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40 Common English Idioms

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[Learning English](#) isn't as easy as some might think. First, [grammar](#) muddies the waters (makes things unclear), and idiomatic expressions only add fuel to the fire (make things worse).

If you're taking the [TOEFL](#) or the [TOEIC](#), or just want to know more common [idioms](#), study this list of 40 common idiomatic expressions before you take the test. They may just help your English language acquisition soar (get much better).

Common English Idioms

1. **24/7**: Twenty-four hours a day; seven days a week; all the time; constantly. *My little sister irritates me 24/7!*
2. **A short fuse**: A quick temper. *Jamie is known for his short fuse; just a few days ago he screamed at his coach for not letting him play.*
3. **A taste of your own medicine**: Bad treatment deservedly received for treating other people badly. *After constantly being prank-called, Julian decided to give Juan a taste of his own medicine and ordered twenty-seven pizzas to be delivered to Juan's house.*
4. **Butterflies in my stomach**: To be nervous. *Liam had butterflies in his stomach before he went on stage to play the violin.*
5. **By the skin of your teeth**: To just barely get by or make it. *Lester made the dance team by the skin of his teeth; you can tell he hasn't been dancing jazz for very long.*
6. **Cat got your tongue?**: Can't you speak? (Usually said to embarrass the other person). *I just saw you kissing my boyfriend. What's the matter? Cat got your tongue?*
7. **Crying wolf**: To ask for help when you don't need it. *You have cried wolf so many times that no one believes you when you're really hurt.*
8. **Cut someone some slack**: To not judge someone too harshly. *Hey. Cut me some slack. I was really busy with my frog hunting business last week and forgot to call. I'm sorry!*
9. **Down for the count**: Tired; giving up; unable or unwilling to participate any longer. *No, you can't take my dog for a walk—she's down for the count after chasing cats all day.*
10. **Draw the line**: To stop; to know the point where something goes from okay to not okay. *Now I draw the line at speaking in front of 34,000 people.*
11. **Easier said than done**: Not as easy as it appears to be. *You want me to come to work at 6:00 AM? Easier said than done!*
12. **Every cloud has a silver lining**: You can find good in every bad situation. *Even though you just got fired, remember that every cloud has a silver lining—at least you don't have to work for that grouchy boss anymore!*
13. **Finding a needle in a haystack**: Virtually impossible to find. *Trying to get a new job these days is like trying to find a needle in a haystack.*
14. **Fish out of water**: To be out of place. *Tom felt like a fish out of water at the Star Trek convention his new girlfriend begged him to attend.*
15. **Get something off your chest**: To talk about something that has been bothering you for a long time; to admit something you have done wrong. *I have to get this off my chest—I copied your answers on the SAT. Thanks for the [15th percentile score](#), by the way.*
16. **Give it a whirl**: To try something. *I've never gone kite-boarding, but I'm prepared to give it a whirl!*
17. **Go down in flames**: To fail suddenly and spectacularly. *The football player's career went down in flames after the media learned he'd been losing on purpose to settle gambling debts.*
18. **Go the extra mile**: To make an extra effort. *My dentist always goes the extra mile, offering free back massages at the end of a stressful tooth extraction.*
19. **Hang in there**: Be patient. Wait it out. *I know you're struggling right now in school but just hang in there. It'll get easier. I promise.*
20. **In the fast lane**: A life filled with excitement. *When Curtis turned forty, he decided he needed to live life in the fast lane, so he quit his job as a dentist and decided to tour Europe by motorcycle.*
21. **In the nick of time**: Almost too late. *You gave me that [main idea help](#) in the nick of time—my teacher just gave us a quiz on that reading skill and I passed it!*

Let the cat out of the bag: Tell a secret. *Brady's surprise party is going to be great if you don't let the cat out of the bag.*

Let the chips fall where they may: To let something happen, no matter if it's good or bad. *Look. I'm going to just try out for the cheerleading squad and let the chips fall where they may.*

Lose your marbles: To go crazy; insane. *Mom has really lost her marbles; she's making me practice writing the [ACT Essay](#) seven times this week!*

Once in a blue moon: Rarely. *In Florida, the temperature drops below freezing only once in a blue moon.*

Plain as day: Obvious; clear. *It's plain as day that you're in love with her, so just admit it.*

Play second fiddle: To be less important. *I hate playing second fiddle to my sister; she always does things better than I do!*

Put your foot in your mouth: Saying something you shouldn't have. *Jessica really put her foot in her mouth when she asked about John's job right after he lost it.*

Pull yourself together: Calm down and behave normally. *Pull yourself together, man! Sure, your girlfriend just dumped you and then you got hit by a car, but you can't let those things get you down.*

Sick and tired: To be bothered or annoyed by. *She is sick and tired of her dog chewing up her shoes every day.*

Sleep on it: To think about something for a while before making a decision. *Don't tell me whether you'll move to Texas with me or not today. Sleep on it, and get back to me tomorrow.*

Snug as a bug in a rug: Warm and cozy; content. *That baby looks as snug as a bug in a rug cuddled up next to his mother.*

Step up your game: To start performing better. *Listen, Jen. You'd better step up your game if you want to get all A's in Miss Finch's Physics class. She isn't easy!*

Stick your nose into something: To interfere. *Sharon always sticks her nose into everyone else's business.*

Straight from the horse's mouth: Directly from the person involved. *Listen to the news straight from the horse's mouth; we're all getting bonuses this week!*

Take it easy: Relax. *I know you're not feeling well, so try to take it easy today.*

Tip of the iceberg: The small easily visible part of a larger problem. *The fact that Carrie is dating a member of the mafia is just the tip of the iceberg; she's also smuggling contraband into the country.*

To not see the wood for the trees: To be so involved with the details that you don't get the most important facts. *She always argues about the silliest things; it's like she can't see the wood for the trees.*

Up a creek without a paddle: In an unlucky/bad situation. *If you don't have any [money](#) to pay for the repairs we just made to your car, I guess you're up a creek without a paddle because you can't have your car back.*

You rock! You are great. *Dude. You rock. Thanks for offering to watch my pet iguana all week.*

These are just a few of the thousands of idioms in the [English language](#). Get your feet wet (start) with these, and then move on to the idioms that will knock your socks off (astound you).