

Identify Usage of Idioms: Literal, Idiomatic, or Ambiguous?

Thank you for participating in this HIT.
Please read the instructions below completely before proceeding with the task.

Current employees of the University of Washington, family members of UW employees, and UW students involved in this particular research are not eligible to complete this HIT.

▼ Instructions (Click to Show/Hide)

Your task is to identify the usage of idioms within sentences. For each pair of idiom and sentence provided, you must select an option that best describes the meaning of the idiom given the context of the sentence.

In this instruction, we use the idiom "piece of cake" as a running example. The sentence and the idiom will be presented to you in the following format:

The boy found the project to be a piece of cake because he planned far ahead
[Dictionary Definition] "piece of cake" : something easily achieved

Note that we also provide the dictionary definition of the idiom in case you are unfamiliar with it.

Given the idiom and the sentence formatted as above, your responsibility is to select one among these four options:

If the idiom is used in its idiomatic meaning within the sentence (i.e., used figuratively rather than literally), then select the option **Idiomatic**. Please feel free to use the provided [Dictionary Definition] as a reference for deciding if the idiom was used figuratively.

The sentence shown in the format above, *The boy found the project to be a piece of cake because he planned far ahead*, is a clear example of an idiomatic use. The piece of cake does not refer to a cake as literal sweet food; it tells how easy the project was for the boy.

If the idiom is used in its literal meaning within the sentence, then select **literal**.

The sentence *The boy ate a piece of cake for his dessert* is a literal use. The piece of cake refers to an actual food with no hidden meanings behind it.

If it can be interpreted either way (either figuratively or literally), then select **ambiguous**.

The sentence *That was a piece of cake* is an ambiguous use of the idiom. The sentence might be literally referring to a breadlike food or metaphorically portraying how easy whatever "that" was. Since it can be freely interpreted either way, the correct option is "ambiguous".

WARNING: The relatively short length of a sentence is NOT a proper justification for selecting ambiguous. For example, consider the sentence *Julia has never thought the whole thing would be a piece of cake*. Although the sentence is moderately long, the interpretation is still ambiguous.

If the usage of the idiom does not fall under any of the categories defined above, then select **discard**. The specific reasons you may select **discard** are the following:

- The idiom is **not found** within the sentence.
e.g., *The boy ran across the field*
- The sentence is **too unnatural, ungrammatical, or implausible** for one to comprehend.
e.g., *The piece of cake ate the boy*
- The sentence makes **excessively many adjustments to the idiom** that the idiom no longer holds its idiomatic interpretation.
e.g., *The boy found the project to be a fragment of cake because he planned ahead*. Though "fragment" and "piece" are normally synonymous terms, the phrase "fragment of cake" completely hinders the identity of the original idiom "piece of cake".
- The sentence is **inherently offensive**.
e.g., *Being Asian is quite a piece of cake—just act submissive all the time*

▼ Example 1: "kick the bucket" (Click to Show/Hide)

[Dictionary Definition] "kick the bucket" : die

Sentence	Expected Answer	Explanation
All the money goes to the daughter when the old man kicks the bucket.	Idiomatic	The daughter is inheriting the old man's property upon his death, which implies the figurative use of the phrase.
The old man accidentally kicked the bucket and spilled water in it	literal	Spilling water implies that the bucket is a literal bucket that contains water.
The old man kicked the bucket	ambiguous	The old man might have kicked a physical bucket (literal) or died (figurative). It is unclear which one is the case.
The fatter you are, the earlier you kick the bucket.	discard	Inherently offensive, non-inclusive.

▼ Example 2: "elephant in the room" (Click to Show/Hide)

[Dictionary Definition] "elephant in the room" : an obvious problem that nobody wants to discuss

Sentence	Expected Answer	Explanation
Her alcoholism was the elephant in the room	Idiomatic	This figuratively means that her drinking problem is an obvious issue that nobody wants to bring up.
An elephant in the room was roaring	literal	The elphant being able to roar implies that the elphant is a living animal.
The research topic was an elephant in the room	ambiguous	The research topic might have been a study of a living animal in the room (literal) or something no person in the room wants to talk about (idiomatic).
An elephant was roaring in the room	discard	A non-trivial modification was made to the idiom, as the word "elephant" and the remaining phrase "in the room" were separated to an extent that the identity of the original idiom was damaged. Note that the meaning of this sentence isn't any different from the literal example above; yet this still must be discarded as the idiom can no longer possibly hold its idiomatic interpretation due to excessive edits.

▼ Example 3: "red tape" (Click to Show/Hide)

[Dictionary Definition] "red tape" : excessive adherence to rules and formalities

Sentence	Expected Answer	Explanation
This law will just create more red tape	Idiomatic	The red tape figuratively refers to excessive bureaucratic rules that hinder citizens' decision-making.
Don't use the red tape because it is no longer sticky	literal	The red tape refers to a literal tape that is used to stick things together.
The man faced the red tape	ambiguous	One interpretation of "face the red tape" is to come across a physical tape of red color (literal). Another interpretation is to encounter bureaucratic rules that impede the man's goal (idiomatic). The sentence doesn't clarify which is the case.
Red bull is my favorite energy drink	discard	The idiom "red tape" is mentioned nowhere in the sentence.

▼ Example 4: "break the ice" (Click to Show/Hide)

[Idiom] "break the ice"
[Dictionary Definition] do or say something to relieve tension or get conversation going

Sentence	Expected Answer	Explanation
John tried to break the ice by talking about the weather	Idiomatic	John is trying to initiate a conversation by opening up a conversation about the weather, not actually breaking a solid ice.
John tried to break the ice with a crack hammer	literal	Using a hammer to break the ice implies that the ice is a crystalline solid with a physical form.
John tried to break the ice all day long	ambiguous	John might have either struggled with initiating a conversation with someone or destroying a thick layer of ice in front of him.
John tried to shatter the ice all day long	discard	Even though "to shatter" has a meaning similar to "to break", the phrase "to shatter the ice" is never used idiomatically—thus not a correct use of the idiom in the first place.

TO BE COMPLETED

#{instance_2}
[Dictionary Definition] "#{diom_2}" : #{meaning_2}

☒ Idiomatic ☐ literal ☐ ambiguous ☐ discard

#{instance_4}
[Dictionary Definition] "#{diom_4}" : #{meaning_4}

☒ Idiomatic ☐ literal ☐ ambiguous ☐ discard

#{instance_0}
[Dictionary Definition] "#{diom_0}" : #{meaning_0}

☒ Idiomatic ☐ literal ☐ ambiguous ☐ discard

#{instance_1}
[Dictionary Definition] "#{diom_1}" : #{meaning_1}

☒ Idiomatic ☐ literal ☐ ambiguous ☐ discard

#{instance_3}
[Dictionary Definition] "#{diom_3}" : #{meaning_3}

☒ Idiomatic ☐ literal ☐ ambiguous ☐ discard

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