

Idioms

Idioms are phrases with meanings you cannot understand simply by knowing the meaning of the separate words. They are an interesting and colourful part of the language. All the idioms you will find in this dictionary are quite common and are used in everyday English. Use your dictionary to do the exercises on these pages.

Exercise 1

Have a look at the following common idioms, and match them to their meanings:

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|-------------------------------|--|
| 1. get the hang of something | a. guess the truth from things you know |
| 2. put two and two together | b. say something by accident that upsets or annoys someone |
| 3. get cold feet | c. act in a firm way to deal with a difficult situation |
| 4. take the bull by the horns | d. learn how to do something or use something |
| 5. put your foot in it | e. suddenly feel afraid to do something that you had planned to do |

Exercise 2

Use a verb from the box to complete the idioms in these sentences:

come let play dish keep

1. The party was meant to be a surprise, but Tom **the cat out of the bag**.
2. **your hair on!** We're only ten minutes late.
3. I'm only trying to **devil's advocate**, to check we've thought of everything.
4. As soon as he became party leader, the media began to **the dirt** on him.
5. New evidence about the crime has **to light**.

Exercise 3

Each of these sentences contains an idiom with the wrong preposition or adverb. Find the right prepositions or adverbs to correct them:

1. My neighbours are **driving me over the bend** with their loud music.
2. You need to **get your act up** and start studying more.
3. This business changes so fast, you really need to **be in the ball**.
4. I can teach French to young students, but I was **around my depth** with the adults.
5. As soon as we offered online shopping, all the other shops **jumped inside the bandwagon**.

Exercise 4

Use the dictionary to help you answer these questions:

1. What do you **pull over someone's eyes** if you want to trick them?
2. What part of your body do you **put down** if you insist that something happens?
3. What do you **bite** if you suddenly decide to do something difficult?
4. What do you **pull up** if you start to do better?
5. What do you **throw around** if you try to make people do what you want?

Exercise 5

Idioms are often used for emphasis. For instance, if you say you are 'at the end of your tether', it sounds stronger than saying you are 'fed up'. Choose the correct form of an idiom from the box to replace the words *in italics* in the sentences below and make their meaning stronger:

break someone's heart bend over backwards with flying colours
dig your heels in be up to your eyes in something

1. When Sara left him, it *made him very unhappy*.
2. I *have got a lot of* work.
3. We *tried very hard* to make her feel welcome.
4. He passed his exam *with a very high mark*.
5. They'll probably offer you £6 per hour, but if you *insist*, they may give you more.

Exercise 6

Idioms are often used to express emotions. For each of the sentences below, say what emotion the person is feeling:

anger disappointment happiness affection fear

1. When I admitted that I didn't have the key, he really **flew off the handle**.
2. The idea of jumping out of a plane **made her hair stand on end**.
3. He was **over the moon** when they offered him the job.
4. I **have a soft spot for** her brother.
5. When we saw our hotel room, my **heart sank**.

Exercise 7

There are many idioms that contain words for parts of the body. Complete the following sentences by adding body parts to them:

1. He said I would have to pay £100, but he was just **pulling my** (*joking*)
2. Their requests for more help have **fallen on deaf** (*been ignored*)
3. We had to **learn** all the kings and queens of England **off by** (*learn so that we knew them all*)
4. She's **got her** **full** with five small children. (*very busy*)
5. When it comes to politics, I don't **see** **to** **with** my parents. (*agree with*)

Exercise 8

Some idioms can use more than one verb with the same meaning. Find another verb that can be used with the idioms in these sentences:

1. We hope that these letters will **throw light on** her disappearance.
2. Why don't you phone your mother and **set her mind at rest**?
3. I have never **laid eyes on** these documents before.
4. Do you know where I can **get my hands on** some coloured paper?
5. The concert was all arranged, but then Clara **put a spanner in the works** by refusing to sing.