

# SPICE UP YOUR VOCABULARY!

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50 COMMON ENGLISH PHRASAL VERBS AND IDIOMS



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# INTRODUCTION

What makes languages so fascinating is the fact that each language has its own characteristics. Each language has its unique sounds, constructions and...expressions.

If you want to achieve great domain of the English language, learning phrasal verbs and idioms is a must. Let me just define the terms very quickly:

## **PHRASAL VERBS**

A phrasal verb is a combination of verb + preposition; two or three distinct words which, when brought together, form yet a third distinct meaning, e.g. 'keep on'.

The verb 'keep' has a meaning, as well as the preposition 'on'. However, when these two words are joined, they form another meaning: 'To continue'.



# INTRODUCTION

‘I need to continue studying’ could easily be replaced by ‘I need to keep on studying’. Sometimes, a phrasal verb may have three words, such as ‘Get along with’. ‘Get along with’ means ‘to have a good relationship with’, e.g. ‘I get along (well) with my father’.

## IDIOMS

An idiom is an idiomatic expression. It’s a combination of words which, when translated or thought of literally, do not make much sense. A good example is ‘It’s raining cats and dogs’.

If we think of the literal meaning of this sentence, we would imagine real cats and dogs falling off the sky, which does not make any sense at all.

However, this is an idiomatic expression. It’s used simply to emphasize the amount of rain. When someone says ‘It’s raining cats and dogs’, they mean ‘It’s raining a lot’.



# INTRODUCTION

Phrasal verbs and idioms are frequently used by native speakers. This is one of the main reasons why students sometimes have a hard time understanding movies, TV series, blog articles or the news on TV.

When working on your vocabulary, it's much better to focus on learning phrasal verbs and idioms as opposed to individual words.

The more phrasal verbs and idioms you know and use, the more you will speak English like a native speaker. Plus, the more you will understand native speakers talking.

In this eBook, I've compiled 50 of the most commonly used phrasal verbs and idioms in American English. I hope you enjoy it.

# PHRASAL VERBS

## 1) 'Watch out'

Expression used to tell someone to be careful when facing imminent danger.

Example: Imagine there is a person dusting a bookshelf full of books. You see that one of the books is about to fall on the person's head, but they don't see it. In this case, you can shout 'watch out'!

## 2) 'Get off the phone'

'Get off' here means to 'disconnect the phone'.

Example: You want to use the phone but your daughter has been using it non-stop for the past 15 minutes. You can say: 'Jenny, get off the phone now'!

### 3) 'Stop by'

It means to go to a place and spend a brief time there, usually in-between destinations. Another meaning can be 'To pay a quick visit'.

Example 1: Imagine you just left work and are going home. However, in the middle of the way, you remember to stop at the supermarket to quickly buy some food for dinner. You can say: 'I'm going home, but I need to stop by the supermarket first'.

Example 2: You pay your friend a quick visit before going away for the weekend. At the end of your visit, your friend says: 'Thanks for stopping by'.

### 4) 'Hand in'

To hand in means 'to give' or 'deliver'.

Example: Your boss asks you to deliver your monthly report tomorrow. You can say: 'I need to hand in my report tomorrow.'

### 5) 'Sneak in'

To sneak in means to 'enter someplace quietly so other people don't see or hear you'.

Example: The thief sneaked in the house and took a laptop.

### 6) 'Come up with something'

To come up with something means 'to create something'.

Example: You are writing a book. After finishing it, you need to come up with a title for it.

### 7) 'Bring up a topic'

It means to introduce a topic in a conversation.

Example: I don't want to hear about this matter anymore. Please don't bring it up again.

### 8) 'Make something up'

It means to invent something.

Example: I made up an excuse for being late.

### 9) 'Get away with something'

It means to do something wrong without being caught or without suffering the consequences.

Example: The police officer saw me running a red light, but I got away with it.

### 10) 'Cut down on something'

It means to eat, drink or do something less often.

Example: I need to cut down on alcohol.

### 11) 'Let somebody down'

It means to disappoint somebody.

Example: You let me down when you lied to me.



### 12) 'Show off'

It means to try to impress other people.

Example: Look at that guy playing the guitar with one hand. He's just showing off.

### 13) 'Take off'

It means to leave.

Example: Jack took off because he needs to wake up early tomorrow.

### 14) 'Fall out with somebody'

It means to stop being friends with somebody.

Example 1: They used to be best friends, but they have fallen out.

Example 2: Dan fell out with his father and left home.

Example 3: They had a falling out and broke their business partnership.

**15) 'Work something out'**

It means to think about a problem and find a solution.

Example: My wife and I disagree on where to spend the holidays, but we will work it out.

**16) 'Eat out'**

It means to eat at a restaurant, not at home.

Example: I usually eat out on the weekends because I'm too tired to cook.

**17) 'Drop out'**

It means to stop a course before you finish it.

Example: Johnny went to college but dropped out after a year.

**18) 'Get by'**

It means to manage; survive.

Example: Even though he had lost his job, they had enough money to get by until he got another one.

**19) 'Break down'**

It means 'the engine stopped working'.

Example: I was late because my car broke down on the way.

**20) 'Run out of something'**

It means to use it all.

Example: We ran out of drinks, so we needed to go to the liquor store to buy more.

**21) 'Be off (to a place)'**

It means to go to a place.

Example: I'm off to Berlin tomorrow morning.

**22) 'Put on (some music)'**

It means to play some music.

Example: I haven't listened to this album yet.  
Why don't you put it on?

**23) 'Pick up somebody'**

It means to meet somebody at a place and take them somewhere else.

Example: I had to pick up my parents at the airport so I could take them to my house.

**24) 'Show up'**

It means to appear; to come.

Example: Many people showed up at the party.

## 25) 'Take over'

It means to become responsible for something by replacing somebody else.

Example: Mr. Burton is going to retire next year, and Ms. Summers will take over his economics class as the new Professor.

These are just a few examples of common phrasal verbs. It's important to point out that some phrasal verbs have more than one meaning and can be used in different situations.

A good example is 'take off'. On the list above, I wrote that 'take off' means 'to leave'. However, you can also use this phrasal verb to talk about the airplane. When the plane lifts off the ground, the plane 'takes off'.

Also, 'take off' means to remove. For instance, before taking a shower, you need to 'take off' your clothes.

There are phrasal verbs dictionaries like the ones published by McMillan, Oxford, Longman and Cambridge that can give you all the possible meanings a phrasal verb can have.

# IDIOMS

## 26) 'Keep it under someone's hat'

It means to keep a secret and not tell anyone.

Example: Julie told me she's getting me married next year. But keep it under your hat. She doesn't want anyone to know it yet.

## 27) 'Jump the gun'

It means to do something too early, before you're ready or before the conditions are right.

Example: You should have waited for me before telling everybody about our plans. You jumped the gun.

# IDIOMS

## 28) 'Bury the hatchet'

It means to stop arguing about something and make peace (be friends) again.

Example: It's been five years since they stopped being friends. But now, I think they're ready to bury the hatchet.

## 29) '(Not) have a clue'

It means to be ignorant or oblivious about something. Used to talk about a person who has no idea of what is happening or doesn't know how to do something.

Example 1: She really liked him and was into him, but he didn't have a clue.

Example 2: Do you know how to turn this off? I don't have a clue.

# IDIOMS

## **30) 'To be the apple of someone's eye'**

It means to be loved very much by someone, especially by an older member of your family.

Example: My granddaughter Melissa is amazing. She's the apple of my eye.

## **31) 'To be all ears'**

It means to listen carefully to what a person has to say.

Example: Tell me what happened. I'm all ears.

## **32) To walk all over someone**

It means to treat someone without any respect.

Example: If you don't impose boundaries, people will walk all over you.



# IDIOMS

## 33) 'No sweat'

It means to be able to do something very easily.

Example: Are you sure you can fix the car? - Sure, no sweat.

## 34) 'In a jiffy'

It means to go some place or do something very quickly.

Example 1: I have to go to the liquor store, but I'll be back in a jiffy.

Example 2: If you wait a little, I'll have the numbers for you in a jiffy.

## 35) 'To be in dire straits'

It means to be in a serious or difficult situation, especially because you don't have enough money.

Example: If we don't make any more sales, the company will be in dire straits.

# IDIOMS

## 36) 'To put your foot down'

It means to refuse to do something or allow something to happen, often in a forceful way.

Example: If John put his foot down more often and said 'no', people would respect him more.

## 37) 'A long face'

It is the expression on your face when you are very sad or disappointed.

Example: I don't like to see you with a long face. Come on, cheer up! Everything is going to be okay.

## 38) 'Stay put'

It means to remain in one place and not move.

Example: This line is really long. You stay put and I'll talk to the manager to check what is going on.

# IDIOMS

## 39) 'Shitfaced'

It means to be very drunk.

Example: I was so shitfaced that I forgot to lock the door.

## 40) 'That'll be the day'

It means you think it is very unlikely (almost impossible) for something to happen. It's usually spoken with a sarcastic tone.

Example: Some people believe that corruption will end among politicians. That'll be the day.

## 41) 'When push comes to shove'

It means when a situation becomes very difficult and you need to take action.

Example: You may think you have many friends, but when push comes to shove, you learn who your real friends are.

# IDIOMS

## 42) 'Drop the subject'

It means to stop talking about a subject, especially when it's upsetting for other people.

Example: When I asked her about Diana, she got really mad. So, I dropped the subject and talked about my day.

## 43) 'Bust your hump'

It means to try very hard to do something.

Example: I busted my hump writing that report, but my boss hated it.

## 44) 'Couch potato'

It is someone who spends a lot of time sitting, not using much mental or physical energy, like watching television.

Example: After I lost my job, I was a complete couch potato. I didn't even want to walk to the store next to my house.

# IDIOMS

## 45) 'Kick the bucket'

It means to die.

Example: When I finally kick the bucket, I want my children to remember me as a great father.

## 46) 'Catch someone off guard'

It means to do or say something to people when they are not ready for it, and can't manage it well.

Example: My boss caught me off guard when he asked me about last month's sales.

## 47) 'Bite someone's head off'

It means to talk to someone in a very angry, rude manner, usually without apparent reason.

Example: Hey, I just wanted to know how your day was. You don't have to bite my head off.

# IDIOMS

## 48) 'Give food for thought'

When someone gives you food for thought, they expect you to think carefully (reflect) about what they told you.

Example: Let me give you some food for thought: How can you expect people to know what you want if you never speak your mind?

## 49) 'Cry your eyes out'

It means to cry a lot and for a long time.

Example: Poor little Jaime. She cried her eyes out when her puppy died.

## 50) 'Call it a day'

It means to stop working or doing an activity because you're very tired. If you're doing something at night, you can say 'call it a night'.

Example: We were very tired from the moving, so we called it a night and went to bed.

# CONCLUSION

Learning these phrasal verbs and idioms will make your English vocabulary richer and more native-like.

Just like phrasal verbs, you can also buy an idioms dictionary from the publishers I recommended earlier.

Note: Phrasal verbs and idioms differ from American English to British English. Many times, expressions that are popular in North America will not be so popular in England or other English-speaking countries.

The phrasal verbs and idioms that I listed and explained in this eBook are based on American English. If you prefer to study British English, make sure you compare this list against your British English references.

# THANK YOU!

Thank you for downloading this eBook. I hoped you find it useful and use it as a reference for your English vocabulary.

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