



Introduction

Every language has its unique collection of quotes and phrases. These expressions often contain meanings that may not be obvious by simply looking at the individual words contained therein. We call these expressions ‘idioms’.

Definition

An idiom or a phrase is a group of words that has a meaning different from what it literally conveys.

Humans have the most advanced and evolved form of verbal communication among all species. The ancient language was a group of trivial sounds which differentiated from each other based on geographical and cultural deviations. Later, as the need to communicate grew exponentially with the advent of innovations, child-rearing, and community building, the language evolved at an incredible pace, and there was a need to have a written form of language; after all, documentation of facts and figures was required to educate the next generations.

A few centuries later, various languages evolved across the world. Like all other aspects of human evolution, even the languages were not free from cultural influences, social setups, political aspects, and recreation. Cults were formed; various schools of thought got organised; songs of human glory were written; heroes were praised; and love, hatred, and envy became a part of verbal communication. The language got fluid, and the meanings became symbolic. The messages were layered, and the motives were not just exchanging of information but also creating an effect or an impact. That’s how idioms and phrases were born.

Humanity has now risen to tantamount proportions of connectivity and idea-flow. It has become necessary for humans to decorate their words in spoken and written forms.

In CAT and OMETs, the VA-RC section contains passages adorned with idioms and phrases, at times to increase complexity. A deep understanding of idioms and phrases is required to score well in the written stage of CAT and perform extraordinarily in the GD-PI WAT stage.

Idioms and Phrases Starting with the Letter A

A Dime a Dozen

Meaning: Common, and therefore not much expensive

Explanation: As dimes are available in abundance in the United States, we can say dimes are available in dozens. It is used for something that is easily and abundantly available and therefore is not very costly.

Example: The tomatoes cost a dime a dozen after they overgrew, owing to better weather conditions in the last decade.

A Far Cry From

Meaning: Different from

Explanation: Though ‘a far cry’ means a great distance, we use the idiom ‘a far cry from’ to suggest that something is very different from something else or from what was expected.

Example: This hotel is a far cry from what it looked like on the travel site.

Add Insult to Injury

Meaning: Make a situation worse.

Explanation: If your friend falls in the school hallway, he is hurt. To add to this, everybody starts laughing at him and insults him. Thus, a situation that was already bad for him



has been made worse by adding insult to injury. This instance is a connection between literary and actual meaning.

Example: A fake corruption charge on the already suspended government official added insult to his injury.

A Rising Tide Lifts All Boats

Meaning: An improving economy benefits all its participants

Explanation: Used in economic situations, this idiom reminds us that all the people concerned with that economy prosper when an economy prospers. Just as a tide comes and lifts all boats, developments in an economy benefit everyone from local sellers on the street to business tycoons.

Example: India is on its way to becoming an economic powerhouse. The manufacturing, outsourcing, agriculture, banking, and small-scale industries seem to be flourishing. A rising tide lifts all boats.

Apple Pie Order

Meaning: In perfect order

Explanation: Along with being delectable, an apple pie is also an example of an aesthetic appeal. The beautifully appealing layers show the impeccability of the maker. Thus, the apple-pie order is a perfect and error-free order.

Trivia



The idiom apple pie order originated from the French ‘nappes pliees’ which meant neatly folded. It was recorded first in English in Sir Thomas Pasley’s Private Sea Journals back in 1780: *Their Persons Clean* and in *Apple-Pie Order on Sundays*.



Example: “What beautiful paintings Italian artists have made!” she gasped.

“A perfect apple-pie order, madame”, the curator smiled.

Armchair Critic

Meaning: Someone who criticises other people but does not know much about reality himself/herself.

Explanation: Imagine a man in his late fifties who is not aware of the current technology and procedures. He sits in his armchair with tea and a newspaper in his hands and reads some headlines about a postponed space mission. Without delving into the details of the news, he criticises everyone from the Government to the education system to ISRO. Well, someone is criticising based on incomplete information here.

Example: The pseudo-intellectuals on social media behave like armchair critics, thanks to the freedom of digital expression.

As Genuine as a Three-Dollar Bill

Meaning: Something fake

Explanation: A three-dollar bill has never been in circulation in the United States. So, if we encounter something fake, we use this idiom laced with sarcasm.

Example: The new investment scheme by the Mexican company looks more like a three-dollar bill. Who can provide five times ROI in a year?

At the Drop of a Hat

Meaning: Immediately

Explanation: If you do something at the drop of a hat, you do it without stopping to think about it. So, you do it immediately. Another idiom for this is ‘In the blink of an eye’.

Example: The education system shifted from offline to online during the corona crisis at the drop of a hat.



Idioms and Phrases Starting with the Letter B

Back to Square One

Meaning: Back to the starting point, i.e., when you have to start from scratch again

Explanation: Though the origin of this idiom goes back to the olden days of football commentary, I will explain with the example of a game that is more relatable. If you play a game of snakes and ladders and get bitten by a snake hissing at 99, which took you directly to number 1 square, you are back to square one now. So, when someone fails in an effort and has to start from the beginning again, it is said that they are back to square one.

Example: The last 5 years of the brilliant scientist got wasted as all investors withdrew support. Now he is back to square one!

The Ball is in Your Court

Meaning: When a situation is in your hands

Explanation: In the game of tennis, when the ball is in your court, you are the one who will make the next move, and that move will decide the flow of the game. This meaning is transferred through this idiom to refer to someone who has the power to make the next move and change the game, be it sports or the game of politics.

Example: You have impressed the angels. Hire some people now as the ball is in your court.

Trivia



The idiomatic expression 'ball is in your court' originated in America in the early 19th century. The symbolic 'ball' comes from the world of sports, especially tennis and basketball.



Barking Up the Wrong Tree

Meaning: Have wrong expectations from a path of action to be productive

Explanation: Being chased by a dog, a prey may climb a tree, elude the predator, and somehow escape. The dog, believing the prey is still up the tree, would continue to bark. Similarly, when someone makes attempts in the wrong direction, his condition is akin to the dog.

Example: The fundamentals of his case study were scientifically wrong. He was barking up the wrong tree.

Beating a Dead Horse

Meaning: Making futile attempts by doing something

Explanation: In older times, people would beat horses to make them run/walk faster. If the horse is dead, no amount of beating will make it move, let alone run. Thus, if someone is making some futile efforts that will fetch them nothing, we say they are beating a dead horse.

Example: I have told you that our trip to Goa is on hold until the lockdown is over, so stop beating a dead horse and asking me about it.

Beat Around the Bush

Meaning: Avoid talking about an important thing by wasting time talking about useless things.

Explanation: In the 15th century, hunters used to hire men who would help them in hunting by beating the bushes with sticks so that the prey hiding in the bushes would come out and the hunter would shoot them. Now, the real task still was hunting only. Thus, if a person avoids giving some main piece of information in a conversation and is instead talking about other irrelevant and less important stuff, he is said to be beating around the bush.

Example: This year, his grades were low because instead of writing relevant answers in the exams, all he did was beat around the bush.



Be Glad to See the Back of

Meaning: Be happy to see someone/something leaving

Explanation: Imagine a guest who visits your house and overstays his welcome. You would continue playing the perfect host out of sheer politeness. But, the day you see him leaving, you would surely heave a sigh of relief.

Example: Don't worry anymore. Finally, the boss is resigning. Be glad to see his back.

Best Thing Since Sliced Bread

Meaning: A great innovation

Explanation: Slicing a loaf of bread was surely a breakthrough in the baking industry. Any invention that is bound to bring substantial positive effects is compared with the discovery of sliced bread, and hence this idiom is used.

Example: The SpaceX programme's perception makes it look the best thing since sliced bread.

Between a Rock and a Hard Place/Between the Devil and the Deep Sea

Meaning: When you have to choose from two options, both of which are unpleasant

Explanation: If you are falling from a great height (we don't intend any injury to you, let us say you are falling in a dream), what would you like to fall on a rock or a hard place? As you must have realised, both of them will be disastrous for you. So, you are going to have to choose between two unpleasant events. This idiom is used for such situations only when someone has to choose the less unpleasant thing out of two choices.

Example: The politician had to resign either from his office or from his affiliations. He was, of course, between a rock and a hard place.

Bird's Eye View

Meaning: An overall look at something

Explanation: A bird flying hundreds of meters above a stadium can surely view the cricket match going inside it, though it won't have the clearest view. This idiom of bird's eye view refers to a general outline of the whole picture, which is not much detailed but is almost comprehensive and is good for a start before understanding the specific aspects of something.

Example: Just a bird's eye view of his biodata is enough for his recruitment. That man is a genius!

Bite off More Than You Can Chew

Meaning: Try doing something difficult for you

Explanation: Remember the day when your mother made your favourite burger, and you took an elephant-sized bite out of it. You almost choked! Biting more than you can chew at once is a stupid thing to do. You would lose the opportunity to enjoy the food, but you also face the risk of choking. If someone takes up such a task that he is not capable of doing, he is surely biting off more than he can chew.

Example: He took a lot of assignments before he finished the last ones. He has a habit of biting more than he can chew. Hope he improves!

Bite the Bullet

Meaning: The decision to do a difficult task that you have been hesitating to do and also trying to delay

Explanation: This idiom is believed to have been derived from a practice followed by doctors. In this, they used to make the patient bite the bullet when doing some operation which would help them cope with the excruciating pain of the operation. Thus, biting the bullet is used when someone is finally doing or has decided to do a task (like the operation explained above) he has been dreading and trying to avoid.



Example: The covert operation was successful because the agent from the intelligence bureau was always ready to bite the bullet.

Blessing in Disguise

Meaning: Something which appears to be bad but is, in fact, good.

Explanation: Self-explanatory from the words of the idiom, it is used to refer to anything which is good as a blessing but is disguised to look like something neutral or bad. It also strengthens the belief that everything has some good effects.

Example: Their arguments were nothing less than a blessing in disguise. They overcame their faults and became stronger partners.

Bread and Butter

Meaning: The main source of income

Explanation: Bread and butter being the most basic meal of any family, this idiom represents the source through which a person or family earns money to buy bread and butter, i.e. sustenance. Therefore, bread and butter refers to the source of income on which a family depends.

Example: Teaching was his bread and butter. Writing was just a hobby.

Bring Home the Bacon

Meaning: Achieve something, mostly a source of income

Explanation: As there are many theories on the origin of this idiom, and none of them is certain how it originated, we would go with the explanation of the idiom here. One thing common in all the theories was that bacon represented honour and income to support the family. Both came through being good at your profession or being successful at something. So, if a person achieves success or a good source of income and brings honour by doing so, he has brought home the bacon.

Example: He wrote a book without expectations and launched it among film personalities. Unknowingly he brought home the bacon. He went on to sign a multi-million deal.

Bring Owls to Athens/Carry Coals to Newcastle

Meaning: Do some futile actions

Explanation: In ancient Greece, owls and silver coins with the picture of owls were abundant in Athens. Thus, by bringing owls to Athens, one would be increasing an already large population of owls. This act would not add much value. Thus, this idiom is used for any act which is futile and is not adding any value to anything.

Example: Free resources for exam preparation confuse people about what to choose. Moreover, free things do not get the respect they deserve. Adding more and more free resources on the internet is like bringing owls to Athens.

Trivia



In ancient Greece, coins with the insignia of owls were in abundance.



Bury Your Head in the Sand

Meaning: Ignore unpleasant things or problems

Explanation: If a destructive wave approaches you, what do you do? Run for shelter or bury your head in the sand like an ostrich and pretend you did not see the wave? Ignoring the problem won't make it go away. This is what the above idiom wants to communicate and is used in situations when someone is ignoring an unpleasant reality rather than doing something to solve it.



Example: The world is not as bad as they say. Some people need not bury their heads in the sand.

By the Skin of Your Teeth

Meaning: Succeed by a very small margin

Explanation: Being an idiom from the bible, this one surely involves the use of excellent rhetoric. If you are saved from being hit by a car because you were standing just as away from it as the thickness of the skin of your teeth (which is close to zero because teeth have no skin), what image would you imagine? That you were just saved. Thus, if someone is just saved from something, this idiom is employed in that situation.

Example: The bullet missed him by an inch. He was saved by the skin of his teeth.

Trivia



Shashi Tharoor is an Indian politician known for his flowery language. He once commented on Gandhi,

“Don’t ever forget, that we were not led by a saint with his head in clouds, but by a master tactician with his feet on the ground”.



Idioms and Phrases Starting with the Letter C

The Calm Before the Storm

Meaning: The calm state that happens just before an unpleasant event

Explanation: One of the most common idioms in daily language, you must have heard of a mom looking at her sleeping baby and saying, “don’t be fooled by this innocence; this is just the calm before the storm. Once she wakes up, she is a nuisance.” Any peaceful situation which occurs before an unpleasant or chaotic event is said to be the calm before the storm.

Example: His anger comes after a prolonged phase of silence, like the calm before the storm.

Trivia



“Don’t ever treat your little insanities as if they are aberrations that ought to be hidden from the rest of the world. All the most beautiful people in the world, the most creative, the ones who led revolutions, who discovered and invented things, did so because they embraced their own idiosyncrasies”.

Shahrukh Khan, an Indian actor, is known for his flowery language.



Can’t Make an Omelette Without Breaking Some Eggs

Meaning: Achieving something will always have some negative effects

Explanation: Like every output has a cost and every omelette requires the breaking of some eggs, every achievement will have some negative effects and opportunity costs. Thus, if a sportsman friend of yours is sad about his average grades, you can tell him that it is the opportunity cost for the basketball championship trophy he brought to the college. We can use the above idiom in such a situation.

Example: Have some patience, man! You got to lose something to attain something else. You can’t make an omelette without breaking some eggs.

Can’t See the Forest for the Trees

Meaning: Focus on details while ignoring the bigger picture

Explanation: Here forest has a neutral meaning; it can be good or bad. If someone is busy looking at trees and, while doing that,



forgets to take a look at the humongous forest, they are being involved in details and forgetting the importance of larger and maybe more impactful things. If it is used for a problem, a person is involved in petty issues and forgets to pay attention to the bigger problems. And if the forest represents a good thing, then maybe he is missing out on the opportunity to celebrate a larger and happier thing because he is too focused on some petty issue.

Example: The details in an emerging economy would not be easy to analyse. Let's focus on the major problems. You can't see the forests for the trees.

Caught Between Two Stools

Meaning: Fail because you didn't choose between two alternatives

Explanation: If someone is standing with both feet on different stools and cannot decide which one to choose, he won't survive for long and is bound to fall in some time. Thus, if someone cannot decide between two things, you can warn him that he will fall if he does not decide soon as he is caught between two stools.

Example: Doing more than one thing which requires major attention can be efficiently done only by a few. Most people would find themselves caught between two stools.

Clouds on the Horizon

Meaning: An upcoming problem

Explanation: If clouds are on the horizon, they are about to reach you. This expression compares the clouds to any problem on its way. You had better be ready with your umbrellas!

Example: Entering a new job or culture isn't easy. There are always clouds on the horizon.

Cross the Bridge When You Come to it

Meaning: Not worry about a problem before it has occurred

Explanation: If you are on a journey in which you know you will have to cross a risky bridge, thinking about and fretting over the bridge throughout the journey will fetch you nothing. So, it is better if you enjoy the journey and think of the bridge only when you come to it. The same concept applies to problems of life. If an inevitable problem approaches you, do not ruin your peace by constantly thinking about it.

Example: We can suppress anxiety by following one golden rule: Be ready to cross the bridge when you come to it.

Cry Over Spilt Milk

Meaning: Feel bad over something which has happened and can't be changed now.

Explanation: Another common idiom of all times. Once spilt on the table, milk can't be collected again. So, this idiom is used to console anyone lamenting a loss that can't be undone now. He should move on and maybe fetch another packet of milk from the market.

Example: You quit the job after fighting with your boss. Now be ready to join a new one. There is no use crying over spilt milk.

Curiosity Killed the Cat

Meaning: A warning which reminds us that curiosity can have negative consequences

Explanation: Originated from 'care killed the cat', this idiom is used to warn anyone

Example: The most creative people can sometimes face repercussions. They tend to gather more and more knowledge, and their main work suffers. Curiosity kills the cat!

Idioms and Phrases Starting with the Letter D

Devil's Advocate

Meaning: Pretend to oppose something only to strengthen it more.

Explanation: Sometimes a person is in favour of a concept, but he tries to bring it into the



Trivia



The original version of ‘curiosity killed the cat’ was ‘care killed the cat’, with the word ‘care’ referring to worry. It appeared in this form in Shakespeare’s play *Much Ado About Nothing*. At the end of the 19th century, ‘care’ got replaced by ‘curiosity’.

Curiosity has been discouraged from time immemorial in all civilisations. Adam and Eve were banished from the Garden of Eden for their curiosity about a forbidden fruit. The French abbot St. Bernard Clairvaux stated that curiosity is like a deadly sin: “To learn in order to know is scandalous curiosity”.

Galileo Galilei was discouraged by the Catholic Church when he tried to convince the Pope that the Earth and all the other planets revolved around the Sun.

discussion of others by pretending to give arguments against it. His actual motive is to induce others to speak in favour of it and the subsequent strengthening of the concept. This practice is not evil always. It is also used as a classroom practice by students to understand concepts by participating in discussions.

Example: The film critic was a devil’s advocate. He never praised any film with a full heart. I think he wants film scripts to improve.

Trivia



Devil’s advocate is a former official position within the Catholic Church, the promoter of the faith: one who ‘argued against the canonisation of a candidate in order to uncover any character flaws or misrepresentation of the evidence favouring canonisation’.

Don’t Give Up the Day Job

Meaning: It is a way to tell someone they are not good at something and should not pursue it full time.

Explanation: A friend of yours who is doing well with a job in a bank comes to you and sings a song. You praise it, and then he tells you a secret that he is planning to pursue music. Then, being his true friend, you give him your honest opinion and say, “No doubt you are good at music, but don’t give up the day job”. What you mean here is he is good at singing, but not as good as a professional singer.

Example: What’s in trend is not always the norm? One should never give up his day job to become someone or something he is not capable of.

Don’t Throw the Baby Out with the Bathwater

Meaning: Discard something good along with other things that are undesirable.

Explanation: After a mother is done bathing her child, imagine that, along with throwing the wastewater out of the window, she throws the baby too. She throws something good in her efforts to throw something bad or useless. Thus, this idiom is used for situations when something good is thrown out in the effort of throwing something bad.

Example: While quitting the evening routine of drinking alcohol, don’t quit the food you eat with it. Do not throw the baby out with the bathwater.

Drastic Times Call for Drastic Measures

Meaning: It is necessary to take extreme actions in extreme situations

Explanation: As is evident from the words of the idiom, difficult times need tough measures to control them. It is used when one is a little hesitant to take drastic steps. We can make a person realise that he cannot solve a severe problem without taking drastic steps.



Example: When the child goes out of the way, the parent must be ready to scold him. Drastic times call for drastic measures.

Idioms and Phrases Starting with the Letter E

Easy Does It

Meaning: A way of telling someone to be careful while doing something

Explanation: This idiom is used to remind someone to be careful while doing a task. The task can be cutting a slice of onion to launching a space rocket.

Example: Don't injure your muscles to get a toned muscular physique. Go slow and steady. Easy does it!

The Elephant In the Room

Meaning: The apparent problem that people avoid talking about

Explanation: The elephant in the room symbolises the problem that is too large and apparent to be ignored. But still, people avoid talking about it or taking steps to get it out of the room. The elephant will stay in the room until people discuss it and then take the requisite steps to take it out. The same applies to problems. They will be solved if the stakeholders involved discuss them and then solve them.

Example: Everyone can see that he talks illogical, but they ignore him owing to his powerful position. He is the elephant in the room.

Elvis Has Left the Building

Meaning: The event has ended

Example: There is no use in waiting for that kind of leadership. The phase is over. Elvis has left the building.

Every Cloud Has a Silver Lining

Meaning: Everything has a positive aspect to it

Explanation: No matter how bad a situation, there is always some good aspect. Even if a cloud is blocking the view of the Sun, it still has a silver lining.

Example: Don't worry, brother! You will get over these tough times soon. Every cloud has a silver lining.

Idiom and Phrase Starting with the Letter F

Face the Music

Meaning: Face the consequences of one's actions

Explanation: There are a few theories about where this phrase came from, including a military origin—at one time, military officers were 'drummed out' in disgrace after committing offences. Another possible source is the idea of stage actors facing the orchestra when they walk on stage. Today, we simply use it to mean the deserved punishment for one's actions.

Example: "You murdered him. Now, face the music", the attorney said.

Trivia



The idiom belongs to the time when Elvis Presley used to perform. To tell the audiences that an event is over, the organiser used to say, 'Elvis has left'. Only then would the over enthusiastic crowd agree to leave the auditorium. Having originated from there, it is still used to communicate that an event has ended. The event need not necessarily be a musical performance; it can be anything from a rugby match to a geopolitical event.





Idioms and Phrases Starting with the Letter G

Gain Ground

Meaning: Gain popularity or success

Explanation: If somebody gains ground, he has become more successful, popular, or accepted.

Example: It took him ten years to gain ground in a writing career.

Get the Taste of Your Own Medicine

Meaning: When a person gets the same treatment that he had been meting out to others

Explanation: You may want to make your doctor realise how bitter his medicines are by making him taste them. When these words are used as an idiom, they refer to a situation when the person inflicting a negative treatment on others is treated the same way. In that way, he will realise how bitter the medicines he gave are.

Example: You have treated everyone with disrespect. Now be ready to get the taste of your own medicine.

Go Back to the Drawing Board

Meaning: Fail and begin from the start

Explanation: To accomplish something, the first task you do is to chart out all the steps on a board and then carry on with the implementation. If your plan fails at any step, you need to go back to the first step and start it all over again.

Example: The processes involving several steps are cumbersome. You always have to go back to the drawing board if any step doesn't work.

Go Cold Turkey

Meaning: Stop something abruptly

Explanation: Though now used to represent the ceasing of any activity, this idiom was earlier used for drug addicts who quit drugs

suddenly. This is where the origin of this idiom lies. Today, it is used for the act of stopping anything abruptly.

Example: The judge has told a drunk driver to go cold turkey after narrowly avoiding being locked up for a second time.

Idioms and Phrases Starting with the Letter H

Hand in Glove

Meaning: In close association

Explanation: Your hand and the glove you wear on it do all the movements together. Don't they? Therefore, we can use this idiom for people who are close friends, associates, or accomplices.

Example: The Prime Minister and the Home Minister plan everything together. They are hand in glove.

Trivia



Nazi Germany's political and military ally in Europe was Italy, governed by a fascist regime under Benito Mussolini since 1925. The union between Nazi Germany and fascist Italy can be a true example of a hand in glove situation.



Hard Nut to Crack

Meaning: A difficult problem or person to deal with

Explanation: It takes a little more effort to crack a hard nut than crack a normal one. We can use this idiom for people or a problem. When used for a problem, it signifies that it is harder than a normal problem. When used for a person, it implies that the person is hard to convince, manipulate, or be defeated, unlike a normal person.



Example: The new boss is very strict, a hard nut to crack!

Trivia



In the movie *Casino Royale*, James Bond played by the actor Daniel Craig is tortured by Le Chiffre to extreme limits, but Bond does not break down as he was a hard nut to crack.



Have Your Head in the Clouds

Meaning: Ignore the problems or current situation

Explanation: We can take this idiom literally only for Sofia, the humanoid. For us, we will have to go with the symbolic meaning. If a person has his head in the cloud, he chooses to ignore the problems he is in. It is similar to 'burying your head in the sand.'

Example: You're broke, financially and personally, but still, your head is in the clouds. Rethink and revisit your opportunities. That's the only way you can have a better life.

Trivia



The idiom 'have your head above the clouds' may have originated before 1900s when touching the clouds was not at all possible as there was no invention of airplanes.



Hear it on the Grapevine

Meaning: Get to know about a rumour

Explanation: Grapevine here refers to the flow of rumours from one place to another.

If you hear something on the grapevine, you have heard that piece of information in rumours only.

Example: Did the couple get separated? I am not sure. Heard it on the grapevine only.

Trivia



There is a weird rumour that the Hollywood actor Keanu Reeves is 'immortal', since the days of Charlemagne, in the 8th century, whom Reeves bears a striking resemblance to. It was observed that there are some portraits of 'not Keanu Reeves' over the centuries, which has led some folks to believe the actor is actually hundreds of years old.



Hit the Nail on the Head

Meaning: Find the answer/solution

Explanation: In carpentry, this idiom can refer to a situation when the problem has to be solved with a precise answer, once and for all. Hitting the wrong place will damage the wood. Thus, trying out imperfect solutions will make the situation even worse. You need the exact answer, and when you have it, you need to hit the hammer exactly on the head of the nail!

Example: It took me ten years to finish my research on the relationship between emotions and biology. Finally, I have hit the nail on the head.

Hold Out an Olive Branch

Meaning: Offer for peace

Explanation: As olive is symbolic of peace, this idiom is used for the offer of peace. The party offering peace is said to have been holding an olive branch. This idiom can be used when



conflicts or wars are being resolved by the offer for negotiations by one of the parties.

Example: After a long history of wars, both kingdoms hold an olive branch.

Hot Potato

Meaning: Controversial issue

Explanation: A boiled potato is one edible item that takes a lot of time to get cold, as it contains a lot of water. Thus, this term is used for a 'hot' topic in controversy and will take time to get off our news, and social media feeds.

Example: The nuclear deal between the two countries is a hot potato. The leaders have to be very careful.

Idioms and Phrases Starting with the Letter I

In Hot Water

Meaning: In trouble

Explanation: Hot water here is symbolic of problems and awkward situations with anyone. Being in hot water simply means being in a difficult and unpleasant situation.

Example: Today is the first time he found solace. His entire life has been in hot water.

In the Red

Meaning: Be in deficit, i.e., spend more than what you have

Explanation: When someone withdraws more than what he has deposited in his account, the bank marks his account in red colour. Thus, being in red implies that you are in deficit and hence you owe to people, probably because you have spent more than what you owned.

Example: Thanks to the banks' credit facilities, the millennials are always in the red.

It's Always Darkest Before the Dawn

Meaning: There is an extremely bad phase just before a good phase.

Explanation: This idiom is used to console someone going through the hardest of times. You tell him that his situation is like the time just before dawn. It is as dark as it can be because the light is just about to arrive. His situation is problematic only because it is about to get better.

Example: When I was lost in depression, friends tried to remind me that it was darkest before dawn.

Trivia



The idiom 'it's always darkest before the dawn' is derived from the natural phenomenon. The brightness or the darkness of the sky depends upon the moon's appearance. In the first two weeks following the new moon, the moon is not visible before sunrise.



Idiom and Phrase Starting with the Letter J

Jump on the Bandwagon

Meaning: Follow something which is trending

Explanation: If all the people of your town are going somewhere, and you also hop on their bandwagon without even asking where they are headed, you are following the herd without considering where you want to go. This idiom represents when people blindly follow what is in the trend without thinking about whether it suits their personalities and choices.

Example: The new Bollywood actor wears weird clothes to get attention, and teenagers follow him without any thought. They just jump on the bandwagon.



Idioms and Phrases Starting with the Letter K

Kick the can Down the Road

Meaning: Avoid or delay dealing with a problem or a tough decision

Explanation: If we want to get rid of an empty can lying on the road, the proper way would be to pick it up and throw it in the bin. But instead of doing that, if we just kick it down the road, that won't solve the problem. Likewise, if instead of facing a situation, a person just avoids it, we can say he is kicking the can down the road.

Example: Kicking the can down the road doesn't help anyone. One has to be courageous enough to face his problems and solve them.

Kill Two Birds with One Stone

Meaning: One act that has two positive outcomes

Explanation: It is applied when one action can fulfil two motives. One of the most common idioms used in everyday life, this needs little explanation.

Example: He just played a diplomatic trick to save his job. Unknowingly he killed two birds with one stone. He got a promotion as well.

Trivia



It is believed that the phrase 'kill two birds with one stone' originated from the story of Daedalus and Icarus from Greek mythology. In this story, Daedalus killed two birds with one stone in order to get the feathers of the birds and make the wings. The father and son escaped from the labyrinth on Crete by making wings out of those feathers and flying out.



Idioms and Phrases Starting with the Letter L

Last Straw

Meaning: That stage of a difficult task where one gives up

Explanation: Suppose a load-carrying animal is made to carry a heap of hay on its back. No matter how strong the animal is, it will have its limits. When those limits are reached, its back will break. The limit will be crossed by one single straw, no matter how light it would be. The straw that broke the animal's back is symbolic of that part of a task where one gives up.

Example: You would feel that you have reached the last straw, and that's where you need to be the strongest and get to your goal.

Trivia



In the novel *O Alquimista* by Paulo Coelho, there are many short stories which signify the meaning of 'Last Straw'.



In one such story, a man is told that he would find a precious stone at the bed of a river. He started digging and after years of dedicated efforts, he could not find anything. He left digging at the time when he was just one blow away from realising the treasure.

Let Sleeping Dogs Lie

Meaning: Not to disturb someone's situation, as it may cause havoc

Explanation: No person of sane mind would want to wake up a sleeping dog. Everybody knows that the dog will come after him only. Thus, disturbing the dog is equivalent to creating problems yourself. In real-life scenarios, too, sometimes it is better to let things be as they are. Disturbing the situation



will do nothing but deteriorate it. This idiom is used for such situations.

Example: He just came out of his guilt. Do not tell him what wrong he did for a while. Let sleeping dogs lie.

Let the Cat out of the Bag

Meaning: Reveal a secret accidentally

Explanation: The cat is the secret, and the bag hides it. When a person lets out the cat, he accidentally lets the secret be known to people.

Example: He was so low emotionally that he let the cat out of the bag. It can happen to anyone.

Trivia



The use of idiom 'Let the cat out of the bag' was first documented in 1760 under a review of The London Magazine.



This idiom originated from a livestock fraud that once happened. The merchants used to sell live piglets to the customer and, after putting a pig in a sack for easier transport, they sometimes swap the pig for a cat when the customer looked away. The buyer couldn't discover they'd been cheated until they got home and literally let the cat out of the bag.

Let the Dust Settle

Meaning: Let the situation become normal before taking some steps

Explanation: After a dusty wind, you don't get out of the house if it is avoidable. You wait for the dust to settle and then step out. The same applies to any problematic situation. The person affected by a situation will wait for it to get over before planning his moves.

Example: You have told him your reasons. He is shocked, but he will try to improve now. Let the dust settle.

Idioms and Phrases Starting with the Letter M

Make a Mountain Out of a Molehill

Meaning: Exaggerate a minor issue

Explanation: Describing a molehill as a mountain is a typical example of exaggeration. We use this idiom when someone describes a small problem as larger than what it is.

What he did looks problematic, but it is normal. Let's not make a mountain out of a molehill.

Make Ends Meet

Meaning: Earn just enough for sustenance

Explanation: The origin of this idiom has some ambiguity. But its simple and universally accepted meaning is to earn just enough to survive. So, if a person is earning barely enough to fill the stomach of his family, we say that he is barely making his ends meet.

Example: During the recession, many people in the company lost their jobs. It became increasingly difficult for their families to make ends meet.

Make Light of Something

Meaning: Understate something, mostly a problem

Explanation: This idiom is used when someone understates something. The understated thing can be anything from an idea to a problem to a person.

Example: Make light of your suggestions. I am not in the right frame of mind as of now.

Midas Touch

Meaning: Capability to make every monetary venture profitable

Example: Shahrukh Khan is a great marketing force. He has the Midas touch. Everything he endorses sells.



Trivia



Midas was the name of the king who had the ability to turn everything into gold by touching it. This idiom is thus used for a person who possesses the modern Midas touch, i.e., who can turn any economic venture or business profitable.



Miss the Boat

Meaning: Miss an opportunity

Explanation: The boat here signifies an opportunity. So, if you are too slow to take advantage of an opportunity, you are likely to miss the boat.

Example: You missed the boat by turning down the job offer from that new company. It has grown fourfold in a year.

Mull Over

Meaning: Take a lot of time to make a decision

Explanation: The literal meaning of 'mull' is to ponder over something. If someone is mulling over a decision, he is taking a lot of time to think and decide.

Example: Stand up and act! Do not mull over petty issues.

Idioms and Phrases Starting with the Letter N

Nip Something in the Bud

Meaning: Stop someone/something at its early stage

Explanation: If you nip a bud at its early stage, it will die then and there and will not even have an opportunity to grow into a complete flower. Hence, the idiom is applied when some problem is solved at its very early stage or if someone's chance to grow is seized even before they start growing properly.

Example: He could have grown into a better man if you were free of your own biases. You nipped him in the bud. Now the efforts required have to be huge.

Trivia



In an American TV Series named *The Andy Griffith Show* (1960) Barney Fife (Don Knotts) repeatedly advises Andy Taylor (Andy Griffith) to 'nip it in the bud'. This expression was originally derived from the de-budding of plants and indicates suppressing something, especially at an early stage.



Idioms and Phrases Starting with the Letter O

Once in a Blue Moon

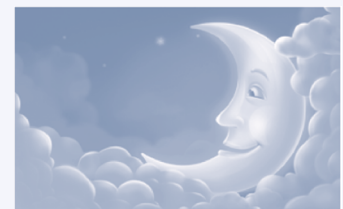
Meaning: Rarely

Explanation: Though the moon is never actually blue, this idiom is used for events that rarely occur or occur after long intervals.

Trivia



The idiomatic expression 'once in a blue moon' sounds pretty scientific and originat-



ed way back. In Krakatao (1883), after a volcanic eruption the moon literally appeared blue in colour. Dust particles in the atmosphere are normally of a size to diffract blue light, making the moon appear reddish at sunset. Larger volcanic dust particles diffract red light, making the moon appear bluish.



Example: You reap profits in the stock market once in a blue moon. Majorly you are at a loss. It is the right time to stop investing and learn more.

On the Horizon

Meaning: Something which is going to happen soon

Explanation: If you can see something on the horizon, it is quite near you and will approach soon. Thus, this idiom refers to something that is just about to happen.

Example: The arguments are on the horizon. Behave sensibly if you want to avoid them.

Out of the Woods

Meaning: Out of trouble

Explanation: Imagine you have lost your way in some woods, and it is dusk time. All you want is to come out of the maze, and when you are out of the woods, that will be the greatest relief for you.

Example: Chill and relax now. Go for a trip. Enjoy the good time. You are out of the woods now.

Idioms and Phrases Starting with the Letter P

Packed Like Sardines

Meaning: Very close, mostly used for a crowd

Explanation: If you look at a can of sardines and notice how tightly they are packed, you will know the picture this idiom paints. When some things or people are lying very close to each other (as if packed tightly), this idiom is used.

Example: Bangladesh is a dense country. In every local market, you will find people packed like sardines.

A Picture Paints a Thousand Words

Meaning: Used to emphasise the effect of pictures

Explanation: Needless to explain, a picture speaks much more than words can ever do.

Trivia



‘A picture paints a thousand words’ emerged in the USA in the earlier 20th century. Frederick R. Barnard published a piece in which he commended the effectiveness of graphics in advertising with the title “One look is worth a thousand words”, in Printer’s Ink, December 1921.

So, this idiom is used to remind the stunning effect a picture has.

Example: Da Vinci chose painting over writing to convey a message. A picture indeed paints a thousand words.

Pipe Dream

Meaning: Almost impossible idea or dream

Explanation: Originally, a pipe dream referred to a dream seen by a person while taking opium from a pipe. As an idiom, it is used to refer to any dream or idea that has slim chances of becoming a reality.

Example: “Your ambitions are pipe dreams”, they said.

“That’s what keeps me going”, he shrugged.

Pour Oil on Troubled Waters

Meaning: Try to solve an argument

Explanation: Pouring oil on troubled water represents the act of reducing the turmoil in the water. Thus, if someone is trying to solve some argument between two or more people, he is trying to pour oil on troubled waters.

Example: The wise men never carry an argument forward. They try to pour oil on troubled waters.

Putting All Your Eggs in One Basket

Meaning: To put all efforts or time at stake for just one thing



Explanation: An old but classic idiom of ‘putting all your eggs in one basket’ refers to the situation when someone has put all his hopes or stakes on one single event of success or failure. The instance can range from betting all your money on one gamble to spending all your savings for one risky medical operation of your loved one.

Example: Everyone told him not to put all his eggs in one basket because life may go in different directions, but his determination was immovable. That was sheer greatness.

Idiom and Phrase Starting with the Letter R

Ride High

Meaning: Be successful

Explanation: As the words suggest, this idiom is used when someone or something is on the road to success.

Example: Being successful is very difficult and maintaining it is even more challenging. Once you ride high, be ready to take up responsibilities.

Idioms and Phrases Starting with the Letter S

Salt of the Earth

Meaning: A person or a group of persons who are so good in a particular aspect that they represent all the people of a particular kind

Explanation: This is another idiom taken from the bible. It refers to a person or group of persons used to represent a larger group of people, typically because they are at the zenith in the aspect common in the group. Thus, the salt of the earth of a group of singers will be the best singer, and the salt of the earth of a political party will be the leader most loved by the state’s population.

Example: Owing to his oratory and leadership skills, Gandhi was the salt of the earth.

See Eye to Eye

Meaning: Agree with someone

Explanation: If you see something eye to eye with someone, you see it from the same perspective. Thus, if you and your boss see eye to eye regarding a particular thing, you have reached a consensus.

Example: The best teams are formed between people who can see eye to eye, be it personal or professional, and this situation is both desirable and achievable.

Sit on the Fence

Meaning: Not able to decide or simply avoid deciding

Explanation: Suppose there are two gardens, one with mango trees and the other with orange trees, and there is a fence between them; it would get difficult for a person to decide where to go first. He would sit on the fence with that dilemma in mind.

Example: He sat on the fence, ruminating about the past, while what he required was thinking about the present actions and consequences.

Snowball Effect

Meaning: A situation that starts small but later grows big. It can be positive or negative.

Explanation: Imagine a snowball rolling down a hill. It gets larger and more powerful as it accumulates snow along the way.

Example: Forgive and forget is a good policy. If you harbour grudges, it can have a snowball effect and ruin your peace of mind.

Square Peg In a Round Hole

Meaning: Someone or something that does not fit

Explanation: A square peg will never fit in a round hole. This expression denotes someone or something out of place somewhere and will never fit in.

Example: The most intelligent people are not always successful. All they have to do is to move out of their own beliefs. A square peg can never fit in a round hole until great measures are taken.



Trivia



The first use of the idiom ‘a square peg in a round hole’ was made in 1959 as the title song of a British war comedy film *The Square Peg* starring Norman Wisdom. *Square Peg in a Round Hole* is also the name of an album by Apparatjik.



Storm Is Brewing

Meaning: Upcoming problem

Explanation: A brewing storm refers to the fact that the storm is getting ready to take place and destroy anything and everything in its course. So, this idiom signifies a crisis/harm that may soon befall a person.

Example: My dad looks angry. A storm is brewing.

Straight from the Horse's Mouth

Meaning: Get information directly from the source

Explanation: The mouth of the horse is the source of information. Having heard about some event from a person who has experienced it gives you substantial credibility. That is what this idiom is about. If you have received some information directly from the source, you may say you have heard it directly from the horse's mouth.

Example: The reporter who covered the corruption news of a politician has authentic sources; he got/heard it from the horse's mouth.

Trivia



“Prose consists less and less of words chosen for their meaning, and more and more of phrases tacked together like the sections of a prefabricated hen-house.”
—George Orwell on the importance of language.

Idioms and Phrases Starting with the Letter T

Take with a Grain of Salt

Meaning: Not believe something completely; rather see it with suspicion

Explanation: To take it with a grain of salt means to see something with suspicion and not believe it. It may also refer to not believing something literally and reading between the lines.

Example: Taking things with a grain of salt is a great idea, but sometimes we need to believe what others say.

Takes Two to Tango

Meaning: When two people are responsible for an outcome, both should be held accountable.

Explanation: A tango performance requires two people to perform and is not the work of one. So, it makes total sense that both the performers should take responsibility or credit for the performance. The same logic is applied when two people do any action, and now both should take responsibility for the outcomes.

Example: Who says you can succeed alone? It always takes two to tango.

Trivia



The phrase ‘takes two to tango’ originated in a song, *Takes Two to Tango*, which was written and composed by Al Hoffman and Dick Manning in 1952.



The Best of Both Worlds

Meaning: Avail benefit of two very different situations

Explanation: In a dream of yours, if one world is offering oranges and another is offering



apples, and you have to choose one, which one would you choose? You will choose the fruit you like more, but if you can devise a way to take benefit of both the worlds, then this idiom is apt for you. If someone can take benefit of two very different situations simultaneously, then we say that he can take benefit of both the worlds.

Example: “I will bring the best of both the worlds for you”, he offered.

“I believe you”, she affirmed.

Throw Caution to the Wind

Meaning: Not to be careful

Explanation: Throwing caution to the wind is symbolic that someone has abandoned all carefulness and is now entering into some venture or doing some actions recklessly.

Example: Throwing caution to the wind is nothing but escapism. One should avoid doing it; otherwise, the repercussions would not be so pretty.

Tip of the Iceberg

Meaning: A small visible part of a larger unknown problem

Explanation: The visible portion of an iceberg above the level of water is just a small percentage of the total size of that iceberg. The same analogy is established to a problem when only a small part of it is visible, and a larger part is yet to be revealed and come to the fore.

Example: Last month, the minor shakes on Richter scale were just the tip of the iceberg.

Trivia



The ship Titanic sank because it hit an iceberg, the larger portion of which was underwater and concealed. Hence, this could be the best example of ‘tip of an iceberg’



There is a great chance that a big earthquake is approaching.

To Give a Run for One's Money

Meaning: Provide someone with challenging competition or opposition

Explanation: An overweight and average-looking actor goes for a makeover and loses weight; he can give others in the industry a run for their money.

Example: The actor chose simple scripts with low cost but worked with full dedication. He was sure to give the high-profile actors a run for their money.

Twist Someone's Arm

Meaning: Convince someone to do something

Explanation: Ever twisted the arm of your younger sibling and forced him to agree to do something? Well, that is violent when used literally. If used as an idiom, it means to succeed at convincing someone to do something.

Example: You need to twist your manager's arm to get a salary hike. But that seems far-fetched.

Idioms and Phrases Starting with the Letter U

Up in the Air

Meaning: Something which is still to be solved or decided

Explanation: In the air is representative of something hanging in between and is yet to be settled. By this logic, this idiom refers to a decision or a condition which is yet to meet its fate.

Example: Even after making all efforts, analysing every situation, and using all permutations and combinations, the main problem is still up in the air.

Upset the Applecart

Meaning: Ruin someone's plans



Explanation: A kid is standing with his mother, who is buying apples from a vendor who had spent two hours in the morning perfectly placing his apples to allure his customers throughout the day. If the kid takes out one apple from the base and the domino effect makes the whole cart fall, the kid ruins a perfectly-laid plan. This expression is used when someone ruins someone else's perfectly-laid plans.

Example: Vibhishana, king Ravana's younger brother revealed his secrets to Lord Rama. He upset the applecart and became responsible for Ravana's defeat in the epic war of Ramayana.

Idiom and Phrase Starting with the Letter V

Vim and Vigour

Meaning: Enthusiasm and energy

Explanation: Vim means strength, and vigour means energy. So, when you are doing a task with full vim and vigour, you are doing it with full energy and enthusiasm.

Example: "I love thee with all vim and vigour, heart and mind", Orlando spoke.

"That helps me think about you when you are not here", Jessica said.

Idioms and Phrases Starting with the Letter W

When Pigs Fly

Meaning: Some event that is never going to happen

Explanation: It is known with one hundred per cent certainty that pigs can't fly. So, by saying that some event will happen when pigs fly, you mean to say that the event will never happen.

Example: Delivering a fabulous performance for him in this bad phase would be pigs flying. Let's see how he achieves that!

Whole Nine Yards

Meaning: Whole of something

Explanation: If a field is nine yards and the farmer is using the whole of it for the plantation of mangoes, he can affirm that he is using the whole nine yards to grow mangoes. While this is not how the idiom originated, it is a good way to remember its meaning. If you want to refer to something as a whole, you may use this idiom.

Example: King Ashoka wanted the whole nine yards. That is the reason he annexed so many territories.

Idiom and Phrase Starting with the Letter Y

You Can Lead a Horse to Water, but You Can't Make Him Drink

Meaning: You can suggest a good action to someone or make it easy for them, but you can't force them to do to it

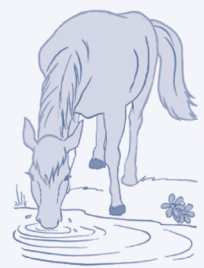
Explanation: Being one of the longer types of idioms, this one is quite self-explanatory and is used to denote instances where you may guide someone about what to do. Still, he is not willing to do it, even though it will be quite beneficial for that person.

Example: Parents can try all they want and teach good things to their children. But eventually, it's up to the children to learn or adopt all that. One can only lead a horse to water but can't make him drink!

Trivia



The idea of the idiom 'you can lead horse to water' happens to originate back in the 12th century. In 1175, it's said to have made an appearance in a book called, Old English Homilies:



"Hwa is thet mei thet hors wettrien the him-self nule drinken?"



Practice Exercise – 1

1. Fill in the blank with the most suitable idiom.
Don't you think you _____ by not showing up at the meeting you underwent so much trouble to organise?
(A) Made your head spin
(B) Burnt bridges
(C) Cut corners
(D) Got a taste of your own medicine
2. There are people around who love being tidy and perfect. Keeping things in perfect order is their forte.
Which idiom can precisely fit in place of 'in perfect order'?
(A) Apple pie order
(B) A dime a dozen
(C) Snap one's finger
(D) At the drop of a hat
3. They say that good opportunities don't come often, but one should grab them 'at the drop of a hat' when they do.
Which word precisely describes the idiom given in the inverted commas?
(A) Immediately
(B) Then and there
(C) Grab instantly
(D) All of the above
4. I've been working here at my desk for three hours without a break. If I don't go outside to get some fresh air soon, I think I'll go crazy!
Identify the idiom used in the given statement.
(A) Three hours without a break
(B) Get some fresh air soon
(C) Go crazy
(D) Working at my desk
5. I was a real basket case when I arrived home after my long trip. I flew for over 30 hours, and two of the planes were delayed.
Identify the idiom used in the given statement.
(A) Had been flying
(B) Planes were delayed
(C) Arrived home after a long trip
(D) Basket case
6. What does "hit the road" mean?
(A) An accident
(B) Begin the journey
(C) End the journey
(D) Stop in the middle of the road
7. Anuj, despite being a diligent employee, was never appreciated by his grumpy manager. So, when the manager got a transfer, Anuj was glad to see his back.
The phrase 'glad to see his back' relates to:
(A) Be happy to see someone/something leaving.
(B) Avoid talking about an important thing by wasting time talking about useless things.
(C) When you have to choose from two options, but both are unpleasant.
(D) Stay quiet.
8. To understand why the company was in the doldrums, the CEO had to take a step back and get a bird's eye view of the situation.
What does the idiom 'bird's eye view' mean here?
(A) Being smart
(B) Looking around like a bird
(C) Free like a bird
(D) An overall look at something
9. Well, I'll never try to ride my bike in the snow again—live and learn!
Identify the idiom in the above statement.
(A) Ride a bike
(B) Live and learn
(C) Either (A) or (B)
(D) Both (A) and (B)



10. You can't live life completely reserved, you know. You've got to throw caution to the wind now and then.

Identify the phrase in the above statement.

- (A) Live life completely reserved
- (B) Throw caution to the wind
- (C) Either (A) or (B)
- (D) Both (A) and (B)

Direction for Questions 11 to 14: Read the following passage and answer the following questions.

Key to success

John is an accomplished, successful businessman who is quite popular as a mentor. He enjoys showing young professionals the ropes. The first thing he says is that his career has not always been smooth sailing. He learned several lessons along the way. "First and foremost," John said, "don't believe that success is ever manna from heaven." He has met many people with similar rags-to-riches stories and learned that a lot of hard work went into their success.

John believes not only in hard work but also in recognising the right opportunities:

"It's essential never to spread yourself too thin. You'll certainly miss out on a real opportunity if you have too many irons. I've seen people as busy as a bee who never really seem to do anything."

You'll probably agree that it's impossible to concentrate if you have to worry about 50 different things. Another good lesson is that it's important to know which side your bread is buttered on and give that activity your full attention. In other words, you need to ride the gravy train. Don't start looking for new challenges if everything works out for the best.

The most important ability of any successful entrepreneur, John stressed, is to have the presence of mind, not simply taking advantage of an opportunity but also keeping

your eye on the ball. Some people are quick on the uptake, but then they get bored. It's important to be consistent and not spread yourself too thin. Finally, make sure never to show your hand to your opponents.

That's how to be successful, according to John.

Source: (Thought Co.) <https://rb.gy/dqw8wp>

- 11. How many idioms are there in total?
 - (A) 5
 - (B) 12
 - (C) 10
 - (D) 14
- 12. Which idiom from the above story means "Make money by doing something already proven to be successful"?
 - (A) Ride the gravy train
 - (B) Everything is working out
 - (C) Spread yourself
 - (D) Bread is buttered
- 13. From the above story, fill in the blank with an appropriate idiom.
My boss _____ at work because it was my first week.
- 14. From the above story, fill in the blank with an appropriate idiom.
We've been lucky in life. It's been _____ since the very beginning.
- 15. I would like Taylor Swift and Iron Maiden to sing together at my birthday party, but I don't think that will happen even in my *wildest dreams*.
What does the highlighted idiom relate to?
 - (A) A bad dream
 - (B) A dream based on imagination
 - (C) Dream with wrong intentions
 - (D) Normal dreams
- 16. What is the meaning of 'bring home the bacon'?
 - (A) Main source of income
 - (B) Do some futile actions



- (C) Ignore unpleasant things or problems
(D) Achieve something, mostly a source of income
- 17.** Which idiom relates to 'Succeed by a very small margin'?
- (A) The calm before the storm
(B) Caught between two stools
(C) By the skin of your teeth
(D) Don't give up the day job
- 18.** What does 'the elephant in the room' relate to?
- (A) The apparent problem that people avoid talking about
(B) A person with a healthy physique
(C) The event has ended
(D) None of these
- 19.** Which of the following examples correctly explains 'face the music'?
- (A) Don't worry. Your job is done, and you may face the music now.
(B) You murdered him. Now, face the music.
(C) I love music, and I face the music too.
(D) All of the above
- 20.** 'Hand in glove' means:
- (A) In close association
(B) A difficult problem or person to deal with
(C) Get to know about a rumour
(D) Ignore the problems or current situation





Solutions

1. (B)

Burnt bridges, the idiom, means intentionally destroying one's path, connections, reputation, opportunities, etc.

2. (A)

apple-pie order; arranged perfectly

3. (A)

The idiom at the drop of a hat means to do something immediately.

4. (A)

It's an idiom (also used as a phrase) that is often used in place of "insane".

5. (D)

Someone is viewed as emotionally unstable and unable to function in normal situations.

6. (B)

Begin the journey is often replaced by 'hit the road' to beautify a sentence.

7. (A)

Be happy to see someone/something leaving

Idiom "glad to see his back" means to be pleased that someone has gone because you do not like them.

8. (D)

An overall look at something

The idiom bird's eye view means to have an overall look at something carefully.

9. (B)

Live and learn: it is an expression used after one has learned something from personal experience.

10. (B)

Throw caution to the wind: it means to abandon one's cautiousness to take a risk.

11. (D)

Idioms and their meanings used in this story are:

Smooth sailing: an easy life with no problems

Know which side your bread is buttered on: understand what is most important to you

Ride the gravy train: make money by doing something that has already proved to be successful

Keep your eye on the ball: concentrate on what's important

Manna from heaven: surprise riches

From rags to riches: going from poor to rich

Show someone the ropes: explain and show by example how something is done properly

As busy as a bee: very busy (also as busy as a beaver)

Work out for the best: end with the best possible result

Quick on the uptake: understand very quickly

Have the presence of mind to do something: be aware and be able to grasp an opportunity

Show your hand: show others the advantages you have in a situation

Spread yourself too thin: doing too many things at once

Have too many irons in the fire: doing too many things at the same time



12. (A)

Ride the gravy train: make money by doing something that has already proved to be successful

13. showed me the ropes

Explain and show by example how something is done properly

14. smooth sailing

An easy life with no problems

15. (B)

Wildest dream

It is often used informally and refers to a dream based on imagination.

16. (D)

Achieve something, mostly a source of income

Bringing home the bacon means achieving something, mostly a source of income.

17. (C)

By the skin of your teeth

'Succeed by a very small margin' idiom refers to: By the skin of your teeth.

18. (A)

The apparent problem that people avoid talking about

'The elephant in the room' closely relates to the apparent problem that people avoid talking about.

19. (B)

Idiom 'face the music' refers to being confronted with the unpleasant consequences of one's actions.

20. (A)

'Hand in glove' means in close association with something or someone.

Practice Exercise – 2

Level of Difficulty – 1

1. Which of the following correctly describes the meaning of the idiom 'By the skin of your teeth?'
(A) Very expensive
(B) Ignore someone
(C) Just barely
(D) Be patient
2. Which of the following correctly describes the meaning of the underlined idiom in the given sentence?
We would have reached the summit but for the weather.
(A) We would have reached the summit, but the weather did not let us start.
(B) We would have reached the summit were it not for the weather.
(C) We could reach the summit only because of the weather.
(D) We would not have made it to the summit without such weather.
3. Select the *one* that is the right meaning of the idiom 'a piece of cake':
(A) Getting anything
(B) Easy thing
(C) Getting cake
(D) Tough thing
4. Select the *one* that is the right meaning of the idiom 'cold feet':
(A) Does not know anything.
(B) Nervous about something.
(C) Cold toes.
(D) Lack of warmth.
5. Which of the following correctly describes the meaning of the idiom 'To make bricks without straw'?
(A) To attempt to do a thing without proper materials
(B) To attempt to do something impossible
(C) To attempt to do something difficult
(D) To attempt to do something without help
6. Which of the following correctly describes the meaning of 'in the purview of'?
(A) Within the scope of
(B) At contrast with
(C) In exchange of
(D) In place of
7. Which of the following correctly describes the meaning of the idiom 'a damp squib'?
After all that media attention, the whole event turned out to be a bit of a damp squib, with very few people attending.
(A) Rainy weather
(B) Disappointing
(C) A skirt in a laundry
(D) None
8. Which of the following correctly describes the meaning of the idiom 'bad blood'?
There has been bad blood between the two families for years.
(A) Enmity
(B) Hostile
(C) Bitter
(D) Friendliness
9. Which of the following correctly describes the meaning of the idiom 'take for a ride'?
When he didn't return my money, I realised he had taken me for a ride.
(A) To give a ride to someone
(B) To deceive someone
(C) To be indifferent
(D) To disclose a secret.
10. Which of the following correctly describes the meaning of the idiom 'To smell a rat'?
Though Lloyd George's behaviour seemed odd, Haig still did not smell a rat.



- (A) To smell foul
- (B) To see a rat
- (C) To chase a rat
- (D) To be suspicious

Level of Difficulty – 2

- 11.** After the match that lasted three hours, Jack said he could eat a horse.
- (A) Willingness to eat a horse
 - (B) Desire to eat non-vegetarian food
 - (C) Very hungry
 - (D) Unwilling to eat food
- 12.** Four alternatives are provided after the statement in the following question. Choose the alternative which best expresses the meaning of the underlined phrase.
- Steve was down for the count after the rugby match.
- (A) Very upset
 - (B) Extremely tired
 - (C) Calculating scores
 - (D) Observing mistakes
- 13.** Four alternatives are provided after the statement in the following question. Choose the alternative which best expresses the meaning of the underlined phrase.
- People sell most of their stocks whenever there is a dip in the stock market, but it is advisable to look before you leap.
- (A) Take advantage of the opportunity
 - (B) Take courageous actions
 - (C) Take calculated risks
 - (D) Take big steps
- 14.** Select the sentence that correctly uses the phrase given in the question.
- Select the sentence that makes correct use of the idiom 'Hit the sack':
- (A) The bodybuilders hit the sack as soon as they reached the stage for the competition.
 - (B) He said that when there is much work, he prefers to hit the sack and relax instead of working very hard.
 - (C) All the guests at the party were so excited to participate in the dance that they hit the sack.
 - (D) The newly crowned Miss world hit the sack when she started her winning speech.
- 15.** Select the sentence that correctly uses the phrase given in the question.
- Select the sentence that explains the correct use of the idiom 'Keep an ear to the ground':
- (A) Doing something in an easier and least expensive manner
 - (B) To have patience
 - (C) Staying informed and updated about everything
 - (D) Get organised and do things effectively
- 16.** Which of the following correctly describes the meaning of the idiom 'have a bone to pick with somebody'?
- (A) To have an issue to discuss or argue about
 - (B) To have a personal or selfish reason for doing something secret
 - (C) To avoid saying what you mean, usually because it is uncomfortable
 - (D) To do the thing you've always wanted to do
- 17.** Consider the following statement:
- The study should be conducted by a firm with no axe to grind.
- Which of the following correctly describes the meaning of the underlined phrase?
- (A) To not hold someone responsible for something
 - (B) Have a private or selfish reason for doing something
 - (C) The person we were just talking about showed up!
 - (D) You don't notice how long something lasts when it's fun.



- 18.** Identify the option that gives the meaning of the idiom/phrase in the below sentence.

The police came to arrest me, but I told them that they were barking up the wrong tree.

- (A) To be mistaken
- (B) To be betrayed
- (C) To be misled
- (D) To be revenged

- 19.** Consider the following statement:

I felt like someone had pulled the rug out from under my feet when my health insurance company said it would stop paying for my medical bills.

Which of the following is the meaning of the underlined phrase?

- (A) Be open and honest
- (B) Argue vehemently and violently all the time
- (C) Running away from a problem
- (D) To suddenly or unexpectedly remove help

- 20.** Select the *one* that is the right meaning of the idiom 'bring something home to somebody':

- (A) Let someone know something.
- (B) Make somebody understand something.
- (C) Make somebody a fool.
- (D) Invite somebody at home.

Level of Difficulty – 3

- 21.** Choose the option that gives the meaning of the underlined idiom.

When Jio started its operations, it gave the competitors a run for their money.

- (A) To accept the difficulties in life
- (B) To give tough competition
- (C) To continue to work despite knowing the outcome
- (D) To work afresh but get back to the same routine every time

- 22.** Select the sentence(s) that does not use the below-mentioned idiom correctly: 'Find your feet'

- 1. They quickly found their feet in their adopted country.
- 2. I was away for a long time, so it will take me a while to find my feet again.
- 3. Did it take you long to find your feet when you started your new job?
- 4. After moving from teaching to industry, finding her feet in a very different job took her a long time.

- (A) Only 1
- (B) 3 and 4
- (C) 1, 2, and 4
- (D) None

- 23.** Which of the following correctly describes the meaning of the idiom 'Barmecide feast'?

- (A) To keep things awkward
- (B) Imaginary benefits
- (C) To keep things hidden
- (D) To act weird in a fair

- 24.** Select the option that gives the correct meaning of the phrase 'let the cat out of the bag':

- (A) Quite peaceful
- (B) Running out of time
- (C) Part of a sentence
- (D) Give away a secret

- 25.** Which of the following correctly describes the meaning of the idiom given below?

At one's wits' end

- (A) At the limit of one's resources
- (B) Utterly at a loss
- (C) To lose one's mind
- (D) To reach a conclusion

- 26.** Which of the following correctly describes the meaning of the idiom given below?

Take by storm

- (A) To captivate completely
- (B) To disturb completely
- (C) To disturb violently
- (D) To be excited



27. Which of the following correctly describes the meaning of the idiom given below?

Boil the ocean

- (A) Doing something in an easier manner
- (B) Taking up an overly ambitious project
- (C) Coming to know a secret matter
- (D) getting very angry

28. Which of the following correctly describes the meaning of the idiom given below?

Take something with a grain of salt

- (A) Take something seriously.
- (B) Treat something with scepticism.
- (C) Understand something completely.
- (D) Take something with some salt.

29. Which of the following correctly describes the meaning of the idiom given below?

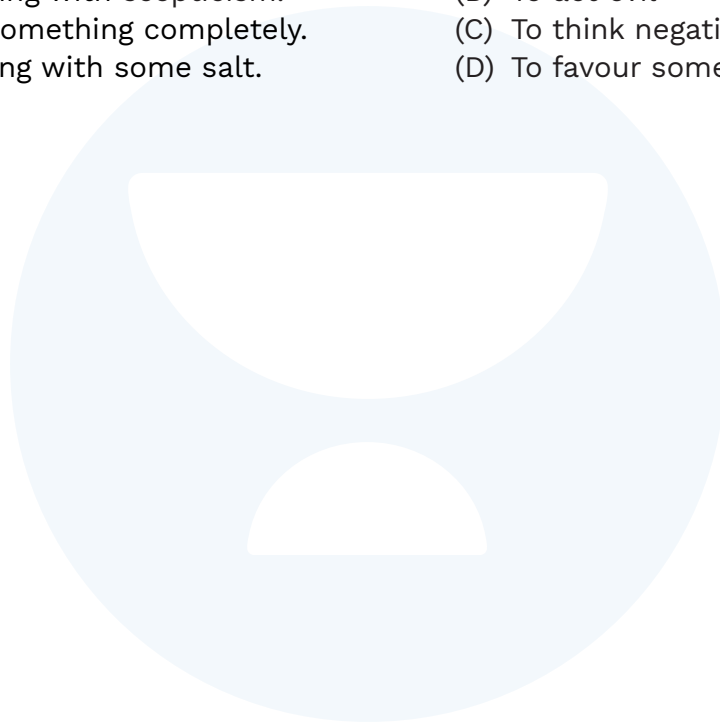
Rain on someone's parade

- (A) To rain heavily
- (B) To make things dirty
- (C) To make a situation worse
- (D) To spoil a moment

30. Which of the following correctly describes the meaning of the idiom given below?

Play devil's advocate

- (A) To argue, just for the sake of it
- (B) To act evil
- (C) To think negative
- (D) To favour someone beyond the limit





Solutions

1. (C)

'By the skin of your teeth' means by a very narrow margin, only just.

"I only got away by the skin of my teeth". Therefore, option C is the right answer.

2. (B)

The meaning of the idiom, 'but for' is 'were it not for'. Therefore, option B is the correct answer. The other options do not give the same meaning as in the question.

3. (B)

The idiom 'a piece of cake' means an easy thing. A similar idiom would be 'a walk in the park'.

Hence, option B is correct.

4. (B)

The idiom cold feet means to be nervous or frightened about something. For example, I was going to do bungee jumping, but then I got cold feet.

Hence, option B is correct.

5. (A)

To make bricks without straw means to perform a task without essential material or means.

For example, publishing a magazine without good journalists is like making bricks without straw. Hence, option A is the correct answer.

6. (A)

'In the purview of' means 'under the consideration of', or 'within the scope of'.

7. (B)

A damp squib means a firework that does not explode because of a fault. So, we can use this idiom to mean something that did not go as expected. Therefore, option B is the correct answer.

8. (A)

'Bad blood' means extreme anger, bitterness, or hostility. Options B and C have the same meaning, but they are adjectives. Here we need a noun. Therefore, option A is the correct answer.

9. (B)

'To take someone for a ride' means to con someone. Generally, impostors take people for a ride with their glib talks. Eg. The scheming guru took many people for a ride with his hypnotic acts.

Therefore, option B is the right answer.

10. (D)

'To smell a rat' means to get suspicious about something. It can also mean finding something fishy. Therefore, option D is the correct answer.

11. (C)

Eat a horse means being extremely hungry or famished.

12. (B)

'Down for the count' means someone is very tired/worn out/exhausted/knackered.

13. (C)

Look before you leap means to take action after all the risks have been calculated carefully.

14. (B)

The idiom hit the sack means to go to sleep. A similar idiom is hit the hay.

Hence, option B uses it in the correct sense.

15. (C)

The allusion here is to the days of cowboys and Indians when people used to put their ears to the ground to hear the



sound of horses miles away. Today, it signifies that someone is well aware of what is happening around him.

16. (A)

‘To have a bone to pick with someone’ means to be annoyed with someone about something, and want to talk about it. For example, ‘I have a bone to pick with you as you did not return my cylinder.’

17. (B)

‘To have an axe to grind’ means to have a selfish motive for doing something. Therefore, option B is the correct answer.

18. (A)

Barking up the wrong tree means being mistaken and looking for solutions in the wrong place. Therefore, option A is the correct answer.

19. (D)

Pull the rug out from under someone: Remove all support and assistance, usually suddenly. For example, by stopping Peter’s allowance, the charity pulled the rug out from under him, forcing him to look for a job.

20. (B)

The idiom ‘bring something home to somebody’ means to make somebody understand how important or serious something is.

Hence, option B is correct.

21. (B)

When you make it difficult for somebody else to win against you, you give him a run for his money. A new actress from a humble background can give the established ones a run for their money just because she may have great connections in the industry.

22. (D)

Meaning of the idiom: “to start to be comfortable in a new situation: to begin to be confident or successful.”

All the statements correctly use the idiom; hence option D is the correct answer.

23. (B)

Barmecide was the name of a family of princes in a tale from *The Thousand and One Nights* (also known as *The Arabian Nights’ Entertainment*). One prince in the family tormented a beggar by inviting him to a fabulous feast, at which all the dishes were imaginary. The poor man played along with his malicious host, pretending to get drunk on the imaginary wine. So, the Barmecide feast means a total illusion.

24. (D)

One possible and most heavily-cited explanation for this idiom is that it dates back to the Middle Ages. As the story goes, shady livestock vendors in medieval marketplaces sought to trick their buyers. When someone would purchase a pig, the vendor would sneak a cat into the bag instead, cheating the buyer out of the higher price for a pig. It wasn’t until the buyer arrived home and let the cat out of the bag that they realised they’d been scammed; hence, the phrase’s association with revealing a secret.

25. (B)

The meaning of the idiom, ‘at one’s wits’ end’ is ‘at the limit of one’s mental resources’ or ‘utterly at a loss’. For example, ‘He was at his wits’ end trying to think of ways to please me.’ Therefore, option B is the correct answer.



26. (A)

The phrase 'take by storm' means to captivate completely. For example, this novel took the public by storm. Hence, option A is the right answer.

27. (B)

The phrase appears in business and among start-up companies and in other group settings and is considered a negative phrase concerning how one approaches a task. It derives from the literal concept of boiling the ocean, which is an impossible task.

28. (B)

It means a sceptical attitude. It's used to encourage people to look at something with some reservation, as there's a chance it could be untrue or misleading.

Some synonyms for the idiom can be doubtful, sceptical, wary, reserved, or tentative.

29. (D)

It means to ruin one's plans or dampen one's excitement.

A parade is supposed to be a grand affair. So, this term, which calls up a vivid image of a downpour spoiling an elaborate function, is used very commonly when something gets ruined.

30. (A)

The given phrase means to argue just for the sake of it, without having a logical point of view. Hence, option A is the right answer.