on the city last Friday.

42. Punch above one's weight-

**Meaning** - Performing beyond your ability.

**Example** - He was not the best swimmer around but he could win the gold medal at the state swimming competition by working hard and punching above his weight in the finals.

43. Sink your teeth into -

**Meaning** - doing something with a lot of energy and enthusiasm.

**Example** - Marie joined the badminton coaching classes. She sank her teeth into the practice sessions.

44. Stand one's ground -

**Meaning** - Maintaining your position.

**Example** - He stood his ground in support of his friend in spite of several family interferences.

45. Close to home -

**Meaning** - A comment which is true and makes you uncomfortable is close to home.

**Example** - Tom's comment about his friend's unethical activities was quite close to home. He looked quite embarrassed.

46. Carry the torch for -

**Meaning** - Having strong feelings for someone who cannot be yours.

**Example** - He has been carrying a torch for Mamta, who is now married to Nitin, since they studied together in college.

47. Cork up something -

**Meaning** - Failing to express your emotions.

**Example** - She did not let her grief pour out when her father passed away. It's not good for her to cork up his feelings.

48. Cut to the quick -

**Meaning** - Hurting someone deeply or offending them.

**Example** - Joe had worked for 10 years with all his loyalty for his company. He was cut to the quick when his boss held him responsible for the theft.

49. Fish out of water -

**Meaning** - Feeling uncomfortable in unfamiliar surroundings.

**Example** - Being French, I felt like a fish out of water in the group of Japanese.

50. Bee in one's bonnet -

**Meaning** - Carrying an idea which constantly occupies your thoughts.

**Example** - She is not happy in Africa. She has a bee in the bonnet about moving to Dubai.



51. Deep down -

**Meaning** - Describing what a person really feels deep inside or what is he like.

**Example** - He appears to be indifferent to the success or failure of his children but deep down he is highly concerned.

52. Have your heart in the right place -

**Meaning** - Refers to a person with good intentions; even though the results are not that impressive.

**Example** - The dinner she had cooked wasn't the best but she had her heart in the right place.

53. Groan inwardly -

**Meaning** - Refers to a feeling where you want to express despair, disapproval or distress, but you keep quite.

**Example** - She was quite disappointed at the sarcastic remark by her friend but looking at the situation sh groaned inwardly.

54. Beard the lion in his den -

**Meaning** - Challenge someone in his own area.

**Example** - If he doesn't come to see me today, I'll have to beard the lion in his den.

55. Keep a stiff upper lip -

**Meaning** - Refers to a person who doesn't show off his emotions.

**Example** - He heard the news about his father's demise but kept a stiff upper lip.

56. Go bananas -

**Meaning** - Refers to someone who behaves in a crazy way out of emotions.

**Example** - Your decision to go abroad for a year will make your family go bananas.

57. Lump in your throat -

**Meaning** - Refers to a tight feeling in your throat because of an emotion like sadness or gratitude.

**Example** - After all the hardships, I saw my son winning a gold medal today - I had a lump in my throat.

58. Hard as nails -

**Meaning** - Refers to a person without sentiments and sympathy for anyone.

**Example** - He has become as hard as a nail after his brother was brutally murdered.

59. Lick one's wounds -

**Meaning** - Trying to regain their confidence or boost up the spirits after a defeat.

**Example** - Raja is licking his wounds after being dropped from the Indian Cricket Team.

60. Proud as a peacock -

**Meaning** - Refers to an extremely proud person.

**Example** - His son is has finally become a doctor. He is as proud as a peacock.

61. Tongue-tied -

**Meaning** - Difficulty in expressing yourself because of nervousness or embarrassment.

**Example** - As her prospective in laws came to see her, she was completely tongue tied.

62. Look on the bright side -

**Meaning** - View an unpleasant situation in a positive light.

**Example** - You met with an accident but look on the bright side - you managed to get away just with some bruises.

63. Swallow one's pride -

**Meaning** - Accepting something humiliating or embarrassing.

**Example** - When his son was caught cheating in the exam. He had to swallow his pride and meet the principal.

64. Makes your flesh crawl -

**Meaning** - Something that makes you feel disgusting or nervous.

**Example** - The sight of the accident made my flesh crawl.

65. Speak volumes -

**Meaning** - Expresses a reaction without words.

**Example** - She came to pick me at the station at an odd hour. Her actions spoke volumes about her brevity.

66. Not turn a hair -

**Meaning** - Refers to not exhibiting any emotion where it is expected.

**Example** - He didn't turn a hair even after his office was raided by the CBI.

67. Reduce to tears -

**Meaning** - Getting into tears because of some one's behavior.

**Example** - Her best friend stopped talking to her. This reduced her to tears.

68. In the bag -

**Meaning** - Refers to a situation when you are sure that success is sure.

**Example** - The wickets of opponent team fell down very fast, victory seemed to be in the bag at the end of 25 over.

69. Blow up in face -

**Meaning** - Refers to a situation when a plan or project suddenly fails.

**Example** - It was difficult to get a place in the train to Mumbai. It blew up in the face when a train de-railed and blocked the track.

70. Bottom fell out -

**Meaning** - Refers to a situation when a plan or project fails.

**Example** - When the police announced a red alert in the city, the bottom fell out of their plan to hold a rally.

71. Cake not worth the candle -

**Meaning** - Refers to something in which result vs. efforts are too less.

**Example** - He worked very hard to organize the party but very few guests walked in. The cake wasn't worth the candle.

72. Chance one's arm -

**Meaning** - Deciding to do something even though the chances of success are very little.

**Example** - She knew there was little chance of getting through the audition test but she decided to chance her arm.

73. Come up roses -

**Meaning** - Successful end results even though there may be some initial hiccups.

**Example** - After initial hiccups, the project seems to be coming up roses.

74. Cook someone's goose -

**Meaning** - Spoil other person's chances of success.

**Example** - When the opponent team saw Indian batsmen taking wicket after wicket, they realized that their goose was cooked.

75. Cut one's own throat -

**Meaning** - Doing something that will cause your own failure.

**Example** - Raghav is not sincere in the class since the beginning. He is cutting his own throat.

76. Foot in the door -

**Meaning** - Small but good start with a possibility for a bright future.

**Example** - With customers coming in, his new venture has got a foot in the door.

77. Go great guns -

**Meaning** - Being successful.

**Example** - Ram's preparation for the final exams is going great guns. He scored 90% marks in the practice test.

78. Dead in the water -

**Meaning** - Plan or project that has ceased to function and is not expected to be re-activated in future.

**Example** - Because of the revolt from the civil society, the plan to get the FDI in various sectors is now dead in the water.

79. Flying start -

**Meaning** - Something that is immediately successful.

**Example** - The film hit the box office with a flying start and collected the highest revenue on day 1.

80. Make a go of -

**Meaning** - Succeeding in your enterprise.

**Example** - With his hard work and dedication, he has made a go of his new venture.

81. Go to the dogs -

**Meaning** - Getting comparably less successful than before.

**Example** - With new corruption scams un-veiling every day, the country is going to dogs.

81. Go up in smoke -

**Meaning** - Something that ends before getting a result.

**Example** - With a vigilant police force around the town, the plan of antisocial elements to cause chaos went up in smoke.

82. Live on the breadline -

**Meaning** - Having very little income.

**Example** - The partition of the country has left many people on the breadline.

83. Make or break -

**Meaning** - Circumstances causing total success or total ruin.

**Example** - The huge investments in this big project will make or break him.

84. Landslide victory -

**Meaning** - Overwhelming victory received by a candidate of political party at an election.

**Example** - With a win of more than 40% seats in the first two hours of counting, they are expecting a landslide victory.

85. Let slip through fingers -

**Meaning** - Failing to obtain or keep up a good opportunity.

**Example** - This opportunity can be your breakthrough in the industry. Don't let it slip through your fingers.

86. Rags to riches -

**Meaning** - Becoming very rich while starting very poor.

**Example** - His innovative ideas in business got him from rags to riches.

87. On the pig's back -

**Meaning** - Refers to a person in a successful and well situation.

**Example** - The tourism in the state was on the pig's back before the terror attacks hit the capital.

88. Miss the boat -

**Meaning** - Failing to take advantage of an opportunity because of slow actions.

**Example** - I managed to get a discount of 10% but could not get an early bird offer. Reaching late made me miss the boat.

89. Smash hit -

**Meaning** - Refers to music, films which are very successful.

**Example** - His music became a smash hit in a week's time.

90. Murphy's law -

**Meaning** - Means that if anything can go wrong, it will.

**Example** - Let's be prepared for the worst but don't forget the Murphy's law.

91. Place in the sun -

**Meaning** - Finding a place in the sun refers to a position which provides you all the success and happiness you want in your life.

**Example** - Getting married into the renowned business family in the town, she found a place in the sun.

92. Sink or swim -

**Meaning** - fails or succeed.

**Example** - The test will decide if he sinks or swims.

93. Champagne on a beer budget -

**Meaning** - Wanting expensive things that you cannot afford.

**Example** - She always buys things out of her budget. She has developed a taste for champagne on beer budget.

94. Top dog -

**Meaning** - Very successful group, company, person, country etc.

**Example** - The economic survey proved that they are the top dogs of the IT industry.

95. Keep up appearances -

**Meaning** - Maintaining an outward show of prosperity or well-being while hiding your difficulties

**Example** - Keeping up the appearances was important for him to secure the new big projects.

96. Wooden spoon -

**Meaning** - Imaginary prize for the last person in a race.

**Example** - We won a wooden spoon at the fashion show.

97. Have the world by its tail -

**Meaning** - Very successful person who can choose from a lot of opportunities.

**Example** - Being the pioneers in the pharmaceutical industry, they are now having the world by its tail.

98. Live beyond means -

**Meaning** - Spending more money than you can afford.

**Example** - He has a habit of living beyond his means. Most of the times, you will find him borrowing the money from his friends.

99. Live in an ivory tower -

**Meaning** - Living a lifestyle that saves you from the real world problems.

**Example** - Her inexperience in dealing with tough situations is because she has lived in an ivory tower

100. Hit the road running -

**Meaning** - Start performing immediately.

**Example** - She was our old employee. She hit the road running when she joined us back.