

## Using the *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary* to explore sayings

<b>Level</b>	Advanced
<b>Approx. total time</b>	45-60 mins
<b>Aim</b>	To exploit students' interest in sayings as a starting point for speculation on meaning, imaginative dialogue improvisation, and awareness of the presentation of idioms in dictionaries.
<b>Materials</b>	Photocopies of the worksheet; <i>Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary</i> , 7th edition

### Preparation

Make one copy of the worksheet for each student.

They will need access to copies of the *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary*, 7th edition

### Procedure

**A Activity 1.** You could start by looking at the sayings in the first exercise and trying to elicit a definition of what a saying is: "a well-known phrase or statement that expresses something about life that most people believe is wise and true".

Encourage students to make guesses about when and how these sayings might be used first. When they have made guesses, get them to check the meaning of the sayings in the dictionary. Explain that sayings are shown at the entry for the first 'meaningful' word (i.e. a noun, adjective, verb, etc., ignoring articles, prepositions and other 'small' words). In this exercise, the saying can be found at the entry for the word in **bold**. Sayings are shown at the end of the entry in the idioms section (labelled **IDM**).

#### Key

- 1 so far, so good [used to say that things have been successful until now and you hope they will continue to do so, but you know the task, etc. is not finished yet]
- 2 actions speak louder than words [what a person actually does means more than what they say they will do]
- 3 the more the merrier [the more people or things there are, the better the situation will be or the more fun people will have]
- 4 no news is good news [if there were bad news we would hear it, so as we have heard nothing, it is likely that nothing bad has happened]
- 5 enough is enough [used when you think that something should not continue any longer]

**Optional role-play:** Put students into pairs and either ask them to choose one of the sayings/situations, or allocate one to each pair. Students then imagine the whole conversation surrounding the situation, including the saying. They could either prepare this orally or write the dialogue down, before performing the conversation in front of the class, acting out the situation as much as you/they choose!

**B Activity 2.** Even though the students may not know the sayings here, many of them contain clues. If they are struggling, prompt them with clues: Which animal normally chases mice?, What type of animal 'hatches'?, What type of animal usually catches worms?, What animals have spots?

After students have made guesses about the animals, get them to look the sayings up in the dictionary to confirm their answers and check the meanings.

**Key:**

Note: These sayings can be found in the dictionary at the entry for the underlined word

- a when the cat's away the mice will play [people enjoy themselves more and behave with greater freedom when the person in charge of them is not there]
- b don't count your **chickens** before they are hatched [you should not be too confident that sth will be successful, because sth may still go wrong]
- c the early bird catches the worm [the person who takes the opportunity to do sth before other people will have an advantage over them]
- d you can lead a horse to water, but you can't make it drink [you can give sb the opportunity to do sth, but you cannot force them to do it if they do not want to]
- e a leopard cannot change its spots [people cannot change their character, especially if they have a bad character]
- f pigs might fly [used to show that you do not believe sth will ever happen]
- g you can't teach an old **dog** new tricks [you cannot successfully make people change their ideas, methods of work, etc., when they have had them for a long time]

Ask if any of them have equivalents in their own language. In multilingual classes, this can lead to an interesting and fun discussion as students try to translate sayings from their own languages. Depending on time, you could encourage them to suggest any other sayings involving animals – although be careful here, as in some cultures animals are used in terms of offence!

- C Activity 3.** Look at the dialogue as a class, which repeats the saying from the previous exercise, but in its shortened form. Ask students how they would describe Helen's advice. It could be described as "a friendly warning".

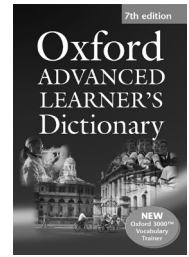
Students should try to guess the meaning of the five sayings from the context, working in pairs. They can then get further practice in finding sayings in the dictionary, looking them up to find the full saying and check the meaning. Because sayings are listed under the first meaningful word, they can still be found from just the first part. Again, ask whether students have similar sayings in their own language.

**Key:**

Note: The sayings can be found at the entry for the underlined word.

- 1 when in Rome (do as the Romans do) [used to say that when you are in a foreign country, or a situation you are not familiar with, you should behave in the way that the people around you behave]
- 2 it takes all sorts (to make a world) [used to say that you think sb's behaviour is very strange or unusual but that everyone is different and likes different things]
- 3 all work and no play (makes Jack a dull boy) [it is not healthy to spend all your time working; you need to relax too]
- 4 better the devil you know (than the devil you don't) [used to say that it is easier and wiser to stay in a bad situation that you know and can deal with rather than change to a new situation which may be much worse]
- 5 needs must (when the devil drives) [in certain situations it is necessary for you to do sth that you do not like or enjoy]

**More sayings:** If your students have enjoyed exploring these sayings, point out that there is a list of sayings in the back of the dictionary.



## Sayings

### 1 Everyday sayings

There are many common sayings which people use in everyday conversation. Match the sayings below to the situations in which people might use them.

“no **news** is good news”      “**enough** is enough”      “so **far**, so good”  
 “**actions** speak louder than words”      “the more the **merrier**”

- 1 You've started doing something potentially difficult or problematic. You haven't had any problems yet, but you haven't finished.
- 2 Someone promises to change their bad behaviour, but you're not totally convinced they will really do anything to change.
- 3 You're organizing a party and someone asks if they can bring along a couple of other friends.
- 4 You're trying to reassure a friend who is worried because their teenage son is travelling abroad and hasn't been in touch.
- 5 Your neighbours often play quite loud music and you try to be tolerant. One evening though, the music is still going on after midnight so you go to complain.

### 2 Animal sayings

The sayings below all mention an animal. Do you know which animals? Can you make a guess?

- a when the \_\_\_\_\_'s away the mice will play
- b don't count your \_\_\_\_\_ before they are hatched
- c the early \_\_\_\_\_ catches the worm
- d you can lead a \_\_\_\_\_ to water, but you can't make it drink
- e a \_\_\_\_\_ cannot change its spots
- f \_\_\_\_\_ might fly
- g you can't teach an old \_\_\_\_\_ new tricks

Check the meaning of any sayings you don't know. Do you have similar sayings in your own language?

### 3 Unfinished sayings

Because many sayings are so well known, it isn't always necessary to use the whole saying. People often just use the first part.

Angela: We've had an offer for the house, so it looks like we'll be moving soon.

Helen: That's great news, but **don't count your chickens**. We had several buyers pull out before we finally exchanged contracts.

In the dictionary, any optional parts of sayings are shown in brackets: *don't count your chickens (before they are hatched)*.

Look at the sayings below. Can you guess the meaning? Check them in the dictionary to find the full version. Does this make them easier to understand?

- 1 When we were in Greece on holiday, everything was shut in the afternoon because local people have a siesta. So, well, **when in Rome** ...
- 2 Personally, I don't see the attraction of blogging, but **it takes all sorts**.
- 3 You've been home from work late a lot recently. Why don't you leave early tomorrow and we could go out to the cinema. **All work and no play** ...
- 4 The polls show that people aren't particularly happy with the current government, but it's **better the devil you know**, so we're unlikely to see any big shifts in voting patterns.
- 5 I wouldn't normally agree to work at weekends, but in this case, **needs must**.