

COMMUNICATION

Advanced idioms and phrases

LEVEL

Intermediate (B2)

NUMBER

EN_B2_3083X

LANGUAGE

English

Learning outcomes

- I can understand and recall a range of more advanced idioms and phrases.
- I can accurately use these idioms in my own sentences and in an appropriate context.



Warm-up

Idioms are sayings or phrases that have a specific meaning in the culture they come from. Usually, they can't be translated **word for word**.

- What is another way of asking these questions?
- Are there idioms in your language that express something similar?
- How do they sound when you try to translate them word for word?

*Are you feeling **under the weather**?*

*Has anything been **driving you up the wall** recently?*

*Can you think of a time when you were **at the end of your tether**?*



Word for word, that's what she said. I'm just passing on the message!

I think they just translated the poem **word for word**, which is why it sounds a bit strange!

When you repeat something **word for word** you say exactly what another person said. What's another term for this? In the context of translation, it means to substitute each word in the original with a word in the second language. Naturally, this could lead to some interesting and even incomprehensible syntax!



Advanced idioms and phrases

- The idioms in today's lesson are divided into three groups:

Positive outcomes	Sadness and anger	Wisdom and advice
a blessing in disguise	under the weather	don't put all your eggs in one basket
let someone off the hook	down in the dumps	don't judge a book by its cover
speak of the devil	at the end of my tether	pull yourself together
on the ball	drive up the wall	bite the bullet

a blessing in disguise

A blessing in disguise is a **bit of good fortune** that appears negative, but is actually positive.

Why do you think the word *disguise* is used in this context?



Losing my phone was a **blessing in disguise**. I am now spending more time reading and visiting friends.

let (someone) off the hook

Imagine a friend has asked you to come over to their house to help them with a home renovation project, but you don't want to do it. He then calls you and says you don't need to come after all. He's let you off the hook!

What do you think this phrase has to do with **fishing**?



I'll **let you off the hook** today, but we really need to start working on it tomorrow.

Speak of the devil

We use this phrase when we were just talking about someone shortly before they join the conversation.

Do you have a phrase that means something **similar** in your native language?

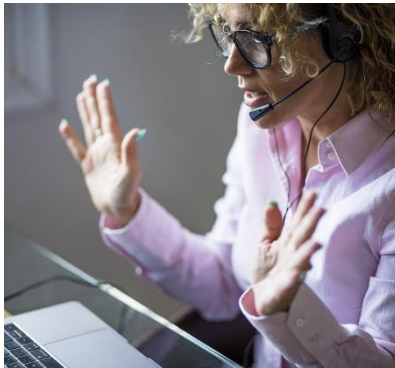


Speak of the devil! We were just talking about you.
Your presentation today was excellent.

on the ball

Feeling sharp, clever, and with it? If so, you might say you are *on the ball*. This means you are **doing things well** and **to plan**.

What does this phrase have to do with **sport**?



She's totally **on the ball** at work right now, which is impressive because she is managing two big projects.



How would you react?

Choose an idiom to respond to each situation below. **Give** a reason for your answer.

1
'We really need to be on the ball these next few weeks.'

2
'It's ok. We'll let you off the hook this time.'

3
'Speak of the devil! Here he is!'

4
'It might turn out to be a blessing in disguise.'

A You are having coffee with friends in a café. You are waiting for one of your friends to arrive. One of your friends starts to complain about how the friend who is still to arrive is always late.

B Your colleague tells you that one of your clients is unhappy with how your company has been performing recently. They inform you that they have been thinking about working with one of your competitors if things do not improve.

C Your sister calls you up to tell you that she has lost her job. She is upset, but she has been talking about wanting to change careers recently. She regularly tells you that her job makes her unhappy. She wants to pursue what she is passionate about.

D You are the captain of a basketball team. Your best player contacts you to tell you that they are unable to come to training this week.



Can you think of a time when...

**...you let someone off
the hook?**

**...you were really on
the ball?**

**...something turned
out to be a blessing
in disguise?**

**...you used the phrase
in your language that
means *speaking of the
devil?***

Sadness and anger

Read the example sentences. **Answer** the questions in the blue box.

I'm feeling a bit **under the weather** this week. I've got a bad cold.
I've been **down in the dumps** since my girlfriend broke up with me.
I'm **at the end of my tether**! My boss is impossible to deal with.
Honestly, my kids are **driving me up the wall** these days.

- Which idiom means...
 - ...to feel sad?
 - ...to feel physically ill?
 - ...to have no strength or patience left?
 - ...to be angry or irritated?
- Which idioms are usually associated with **stress** or **burnout**?





How would you react?

Choose an idiom to respond to each situation below. **Give** a reason for your answer.

1
I'm at the end of my tether!

2
'I'm sorry to hear you've been so down in the dumps.'

3
'You do sound a little under the weather.'

4
'It's been driving you up the wall for months.'

A Your brother emails you to tell you that he still hasn't fixed his leaky shower. He often complains about it to you but he hasn't done anything about it.

B You meet your friend and you tell them that you have been struggling with your childcare and work responsibilities.

C 'I travelled this weekend and did not get a lot of sleep. As a result, I'm exhausted and run down. I think I caught a cold as well.'

D 'It's been a tough week, and I'm just feeling really sad. I did not get a job I applied for and my best friend moved away last month, so I'm just feeling lonely.'



Reaching the end of your tether

1. In **breakout rooms**, read and discuss the situations below. **Brainstorm** possible solutions.
2. **Roleplay** a conversation between (a) you and your boss, and (b) you and your best friend.
3. **Share** the outcome of the conversation when you return to the main class.



When you **reach the end of your tether** it can be hard to know how to improve the situation.

- Your boss is constantly asking you to work overtime, and you feel as though you can't say no because you're worried about losing your job and everyone else in your team works extra hours.
- Your best friend is always asking you to babysit their kids. You love them and want to help out, but you feel they are taking advantage of your kindness. When you try to bring it up, they get defensive.

don't judge a book by its cover

This idiom is a **piece of advice**. It reminds us that sometimes we need to **find out more about someone or something** before we make our minds up.

Why is this an **effective** idiom? Why is it relevant to **books**?



I know the restaurant looks shabby, but it does the best pizza in town. **Don't judge a book by its cover!**

don't put all your eggs in one basket

This means to have one or several **back-up plans**. It tells us to not **rely** on just **one thing**.

What is the **risk** of **literally** putting all your eggs in one basket?



You should probably apply to several universities. **Don't put all your eggs in one basket**, otherwise you might be disappointed!

to pull yourself together

When you are **upset, disorganised**, or generally **not good**, *pulling yourself together* means to **recover** and be **strong**.

Can you explain the meaning of this idiom?



We are losing by 23 points at half time.
We need to **pull ourselves together** if we want to win!

to bite the bullet

Biting the bullet means doing something that is **tough** or **unpleasant**.

Do you have a **similar idiom** in your own language?



I finally **bit the bullet** and paid off my car loan. It was tough, but I feel better.



Fill in the gaps

Complete the sentence with the idiom that fits best. Change the verb form and pronouns, if necessary.

- 1 My little sister isn't studying at all. She needs to _____ if she wants to pass her exams.
- 2 I _____ and finally quit my job. I am a little worried about the future, but I am much happier.
- 3 Save a copy of your presentation on a USB and the cloud. _____.
- 4 I know it doesn't seem like a very exciting place, but don't _____. If you know the right spots to go, you'll have a lot of fun!
- 5 I really need to _____ and start exercising more often. I can't climb the stairs now without feeling out of breath!

to bite the bullet

to put all your
eggs in one basket

to judge a book by
its cover

to pull yourself
together



Idioms: review

1. Can you **remember** the idioms from the lesson?
2. **Write a sentence** that is true for you, using one of the idioms from the completed sentences as inspiration.

- 1 My neighbours absolutely _____. They play loud music late at night and have huge parties at the weekends, which they never invite me to!
- 2 I felt _____ last weekend, so I mostly stayed at home, slept, and drank tea. I must have been a bit sick after a long week at work.
- 3 After another late night of loud music and loads of guests, I am _____! I can't handle another night of bad sleep.
- 4 She was _____ after her breakup. All her friends tried to cheer her up.
- 5 Getting locked out of my apartment was _____, because I met my lovely neighbours who became good friends.



End of the lesson

Idiom

Beyond words

Meaning: This phrase is used to describe something inexpressible, or difficult to put into words

Example: Our friendship is really special – it's beyond words.



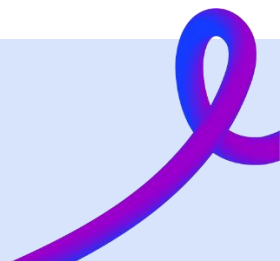
Additional practice



Transform the sentences

Describe the meaning of the following sentences for someone who is **unfamiliar** with the idioms used.

- | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | She is driving me up the wall! | > | Her behaviour is frustrating and making me very angry . |
| 2 | You should call Andy. He has been down in the dumps recently. | > | |
| 3 | Don't put all your eggs in one basket. You might not get the flat you want. | > | |
| 4 | We're very proud of Kelly, she's really been on the ball at school lately. | > | |
| 5 | You have to go into that meeting, even though you're upset. Pull yourself together! | > | |
| 6 | Speak of the devil! We were just talking about you. | > | |





Over to you!

Choose one of the idioms below.

Describe a situation you've been in where this idiom could be used.
Was it advice or a suggestion that you gave or received?



to judge a book by its cover

to put all your eggs in one basket

to pull yourself together

to bite the bullet



Discuss

Choose a classmate and **ask** them one of the questions below.

What do you do
when you feel
under the
weather?

When was the
last time you
felt really down
in the dumps?

Do you know
anyone who
drives you up
the wall?

How can you
avoid feeling at
the end of your
tether?





What do they mean?

Your friend has received this note. **Help her to figure out** what her neighbour is saying.

← → ↺ Mail.com

Do you understand this??

To: Maria <languagebuddy@mail.co.uk>

Hi there,

I got a note from my neighbours last night and I can't work out what it means! I think they are upset...but I can't tell for sure. When I translated the note, it didn't make any sense. Can you help? It says:

Your party last night was unacceptable. We are **at the end of our tether** with all your noisy guests. We have **let you off the hook** several times, but we won't anymore. I know we shouldn't **judge a book by its cover**, but you and your flat mates seem very rude. Please quieten down or we'll have to **bite the bullet** and phone the police. You are **driving us up the wall**!

▼ | 📎 🖼️ 😊 🔍

Send





Answer key

P.10: 1. (b) 2. (d) 3. (a) 4. (c)

P.12:

to feel sad – down in the dumps

to feel physically ill - under the weather

to have no strength or patience left - at the end of my tether

to be angry or irritated - driving me up the wall

Idioms related to stress and burnout: to be at the end of your tether; to drive (sb.) up the wall

P.13: 1 (b) 2. (d) 3. (c) 4. (a)

P.19: 1. pull herself together 2. bit the bullet 3. Don't put all your eggs in one basket. 4. judge a book by its cover 5. pull myself together / bite the bullet

P.20: 1. drive me up the wall 2. under the weather 3. at the end of my tether 4. down in the dumps 5. a blessing in disguise



Summary

Advanced idioms:

- *A blessing in disguise; let (someone) off the hook; speak of the devil; on the ball*
- *Losing my job turned out to be a **blessing in disguise**.*
- *Speak of the devil – here comes John!*

Idioms for sadness and anger:

- *Under the weather; down in the dumps; at the end of your tether; drive someone up the wall*
- *I'm feeling a bit **under the weather** today.*
- *Shura has been really **down in the dumps** since Paula dumped him.*

More advanced idioms:

- *don't judge a book by its cover; don't put all your eggs in one basket; to pull yourself together; to bite the bullet*
- ***Pull yourself together** and get back to work!*
- *I'm going to **bite the bullet** and ask for a raise.*



Vocabulary

word for word

a blessing in disguise

let (someone) off the hook

speak of the devil

on the ball

under the weather

down in the dumps

at the end of your tether

drive someone up the wall

don't judge a book by its cover

don't put all your eggs in one basket

to pull yourself together

to bite the bullet

