7 Ways to Make English Idioms and Phrases Easier to Understand:

1. Listen to context.

Idioms are unusual expressions. So ask yourself ‘Why is that person using an unusual expression?’ The reasons are likely to be connected with emphasis, exaggeration, or a high state of emotion! So check the context – and the facial expression!

2. Check to see if you understood.

Use expressions like; ‘so you’re pretty angry about that right?’ or ‘OK, you mean that you’re too busy at the moment.

3. Be honest when you don’t understand.

Try using; ‘I’m sorry, but I don’t know what you mean.

4. Never translate idioms.

Idioms from your own language may use the same imagery or concepts (and it is always interesting to notice these similarities) but they are unlikely to translate word-for-word into English expressions.

5. Listen to how native speakers use idioms.

A native English speaker NEVER says ‘it’s raining cats and dogs’ – so why should an ESL student? Listen to what native speakers actually say in a given situation, and copy.

6. Take notes.

Keep a notebook of your favorite expressions in English and add anything new that you hear. Try to use new expressions soon after you learn them, this is called ‘use it or lose it.

7. Tolerate your mistakes.

You will definitely make mistakes and create confusion when you use idiomatic expressions, so be brave and allow yourself the space to try, fail, and try again.

metaphorically

Illuminating To make something more understandable

Right-wing A part of a political group that consists of people who support conservative or traditional ideas

Look down upon To view someone or something as unworthy

Behind you all the way To fully support someone’s actions

Point of view An opinion on something

Better perspective A clearer view of something, a more thorough understanding of a situation

Take someone’s side To support one person’s side of an argument

Where I stand My opinion, point of view

Look up to To respect someone as a role model

Moral high ground The status of being respected, a position of being ‘more’ moral than others

Sitting on the fence Undecided on a decision, avoid making a decision on something at that moment.

Illuminating To make something more understandable

Right-wing A part of a political group that consists of people who support conservative or traditional ideas

Look down upon To view someone or something as unworthy

Behind you all the way To fully support someone’s actions

Point of view An opinion on something

Better perspective A clearer view of something, a more thorough understanding of a situation

Take someone’s side To support one person’s side of an argument

Where I stand My opinion, point of view

Look up to To respect someone as a role model

Moral high ground The status of being respected, a position of being ‘more’ moral than others

Sitting on the fence Undecided on a decision, avoid making a decision on something at that moment.

A blessing in disguise

Meaning: A good thing that initially seemed bad

A dime a dozen

Meaning: Something that is very common, not unique

Adding insult to injury

Meaning: To make a bad situation even worse

Beat around the bush

Meaning: Avoid sharing your true viewpoint or feelings because it is uncomfortable

Beating a dead horse

Meaning: giving time or energy to something that is ended or over

Bite the bullet

Meaning: To get an unfavorable situation or chore over with now because it will need to get finished eventually

Best of both worlds

Meaning: The choice or solution has all of the advantages of two contrasting things at the same time

Biting off more than you can chew

Meaning: Not having the capacity to take on a new assignment or task that is just too taxing

By the skin of your teeth

Meaning: Just barely making it

Don’t judge a book by its cover

Meaning: Not judging something by its initial appearance

Doing something at the drop of a hat

Meaning: Doing something at the moment of being asked

Don’t count your chickens before they hatch

Meaning: Not to count on something happening until after it’s already happened

Caught between a rock and a hard place

Meaning: Making a choice between two unpleasant choices

Costs an arm and a leg

Meaning: Something that is overpriced or very expensive

Cutting corners

Meaning: Not performing a task or duty correctly in order to save time or money

Devil’s advocate

Meaning: To take the side of the counter-argument, or offer an alternative point of view

Feeling under the weather

Meaning: Not feeling well, or feeling sick

Fit as a fiddle

Meaning: Being in good health

Getting a taste of your own medicine

Meaning: Being treated the way that you have been treating others

Getting a second wind

Meaning: Having energy again after being tired

Giving the benefit of the doubt

Meaning: Believing someone’s story without proof even though it may seem unbelievable

Giving someone the cold shoulder

Meaning: ignoring someone

Going on a wild goose chase

Meaning: doing something that is pointless

Heard it on the grapevine

Meaning: Hearing rumors about someone or something

Hitting the nail on the head

Meaning: Performing a task with exactness

Killing two birds with one stone

Meaning: Accomplishing two different tasks in the same undertaking

Letting someone off the hook

Meaning: Not holding someone responsible for something

Letting the cat out of the bag

Meaning: Sharing information that was intended to be a secret

No pain, no gain

Meaning: You have to work hard in order to see results

On the ball

Meaning: Doing a good job, being prompt, or being responsible

Once in a blue moon

Meaning: Something that doesn’t happen very often

Piece of cake

Meaning: A task or job that is easy to complete

Pulling someone’s leg

Meaning: Joking with someone

Speak of the devil

Meaning: When the person you have just been talking about arrives

Stealing someone’s thunder

Meaning: Taking credit for someone else’s achievements

Straight from the horse’s mouth

Meaning: Reading or hearing something from the source

The last straw

Meaning: The last difficulty or annoyance that makes the entire situation unbearable

The elephant in the room

Meaning: An issue, person, or problem that someone is trying to avoid

Throwing caution to the wind

Meaning: Being reckless or taking a risk

Your guess is as good as mine

Meaning: To not know something

A snowball effect

Meaning: Something has momentum and builds on each other, much like rolling a snowball down a hill to make it bigger

An apple a day keeps the doctor away

Meaning: Apples are healthy and good for you

Burning bridges

Meaning: Damaging a relationship beyond repair

Every dog has his day

Meaning: Everyone gets their chance to do something big

Fit as a fiddle

Meaning: Excellent health

Go down in flames

Meaning: To fail in a spectacular manner

Getting a second wind

Meaning: Having energy again after being tired or worn out

Having your head in the clouds

Meaning: Day dreaming, not paying attention

He/She is off their rocker

Meaning: Someone who is acting crazy or not thinking rationally

It’s always darkest before the dawn

Meaning: Things always get worse before they get better

It takes two to tango

Meaning: One person usually isn’t the only responsible party

Like riding a bike

Meaning: Something that you never forget how to do

Like two peas in a pod

Meaning: Two people who are always together

Run like the wind

Meaning: To run really fast

Through thick and thin

Meaning: Everyone experiences hard and good times

Time is money

Meaning: Work faster or more efficiently

Weather the storm

Meaning: Enduring a trial or hardship

Can’t make an omelet without breaking some eggs

Meaning: You can’t make everyone happy

You can lead a horse to water, but you can’t make him drink

Meaning: You can’t force someone to make what is seemingly the right decision

Clouds on the horizon

Meaning: Trouble is coming or is on its way

7:36 AM

AMERICAN SLANG WORDS AND PHRASES

(To) ace (v.): To pass a test, exam, etc. really easily. "Robert aced his physics exam."

A-Game: One’s best self, often in relation to a competition. “I’ll bring my A-game”

All-ears: When someone says "I'm all ears", they are telling you that they are listening to you, that they are giving you

their undivided attention.

All-nighter (n.): A period of work or study that lasts all night. Most often used with the verb "pull" (To pull an all-nighter)

- “We pulled an all-nighter in order to finish the project."

Are you kidding me? Phrase often used rhetorically to express frustration or excitement.

Around-the-clock: 24/7, all day and night, non-stop

ASAP: stands for ‘as soon as possible’

B-Ball: often used to abbreviate basketball

Blow or Bomb: to fail or to be unsuccessful

Blue or Have the Blues: to feel depressed or sad

Bro: a friend, often used for a masculine friend

Buck: one dollar

By the skin of your teeth: just barely

Cash (n.): money

Cashback: An option available to retail consumers when, during a debit card transaction, the customer can request to

add an extra amount to the purchase price and receive the added amount in cash. Cash back using debit provides

customers a convenient method of withdrawing cash when purchasing goods and services without having to make a

separate trip to an ATM or bank.

Cheesy (adj.): Cheap, tacky. "A cheesy pick-up line", "A cheesy song", etc.

Chill: relax.

Come on: used to express frustration.

Cool (adj.): nice, great, impressive, popular, interesting "a cool dress", "a cool guy", "a cool bar"

Cop (n.): Police officer.

Couch Potato: a lazy person, one who sits on a couch and watches TV.

Cram: to study feverishly before an exam.

Crash: to go to sleep; or to show up without invitation “Can I crash here tonight?"

DC: UMass term for the dining commons

Dead: Empty; quiet (said of bars, clubs, restaurants, etc.) "It's really dead in here tonight" (It's empty in here

tonight/there are very few people here tonight).

Drive up the wall: to irritate; “He is driving me up the wall.”

Dutch or go Dutch: each person pays for his/her own meal.

FYI: acronym “for your information”

Get under one’s skin: bother

Give the cold shoulder: ignore

Hang out: to gather in a casual; and social manner.

Hip: cool, popular.

Hit the books: study.

Hit the road: to leave.

Hold your horses: Wait a minute!

Hyped (adj.): Really excited. "We're all hyped about the concert next weekend."

I feel you: I understand/empathize with you

In no time: Very soon. "Don't worry - We'll be there in no time."

It is what it is: it’s a fact that cannot be changed.

Jacked: really strong/muscular, “He’s jacked”

Jonesing: to want something badly. “I’m jonesing for a coffee”

Lemon: a bad buy or purchase.

Lighten up (v.): To relax; to not take things too seriously. "You gotta learn to lighten up a bit!"

LOL: Text acronym for ‘laugh out loud’

My Bad: my fault or my mistake.

No problem: you’re welcome, not a big deal

OMG: Text acronym for ‘oh my god’. Used to express surprise or excitement.

On the hour: an idiom for at every hour exactly; one o’clock, two o’clock, and so on. An extension of this idiom is every

hour on the hour, meaning every time the clock's big hand reaches twelve, “The bus passes by the house every hour on

the hour.”

Once in a blue moon: infrequently

Pass the buck: transfer responsibility to someone else.

Piece of cake: easy or effortless.

Put up a front: trying to act/appear tough

R.S.V.P.: Stands for a French phrase, repondez, s’il vous plait. A formal reply to an invitation, by phone or mail.

Recap: to state something again

Ride shotgun (v.): To ride in the front passenger seat of a car. "I wanna ride shotgun!"

Rip-off: overcharge.

Score: to get something you want.

Screw up (v.): To make a mistake, do something badly/wrong “I really screwed up my audition."

See ya: goodbye

Shoot the breeze: casual conversation.

Snagged/Nabbed: to take something without asking or slyly

Spill the beans: reveal a secret.

Take a rain-check: do at another time.

Take for granted: to assume.

That hit the spot: (When talking about food/drinks) that was really good; that’s just what I needed.

The bomb: if something ‘is the bomb’, it is awesome

Trash (v.): To destroy. "The band trashed the hotel room."

Twenty four seven (24/7): Non-stop, around the clock. "That place is open 24/7. It never closes."

UCard: UMass term for the University student identification card

What’s up: How are you?

Wicked: (In New England) used as adjective (meaning “amazing”) or a modifier (meaning: “really).

Wrap up (v.): To finish; to bring something to a close. "OK, let's wrap things up for today."

You bet: of course or no problem.

You can say that again! Phrase meaning "I agree with you completely."

You're telling me! Phrase meaning "I know exactly what you mean"; Similar to "Don't I know it!"