

Idioms and Phrases

Some Commonly Used Idioms & Phrases

- *Beat back* (to compel to retire) : The firemen were *beaten back* by angry flames and the building was reduced to ashes.
- *Boil down to* (to amount to) : His entire argument *boiled down* to this that he would not join the movement unless he saw some monetary gain in it.
- *Cast aside* (to reject, to throw aside) : Men will *cast aside* truth and honesty for immediate gains.
- *Cry down* (to deprecate) : Some of the Western powers did their best to *cry down* India's success in the war.
- *To cut off with a shilling* (to give someone a mere trifle in the will) : The father was so angry with the son over his marriage that he *cut him off with a shilling*.
- *Egg on* (to urge on) : Who *egged* you on to fight a professional boxer and get your nose knocked off?
- *Gloss over* (explain away) : Even if you are an important person your faults cannot be *glossed over*.
- *To laugh in one's sleeves* (to be secretly amused) : While I was solemnly reading my research paper to the audience, my friends were *laughing in their sleeves* for they knew what it was worth.
- *Play off* (to set one party against another for one's own advantage) : It best serves the interests of the super powers to *play off* one poor nation against another.
- *Pull one through* (to recover, to help one recover) : Armed with the latest medicines, the doctor *will pull him through*.
- *Cost a slur upon* (by word or act to cast a slight reproach on someone) : Many a man casts a *slur* on his own good name with some mean act.
- *To catch a Tartar* (to encounter a strong adversary) : When Hitler marched in to Russia he little knew that he would *catch a Tartar* in the tough people of that country.
- *To come off with flying colours* (to come out of a conflict with brilliant success) : The 1971 election outcome was uncertain but finally the congress *came off with flying colours*.
- *To come off second best* (to be defeated in every contest) : Be it an election or a tambola, I have always come off the second best.
- *To cut the Gordian knot* (to remove a difficulty by bold or unusual measures) : The Parliament threw out the Bill for Abolition of Privy Purses. The Government cut the Gordian knot by abolishing the privy purses through an ordinance.
- *To fall to one's lot* (to become one's fate) : It fell to the lot of Mujib and his colleagues to reconstruct the shattered economy of their nation.
- *To get into hot water* (to get into difficulty) : The businessman *got into hot water* with the Income-tax authorities for concealing his income from ancestral property.
- *To give someone the slip* (to dodge someone who is looking for you) : The police had nearly got the dacoits when the *latter* gave them the *slip* in the Chambal ravines.
- *To go on a fool's errand* (to go on an expedition which leads to a foolish end) : Many people earlier believed that going to the moon was like *going on a fool's errand*.
- *To go to the wall* (to get the worst in a competition) : In the struggle of life, the weakest *goes to the wall*.
- *To go to rack and ruin, to go to the dogs* (to be ruined) : If a big war comes, our economy will *go to the dogs*.
- *To have one's hands full* (to be very busy) : Pakistan could hardly expect active help from the U.S.A. *as her hands were already full with Vietnam, Laos and West Asia problems*.
- *To have a bone to pick with one* (to have a difference with a person which has not yet been fully expressed) : The extreme leftists *have a bone to pick* with the police and if ever they come to power there may be unpleasantness between the two.

- *To have the whip hand of* (to have mastery over) : After the split in the party Mrs. Gandhi has *the whip hand of* the Congress.
- *To have too many irons in the fire* (to have so much work in hand that some part of it is left undone or is done very badly) : Let the Government not go in for nationalisation so fast. If they *have too many irons in the fire* they are bound to fare badly.
- *To have the tree or right ring* (To be genuine) : Nixon's pronouncements on world peace do not *have the right ring*.
- *To have two strings to one's bow* (to have an alternative means of achieving one's purpose) : A wife always has *two strings to her bow* if coaxing fails to achieve the desired end; tears succeed.
- *To have an axe to grind* (have personal interests to serve) : Bigger nations supply arms to the smaller ones primarily because they (the bigger nations) *have their own axe to grind*.
- *To keep the wolf from the door* (to keep away extreme poverty and hunger) : Lakhs in India have to struggle everyday to *keep the wolf from the door*.
- *To make short work of* (to bring to sudden end) : The locusts *made short work of* the ripe standing corn.
- *To make amends for* (to compensate for damage) : By his kindness today he has made *amends for* his past insolence.
- *To make common cause with* (to unite, to co-operate with) : During the last elections the princes *made a common cause with* the rightist parties. Both went down.
- *To make a virtue of necessity* (to do a very disagreeable thing as though from duty but really because you must do it) : When a minister knows that he is going to be booted out of the cabinet he *makes a virtue of necessity* and resigns on health grounds.
- *To make much ado about nothing* (make a great fuss about a trifle) : Demonstrations and protests over the change in the timing of news bulletins over AIR was *making much ado about nothing*.
- *To make a cat's paw or a tool of someone* (to use someone as a means of attaining your object) : The super-powers have *made a cat's paw* of the smaller nations of Asia in their game of power politics.
- *To play into the hands of someone* (to act as to be of advantage to another) : By raising the slogan 'Indira Hatao' the opposition *played into her hands* and Mrs. Gandhi won the elections hands down (easily).
- *To play second fiddle* (to take a subordinate part) : With Mrs. Gandhi as the undisputed leader of the Congress and the nation, everyone else is content to *play second fiddle to her*.
- *To put the cart before the horse* (to begin at the wrong end to do a thing) : Preparing the blue print of a project without the provision of funds is like *putting the cart before the horse*.
- *To put one's shoulder to the wheel* (to make great efforts ourselves) : No amount of foreign aid will pull us out of the economic morass; we have to *put our own shoulders to the wheel*.
- *To set store by* (to value highly) : India, *surely sets much store by* the Indo Soviet Treaty of Friendship.
- *To set the Thames on fire* (to do something extraordinary) : He is a steady worker but never likely to *set the Thames on fire*.
- *To set one's house in order* (to arrange one's affairs) : Let Pakistan *set her own house in order* before talking of the welfare of the Kashmiris.
- *To take into one's head* (to occur to someone) : The Manager *look it into his head* that by shutting off the electricity for a few hours daily he could save on refrigeration costs.
- *To take the bull by the horns* (to grapple with a problem courageously instead of avoiding it) : There is no short cut to prosperity. We have to *take the bull by the horns* and make people work like slaves.
- *To take a leap in the dark* (to do a hazardous thing without any idea of what it may result in) : You *took a leap in the dark* in going into partnership with that man.
- *To throw cold water upon* (to discourage something) : The doctor *threw cold water upon* my plans for a world tour by declaring that I could never stand the strain of it.
- *To throw up the sponge* (to give up a contest) : Faced with stiff competition from big companies, many a small company will *throw up the sponge*.
- *To turn over a new leaf* (to change one's course of action completely) : After a long career of crime the convict suddenly *turned over a new leaf* and became a model citizen.
- *To turn tail* (to retreat ignominiously) : The enemy *turned tail* in the face of heavy onslaughts on its key positions.
- *To turn the tables* (to reverse someone's success or superiority) : Pakistan started war with a blitz on our positions but the superior tactics of our Armed Forces soon *turned the tables* on them.
- *To cook or doctor an account* (to tamper with or falsify the account) : From the balance sheet presented to the shareholders, the company seemed to be flourishing, but it afterwards turned out that the Secretary had *cooked the accounts*.
- *To bear the brunt of* (to endure the main force or shock of) : The infantry has to *bear the brunt of* a battle.
- *To beard the lion in his den* (to oppose someone, in his stronghold) : The Indian Army broke through strong Pakistani fortifications in the Shakargarh area and *bearded the lion in his own den*.
- *To bid fair to* (to give fair prospect of) : His health is so good that he *bids fair to* live till he is sixty.

- *To blow one's own trumpet* (to parade one's own good deeds) : Modesty does not pay. Only if you *blow your own trumpet*, you can succeed.
- *To blunt the edge of* (to make something less effective) : Time *blunts the edge* of grief.
- *To build castles in the air* (to indulge in reveries or visionary schemes) : There is nothing wrong if you *build castles in the air*; now put foundations under them.
- *To burn the candle at both ends* (to use too much energy) : Our resources are limited. Let us use them judiciously and not *burn the candle at both ends*.
- *To buy a pig in a poke* (to purchase a thing without previously examining it) : Buying shares in a new Company started by unknown entrepreneurs is like buying a *pig in a poke*.
- *To cross or pass the Rubicon* (to take a decisive step forward) : The Government will have to think of many things before nationalising the textile industry for once they *cross the Rubicon* there will be no going back.
- *To cry over spilt milk* (to nurse unnecessary regrets) : We have failed to build up a sizeable total against England's meagre first innings total. It is no use crying *over spilt milk* now.
- *To err on the safe side* (to choose a course which may in fact be inaccurate, but which will keep you safe from risk or harm) : In going in for mixed economy rather than wholesale nationalisation the Government were *erring on the safe side*.
- *To flog a dead horse* (waste one's energies) : We *are flogging a dead horse* if we are trying to make Sanskrit the national language of India.
- *To feather one's nest* (to provide for oneself through dishonest means) : Many tax collectors make a point of *feathering their own nests* well while they have opportunity.
- *To Eat one's heart out* (to brood over one's sorrows or disappointments) : Don't *eat your heart out* over failure in this competition.
- *To eat humble pie* (to have to humiliate oneself) : Since none came to his support he had to *eat humble pie* and give in to their demands.
- *To eat one's words* (to retract one's assertions under compulsion) : It is hard for a haughty man to have to *eat his words*.
- *To throw down the gauntlet, to take up the gauntlet* (to offer or give a challenge, to accept a challenge) : It is not for a small country to throw down the gauntlet to the right and the left.
- *To run the gauntlet* (to undergo severe criticism or ill treatment) : Most trend-setting books have to *run the gauntlet* of the literary critics.
- *To burn one's fingers* (to get oneself into unexpected trouble) : They were happily placed in the woollen industry. But they went in for cosmetics and *burnt their fingers*.
- *To force one's hands* (to compel one to do something unwillingly or earlier than he wished to do it) : The Government wanted to do all that they could to meet the workers' demands. But the violence by the strikers *forced their hands* to declare a lockout.
- *To haul over the coals* (to scold a man, reprove him) : If your bad habits become known, you will get *hauled over the coals* and richly deserve it.
- *To let the grass grow under your feet* (to be inert and passive to things around) : The authorities should listen to students' grievances. By being indifferent they would only *let the grass grow* under *their feet* till it will be too late to turn these young people take away from the path of violence.
- *To put in a nutshell* (this is said of a thing which is capable, of, or presented in, brief expression) : His conduct is weird. To *put in a nutshell* he is insane. The explanation of his conduct can be *put in a nutshell* - he is insane.
- *To let loose the dogs of war* (to set in motion the destructive forces of war) : Pakistan has *let loose the dogs of war* in Kashmir, through organised terrorism.
- *To lord it over someone* (to domineer over someone, to act as a lord) : The love of power is so strong in human nature, that when a man becomes popular he seeks to *lord it over* his fellows.
- *To mind one's Ps and Qs* (to be punctilious) : The manager suspects his chief clerk of dishonesty, and if the clerk does not *mind his Ps and Qs*, he will soon find himself without a job.
- *To muster in force* (to assemble in large numbers) : The citizens *mustered in force* to welcome their beloved leader.
- *To pay one back in one's own coin* (to give tit for tat, to retaliate) : Howsoever revengeful you may be, unless you are strong enough you cannot *pay him back in his own coin*.
- *To plough a lonely furrow* (to work without help or support) : In the organised society of today no individual or nation can *plough a lonely furrow*.
- *To poison the ears or mind* (to prejudice another person) : A judge must not allow anyone to *poison his mind* against either the plaintiff or the defendant.
- *To rest on one's laurels* (to rest satisfied with honours already won, and to make no attempt to gain further distinction) : Even if he wins the biggest award, a film star will never *rest on his laurels*. He will try to rise higher and higher.

- *To rest on one's oars* (to suspend efforts after something has been attained) : The agitators have been vigorously at work during the winter, but at present they seem to be *resting on their oars*.
- *To harp on the same string* (to keep repeating the same sentiment over and over again) : This gentleman *keeps harping on the same string*; he is from Oxford and deserves this and deserves that etc.
- *To rise like a phoenix from its ashes* (the phoenix was a fabulous Arabian bird. It had no mate but when about to die, made a funeral pile of wood and aromatic gums and on it burned itself to ashes. From the ashes a *young phoenix* was believed to rise) : Germany was completely decimated in the Second World War. But she has *risen like a phoenix from its ashes*.
- *To rule the roost or roost* (to lord it over others in a party or group) : In almost every party there is some overbearing person who tries to *rule the roost*.
- *To run in the same groove* (to move forward on the same path, to advance in harmony) : It is clear that the ideas of both reformers *run in the same groove*.
- *To run in the blood* (a peculiarity which clings to certain families) : Snobbery *runs in the blood* of the Englishmen.
- *To scatter to the winds* (to waste, to scatter abroad) : We have *scattered to the winds* what we had gained by our independence.
- *To be on the right scent* (to be on the right track) : The customs have decided to patrol the Kerala seas to nab smugglers from Dubai. They are *on the right scent* (Its opposite is to be on the wrong scent or wrong track)
- *To see how the wind blows* (to observe what influence, favourable or adverse, is likely to affect the existing state of things) : In party-politics people sitting on the fence keep on watching *how the wind is blowing* before deciding on their options.
- *To see a thing through coloured glasses* (to regard something favourably because of one's prejudice) : Pakistan has for long *looked at India through coloured glasses* and never trusted even the most genuine gestures for peace. (The world is a place of strife and one should not see it through coloured glasses.)
- *To show the white feather* (to show signs of cowardice) : The agitators shouted and gesticulated but the moment the police appeared on the scene they seemed to *show the white feather*.
- *To sow broadcast* (to scatter widely or without stint) : The emissaries of the banished king were *sowing sedition broadcast*.
- *To split hairs* (to make subtle and useless distinctions) : As the drought played havoc in Bihar, the authorities were busy *splitting hairs* trying to decide whether it was 'scarcity conditions' or famine.
- *To steal a march* (to gain an advantage over another stealthily) : While we were still debating the desirability of joint ventures with foreign concerns, Singapore and Malaysia *stole a march* over us and opened their gates to foreign investment in a big way.
- *To steer clear of* (to avoid) : India decided on non-alignment to *steer clear* of the hazards of alignment with one block or the other.
- *To stick at nothing* (the phrase implies readiness to stoop to baseness or deception to reach one's end) : An ambitious politician will *stick at nothing* if he can only serve himself.
- *To strain every nerve* (to use one's utmost efforts) : We have *to strain every nerve* to get over the poverty line.
- *To strike while the iron is hot* (to take advantage of the opportunity when it arises) : If you want to succeed in life, you must *strike the iron while it is hot*. In going in for general elections immediately after the war, the Congress *struck while the iron was hot*.
- *To swallow the bait* (to catch others by guile, by offering them large promises) : The candidate offered the people everything on earth and in the heavens if selected. The people *swallowed the bait* and elected him.
- *To talk shop* (to use the phrases peculiar to one's circumstances) : Except for the undertakers, people of the same professions always *talk shop* at parties.
- *To tie one's hands* (to restrain one from action) : The *Government's hands are already tied* with problem plants. It would not like to go in for nationalisation in a big way.
- *To tread on the heels of* (follow close behind) : Famine *treads on the heels of* drought.
- *To fish in troubled waters* (to make personal profit out of a disturbance) : The super powers are there in West Asia *to fish in troubled waters*.
- *To pour oil on troubled waters* (to say or do anything which soothes and calms angry passions) : The government *poured oil on troubled waters* by announcing a judicial enquiry into the firing.
- *To win or gain laurels or to bear away palm* (to achieve success in a contest) : The Indian Cricket Team *won laurels* on two successive occasions once in West Indies and then in England.
- *To worship the rising sun* (to pay respect to the man who is rising in power the influence) : The newly appointed manager has taken over and his clerks *worship the rising sun*.
- *Argus-eyed* (jealously watchful) : The husband of a pretty wife has got to be *Argus-eyed*.
- *Aegean stables*: (to clean *Aegean stables*, To correct a great abuse, from the stables of king Agues of Greece, whose stables had not been cleaned for thirty years) : The law against prostitution has cleaned no *Aegean stables*; it has merely pushed it underground.

- *Backstairs influence* (influence exerted secretly and in a fashion not legitimate) : The moneyed people do exercise *backstairs influence* on Parliament.
- *Bad blood* : (active enmity) : There has been *bad blood* between India and Pakistan since 1947.
- *A bone of contention* : (subject of dispute) : Kashmir continues to be *a bone of contention* between India and Pakistan since 1947.
- *A bosom friend* (A very intimate and trusted friend) : Bosom friends never betray one another.
- *A bull in a China shop*: (Someone who destroys everything at the same time he happens to be in) : The plainsmen proved to be a *bull in a China shop* in the hills, ruining the hill people in all ways.
- *A close shave* : (a narrow escape from collision accident): The bus had a close shave as its driver swerved to the right a split second before the on-coming truck could run into it.
- *A cold comfort*: (something calculated to cause pain or irritation) : The promise of a better future is only *cold comfort* to the frustrated youth of today.
- *A dog in the manger policy*: (said of a person who cannot himself use what another wants, and yet will not let that other have it) : The affluent nations are *a dog-in-the manger*, destroying what they can't use themselves than giving it to the poor nations of Asia and Africa.
- *Elbow room*: (opportunity for freedom of action) : Only give him *elbowroom* and he will succeed.
- *A fair-weather Friend*: (one who deserts you in difficulties) : *A fair-weather* friend disappears the moment your money disappears.
- *French leave*: (*absence* without permission.) : He went on a *french leave* and was summoned by the direction the next day he went to office.
- *Good offices*: (recommendation) : One can get a good job only through the *good offices* of some one in power.
- *A good Samaritan*: (one who be-friends a stranger or a friendless person) : Centuries ago, India played *a good Samaritan* to the hapless Parsees fleeing their native land.
- *The green-eyed monster*: (jealousy) : The green-eyed *monster* strikes a woman the moment she sees her husband talking to a pretty woman.
- *A Herculean task* (a job requiring great efforts) : Eradication of poverty is a *Herculean task* requiring the collective efforts of the entire country.
- *Lynch Law*: (the practice of punishing people where the punishment is inflicted by unauthorised persons and without judicial trial) : Mob law denotes the same thing when carried out by a mob. In African countries they often resort to *lynch laws*.
- *A maiden speech* (the first speech of a new member in a public body as in Town Hall or in Parliament) : Amitabh's *maiden speech* was very impressive.
- *A nine day's wonder* (*a fascinating but temporary phenomenon*): *Beauty* is, *proverbially*, *a nine day's wonder*.
- *An open question* : (*a matter for discussion and not yet decided*): As far as India is concerned, Kashmir is no longer *an open question*.
- *A red-letter day*: (an auspicious, fortunate or important day): The 26th January, 1950 is *a red-letter day* in India's history.
- *Scot-free*: (exempt from payment, unhurt, safe): Because he had influential connections, the culprit went *scot-free*.
- *A sheet anchor*: (the chief safety, the last refuge for safety): One's faith in God is one's *sheet anchor* in times of stress and strain.
- *Tall Talk*: (boastful language): If we have no real accomplishments, we indulge in *tall talk* to delude ourselves and others too.
- *A white elephant* (an unprofitable possession) : The upper Houses are *white elephants* and should be abolished.
- *A white lie*: (an evasion, a harmless and non-malicious untruth) : Professional members often indulge in *white lies*.
- *A wild goose chase* (a foolish, *wild, unprofitable adventure*) : Attempts towards stabilisation of prices in a developing economy, is *a wild goose chase*.
- *An apple of discord*: (a subject of envy and strife) : Kashmir continues to be the *apple of discord* between India and Pakistan.
- *Cock and bull story* (a silly improbable story) : That India wanted to break up West Pakistan was a *cock and bull* story published by the U.S.A.
- *A fish out of water* : (a person in uncomfortable surroundings) : An Indian may earn tons of money in the Western countries, but he will always feel like *a fish out of water* there.
- *The gift of the gab*: (fluency of speech) : The *gift of the gab* combined with a slight cunning makes for a successful politician.
- *Lion's share*: (an unfairly large share) : The big nations continue to have the *lion's share* of world trade.
- *A mare's nest* : (a discovery that turns out to be false or worthless) : There was much fanfare about the solar cooker. Later it turned out to be a *mare's nest*.
- *The milk of human kindness*: (kindly feelings a phrase used by Shakespeare.) : With all their poverty, Indians do not lack *the milk of human kindness*.
- *Penelope's web* : (a work which seems to be going on and yet never comes to an end.) : A housewife's chores are *a penelope's web*.

- *The pros and cons of a question:* (arguments for and against a thing) : They discussed the *pros and cons* of the matter before taking a decision.
- *The skin of one's teeth:* (a phrase used when one escapes losing everything except life.) : The storm broke up the ship but the sailors escaped by *the skin of their teeth*.
- *A snake in the grass:* (a secret foe.) : China has certainly been *a snake in the grass* for India. Even in the heyday of Hindi Chini bhai-bhai, she was quietly devouring bits of our territory.
- *A stone's throw:* (very near.) : The Taj Hotel is *at a stone's throw* from the Gateway of India.
- *All moonshine:* (foolish, idle, untrue statement.) : The talk about welfare of the poor is all *moonshine*.
- *Behind the scenes :* (of a person having secret or private information and influence) : The dismissed Secretary, having been *behind the scenes*, has made some strange revelations as to the way in which the business is managed.
- *Between two fires :* (assailed or shot at from two sides) : A man, arbitrating between the mother and wife, is to be *between the two fires*, for his decisions can rarely please both.
- *In a body:* (together) : The striking workers went in *a body* to the Manager to present their demands.
- *Wide off the mark or beside the mark:* (irrelevant) : 'Beside *the mark* reasoning or argument'.
- *Cheek by jowl:* (in the same position) : There was a lawyer who never had a client *cheek by jowl* with a doctor who never had a patient.
- *Out at elbows:* (destitute) : The rising prices and the new taxes may soon see most of us *out at elbows*.
- *Part and Parcel :* (integral part of a society, community etc.) Some customs and traditions are a part and parcel of Indian culture.
- *A storm in a tea cup:* (a great fuss about a trifle) : The crackers fired by Diwali revellers caused a *storm in the tea cup* when minority communities thought it to be a bomb attack by the other community.
- *A fly in the ointment :* (a trifling circumstance which mars enjoyment) : It was a wonderful picnic, the only *fly in the ointment* being the absence of shady trees at the picnic spot.
- *Not worth his salt:* (good for nothing) : A soldier who shivers at the boom of guns is *not worth his salt*.
- *With a pinch of salt:* (to take a statement with a grain of salt is to feel some doubt whether it is altogether true) : Shaw's claim of having remained a celibate even after marriage has to be taken with a pinch of salt.
- *Null and void:* (Invalid, valueless, no longer in force) : The court declared the appointment to be *null and void*.
- *To be posted up:* (well acquainted with) : I want *to be posted up* in Indian History.
- *To be worth its weight in gold:* (extremely valuable) : In the desert a bottle of water is often *worth its weight in gold*.
- *To be Greek or double Dutch to one:* (unintelligible) : He spoke so fast that all he said was *double Dutch* to the audience.
- *To be within an ace of* (to be very nearly) : He was *within an ace of* being shot.
- *To be at the back and call:* (to be always ready to serve) : You must not expect me to be *at your back and call*, I have my own business to attend to.
- *To be at daggers drawn :* (in bitter enmity) : With every passing year the hostility between the Arabs and the Israelis has grown more bitter. They have always been *at daggers drawn*.
- *To be at sea:* (confused, uncertain of mind) : I am quite *at sea* in Mathematics.
- *To be at one's wits end:* (perplexed) : With the master shouting from the bathroom and the mistress from the kitchen the servant was at his *wits end* as to whom to attend first.
- *To be in one's element:* (*to be in agreeable company or work*) : Shaw is *in his element* when he is writing about the social ills of his time.
- *To be on wane:* (*to be on the decline*) : After the second World War, the British Empire *was on the wane*.
- *To be on the carpet:* (*to be summoned to one's employer's room for reprimand*) : The unpunctual clerk was repeatedly *on the carpet*.
- *To be on the last legs:* (*about to collapse*) : With science dominating life more and more, religion seems *to be on its last legs*.
- *Chip of the old block* (*a son who is very like his father*) : The younger Nawab of Pataudi has proved to be *a chip of the old block*. He is as good a batsman as his father.
- *To bring under the hammer:* (*to sell it by auction*) : If a person goes insolvent, his creditors will bring everything that he owns *under the hammer* to recover their money.
- *To pay one's way:* (*not get into debt*) : While at college, he *paid his way* by working as a newspaper vendor.
- *To weather the storm:* (to come out of a crisis successfully) : In a crisis it is unity which helps a nation *to weather the storm*.
- *To sail before the wind:* (to go in the direction towards in which the wind is blowing) : An opportunist is he who *sails before the wind* (*Its opposite is to sail close to the wind i.e., to break a law or principle*)

- *To be in the same boat* (To be equally exposed with a person to risk or misfortune) : In a nuclear war, the rich and the poor nations will be in the *same boat*. None will be able to protect themselves.
- *To sail under false colours*: (To pretend to be what one is not, to try to deceive) : In our blessed country, a smuggler *sailing under the false colours* of a socialist will never be exposed.
- *To take the wind out of one's sails*: (Frustrating him by anticipating his arguments, take away his advantage suddenly) : Before the U.S. could spread the canard about India's intention to destroy West Pakistan after "capturing" Bangladesh, India *took the wind out of their sails* by declaring a unilateral cease-fire.
- *Game is not worth the candle* : (The advantage or enjoyment to be gained is not worth the time spent in gaining it) : Journey to the moon is an elaborate and costly affair and some people with a pragmatic approach feel the *game is not worth the candle*.
- *Not fit to hold a candle to*: (One is inferior) : For all his pious platitudes and political stunts, Mr. Nixon is not *fit to hold a candle to* Lincoln or Roosevelt.
- Hope springs eternal in the human breast : (one never loses hope).
- *Fools rush in where angels fear to tread* : (said of reckless persons)
- *He who pays the piper calls the tune* : (one has to act according to the wishes of one's master)
- *You cannot make a silk purse out of a sow's ear* : (said of something impossible)
- *A bird in hand is worth two in the bush* : (right use of the present opportunity)
- *One man's meat is another man's poison* : (what is good for one may be harmful for another person)
- *Out of the frying pan into the fire* : (from one trouble to another)
- *The last straw breaks the camel's back* : (the smallest addition to an already heavy task makes it intolerable)
- *Distance lends enchantment to the old* : (things look nice and beautiful when they are not within reach)
- *Render unto Caesar what is Caesar's* : (to be wise)
- *Look before you leap* : (don't be reckless and impulsive)
- *Make hay while the sun shines* : (to make/ill use of the given opportunity)
- *Never look a gift horse in the mouth* : (there can be no choice about things given in charity)
- *Beggars can't be choosers* : (no choice in scarcity)
- *Nearer the Church, farther from heaven* : (the more opportunity you have, the less you benefit from it)
- *Every cock fights best on his own dung hill* : (one is very brave and confident in one's own place)
- *A rolling stone gathers no moss* : (an aimless person cannot succeed)
- *Rome was not built in a day* : (things take time to complete and to mature)
- *One swallow does not make a summer* : (one person can't do everything)
- *Apparel proclaims the man* : (you judge a man's worth by his clothes)
- *To run with the hare, to hunt with the hound* : (to be insincere to someone)
- *Sweet are the uses of adversity* : (sufferings are to be welcomed)
- *Uneasy lies the head that wears the crown* : (with power and authority come worries and responsibilities)



Practice Exercise

LEVEL-I

DIRECTIONS (Qs. 1-50) : Choose the alternative which best expresses the meaning of the idiom/ phrase.

1. To turn over a new leaf :
(a) To change completely one's course of action
(b) To shift attention to new problems
(c) To cover up one's faults by wearing new marks
(d) To change the old habits and adopt new ones
2. To wrangle over an ass's shadow :
(a) To act in a foolish way
(b) To quarrel over trifles
(c) To waste time on petty things
(d) To do something funny
3. All agog :
(a) Everybody (b) All ready
(c) Restless (d) Almighty
4. To take with a grain of salt :
(a) To take with some reservation
(b) To take with total disbelief
(c) To take whole heartedly
(d) To take seriously
5. Hobson's choice :
(a) Feeling of insecurity
(b) Accept or leave the other
(c) Feeling of strength
(d) Excellent choice
6. To talk through one's hat :
(a) To speak fluently (b) To talk nonsense
(c) To talk wisdom (d) To speak at random
7. To snap one's fingers :
(a) To speak abruptly
(b) To accept immediately
(c) To grasp eagerly
(d) To become contemptuous of
8. To take the bull by the horns :
(a) To punish a person severely for his arrogance
(b) To grapple courageously with difficulty that lies in our way
(c) To handle it by fierce attack
(d) To bypass the legal process and take action according to one's own whims
9. To be in abeyance :
(a) To be in trouble (b) Dual minded
(c) In a fighting mood (d) Insuspense
10. To cast pearls before a swine :
(a) To spend recklessly
(b) To spend a lot of money on the unkeep of domestic hogs
(c) To waste monkey over trifles
(d) To offer to a person a thing which he cannot appreciate
11. To take people by storm :
(a) To put people in utter surprise
(b) To captivate them unexpectedly
(c) To exploit people's agitation
(d) To bring out something sensational attracting people's attention
12. Harp on :
(a) To comment (b) To criticise
(c) To keeep on talking (d) To keep on insulting
13. To bring one's eggs to a bad market :
(a) To face on humiliating situation
(b) To bring one's commodities to a market where there is no demand for them
(c) To show one's talents before audience which is incapable of appreciating them
(d) To fail in one's plans because one goes to the wrong people for help
14. To give/get the bird :
(a) To get the awaited (b) To have good luck
(c) To send away (d) To get the impossible
15. To save one's face :
(a) To hide oneself (b) To oppose
(c) To avade disgrace (d) To say plainly
16. To split hours :
(a) To sidetrack the issue
(b) To quarrel over trifles
(c) To indulge in over-refined arguments
(d) To find faults with other
17. Will o' the wisp :
(a) Anything which eludes or deceives
(b) To act in a childish way
(c) To act in a foolish way
(d) To have desires unbacked by efforts
18. To read between the lines :
(a) To concentrate
(b) To read carefully
(c) To suspect
(d) To grasp the hidden meaning
19. To flog a dead horse :
(a) To act in a foolish way
(b) To waste one's efforts
(c) To revive interest in an old subject
(d) To revive old memories
20. A tall order :
(a) A task difficult to perform
(b) A bid problem
(c) A royal summon
(d) A big demand
21. To turn the tables :
(a) To defeat (b) To oppose
(c) To create chaos (d) To change the sorry scheme
(e) To change completely the position of disadvantage
22. To keep the ball rolling :
(a) To earn more and more
(b) To work constantly
(c) To keep the conversation going
(d) To make the best use of

23. All and sundry :
 (a) Greater share
 (b) All of a sudden
 (c) Completion of work
 (d) Everyone without distinction
24. To worship the rising sun :
 (a) To honour a man who is coming into office
 (b) To honour to promising people
 (c) To indulge in flattery
 (d) To welcome the coming events
25. To play fast and loose :
 (a) To beguile others
 (b) To be winning sometimes and losing at other times
 (c) To play with someone's feeling
 (d) To play tricks
26. To have brush with :
 (a) To start painting
 (b) To have good and pleasing terms
 (c) To be impressed
 (d) To have a slight encounter
27. To pull one's socks up :
 (a) To prepare (b) To try hard
 (c) To get ready (d) To depart
28. Dog in the manger :
 (a) An undersized bull almost the shape of a dog
 (b) A dog that has no kennel of its own
 (c) A person who puts himself in difficulties on account of other people
 (d) A person who prevents others from enjoying something useless to himself
29. To set the people by ears :
 (a) To box the people
 (b) To insult and disgrace the people
 (c) To punish heavily
 (d) To excite people to a quarrel
30. To give chapter and verse for a thing :
 (a) To produce the proof of something
 (b) To eulogize the qualities of a thing
 (c) To make publicity of a thing
 (d) To attach artificial value to a thing
31. To plough the sands :
 (a) To work hard to achieve one's aim
 (b) To afford hope or ground for expecting a good result
 (c) To busy oneself in a way which cannot lead to any profitable result
 (d) To advance one's position in life
32. To take umbrage :
 (a) To feel depressed (b) To be offended
 (c) To be satisfied (d) To be pleased
33. To drink like a fish :
 (a) To drink little
 (b) To drink alone
 (c) To be a drunkard
 (d) To drink in the company of others
34. To fight to the bitter end :
 (a) To fight with poison-tipped arrows
 (b) To fight to the last point of enemy position
 (c) To die fighting
 (d) To carry on a contest regardless of consequences
35. To give a false colouring :
 (a) To misrepresent (b) To submit the false report
 (c) To be dishonest (d) To conceal the facts
36. To show the white feather :
 (a) To show signs to cowardice
 (b) To seek peace
 (c) To show arrogance
 (d) To become polite
37. Spick and span :
 (a) Neat and clean (b) Outspoken
 (c) A ready-made thing (d) Garrulous
38. To take the wind out of another's sails :
 (a) To manoeuvre or mislead another on the high seas
 (b) To cause harm to another
 (c) To defeat the motives of another
 (d) To anticipate another and to gain advantage over him
39. To carry the coal to newcastle :
 (a) To work hard
 (b) To finish a job
 (c) To do unnecessary things
 (d) To do menial jobs
40. The pros and cons :
 (a) For and against a thing (b) Foul and fair
 (c) Good and evil (d) Former and latter
41. A baker's dozen :
 (a) Twelve (b) Charity
 (c) Thirteen (d) Allowance
42. A bull in a china shop :
 (a) A person who is very ugly but loves the beautiful things of life
 (b) A person who takes a sadistic delight in harming innocent people
 (c) A person who becomes too excited where no excitement is warranted
 (d) A person who is rough and clumsy where skill and care are required
43. Hard-pressed :
 (a) Bewildered (b) Insulted
 (c) Hard discipline (d) In difficulties
44. To be at one's finger's end :
 (a) To be hopeless
 (b) To be highly perplexed
 (c) To be completely conversant with
 (d) To count things
45. To pull strings :
 (a) To exert hidden influence
 (b) To tease someone
 (c) To speed up
 (d) To start something
46. A green horn :
 (a) An envious lady
 (b) A trainee
 (c) An inexperienced man
 (d) A soft-hearted man

47. To be old as the hills :
 (a) To be very ancient (b) To be wise and learned
 (c) To be old but foolish (d) Not being worth the age
48. To pour oil in troubled water :
 (a) To forment trouble
 (b) To add to the trouble
 (c) To instigate
 (d) To calm a quarrel with soothing words
49. To mind one's P's and Q's :
 (a) To be cautious
 (b) To be accurate and precise
 (c) To be careful of one's accounts
 (d) To be careful of one's personality
50. To break the ice :
 (a) To start quarreling
 (b) To end the hostility
 (c) To start to conversation
 (d) To end up partnership

DIRECTIONS (Qs. 51-55) : In the following questions, four alternatives are given for the idiom/phrase underlined in the sentence. Choose the alternative which best expresses the meaning of the idiom/phrase

[SSC Sub Insp. 2012]

51. For some people, writing verse is as duck takes to water.
 (a) like taking the duck to water
 (b) like bursting out suddenly
 (c) like dropping the duck in the water
 (d) like easily and naturally speaking
52. He made my day by telling me how important I was to him.
 (a) gave me great pleasure
 (b) displeased me
 (c) spoiled my day
 (d) made me resentful
53. He made away with ten thousand rupees in the course of three months.
 (a) earned (b) ran away with
 (c) squandered (d) saved
54. The students of that group have assured their project guide that they will all work against the clock.
 (a) work while keeping patience
 (b) work with vigour to finish in limited time
 (c) work with enthusiasm
 (d) work hard to go against the time
55. To let off steam, my friend started murmuring.
 (a) to release his tension (b) to show his anger
 (c) to show his approval (d) to show his displeasure

DIRECTIONS: (Qs. 56-60) : In the following questions, four alternatives are given for the Idiom/Phrase printed in **bold** in the sentence. Choose the alternative which best expresses the meaning of the Idiom/Phrase.

[SSC Sub Insp. 2013]

56. I tried to **feel his pulse** on the issue, but in vain.
 (a) find his views (b) enlighten him
 (c) argue with him (d) guide him

57. For this act of indifference he will be **taken to task** by the authority.
 (a) he will get an official reprimand from the authority.
 (b) he will be rewarded by the authority.
 (c) he will tender his resignation to the authority.
 (d) he will be entrusted with an official job.
58. You need to **have something up your sleeve** if the present plan does not work.
 (a) have some honest means
 (b) have some hidden sources of money
 (c) have a secret pocket in the sleeve
 (d) have an alternative plan
59. The new manager **ruled the roost** to every one.
 (a) exercised authority
 (b) rushed through work
 (c) got paid very handsomely
 (d) created good impression
60. Despite his initial arrogance he had to **eat humble pie**.
 (a) he had to yield under pressure
 (b) he maintained composure
 (c) he failed to protest eventually
 (d) he accepted the food offered

DIRECTIONS (Qs. 61-65) : In the following questions, four alternatives are given for the Idiom/phrase underlined in the sentence. Choose the alternative which best expresses the meaning of the Idiom/Phrase and mark it in the Answer Sheet.

[SSC Sub Insp. 2014]

61. We must work with all our might and main, otherwise we cannot succeed.
 (a) full force (b) complete trust
 (c) exceptional skill (d) full unity
62. The sailors nailed their colours to their mast.
 (a) put up a colourful mast
 (b) refused to climb down
 (c) took over the ship
 (d) decided to abandon the ship
63. We had (had) better batten down the hatches. The weather is unpredictable.
 (a) stay in-door
 (b) prepare for a difficult situation
 (c) go somewhere safe
 (d) face the obstacles
64. It is difficult to have a sensible discussion with her as she flies off at a tangent.
 (a) gets carried away
 (b) starts discussing something irrelevant
 (c) loses her temper easily
 (d) does not really understand anything
65. The students found it hard to go at equal speed with the professor.
 (a) get away from (b) put up with
 (c) keep up with (d) race against

DIRECTIONS: (Qs. 66-68) : In the following questions, four alternatives are given for the idiom / phrase underlined in the sentence. Choose the alternative which best expresses the meaning of the idiom / phrase and mark it in the Answer Sheet.

[SSC Multi tasking 2013]

66. The man changed colours when I questioned him on the allocation of funds.
 (a) turned pale (b) got numbed
 (c) turned happy (d) get motivated

67. We cannot depend on him for this assignment as it needs careful handling and he is like a bull in a china shop.
 (a) a felicitous person (b) a clumsy person
 (c) a tactful person (d) a no-nonsense person
68. The mother always insists on keeping the house spick and span.
 (a) open (b) locked
 (c) safe (d) tidy

LEVEL-II

DIRECTIONS (Qs. 1-27) : Choose the alternative which best expresses the meaning of the idiom/phrase.

- To cool one's heels :
 (a) To rest for sometime
 (b) To give no importance to someone
 (c) To remain in a comfortable position
 (d) To be kept waiting for sometime
- A fool's errand :
 (a) A blunder (b) An impossible task
 (c) A useless undertaking (d) None of these
- Swan-song :
 (a) Music as sweet as a song of birds
 (b) A melodious song in praise of someone
 (c) Praise of a woman by her lover
 (d) Last work of a poet or musician before death
- To oil the knocker :
 (a) To instigate a person to do a job
 (b) To do a work with increased pace
 (c) To tip the office-boy
 (d) To revive old enmity
- By the rule of thumb :
 (a) By the use of force
 (b) By the use of trickery
 (c) By cheating and deception
 (d) By practical experience which is rather rough
- To live fast :
 (a) To lead a life of dissipation
 (b) To accomplish a purpose
 (c) to do a task hurriedly
 (d) To use up one's income as fast as it comes in
- To hold somebody to ransom :
 (a) To keep captive and demand concession
 (b) To humiliate somebody
 (c) To offer bribe
 (d) To blackmail and extract money
- To hit the jackpot :
 (a) To gamble
 (b) To get an unexpected victory
 (c) To be wealthy
 (d) To make money unexpectedly
- To pay off old scores :
 (a) To have one's revenge
 (b) To settle a dispute
 (c) To repay the old loan
 (d) None of these

- To take a leaf out of somebody's book :
 (a) To take him as a model
 (b) To steal something valuable
 (c) To follow the dictates of someone
 (d) To conform to other's standard
- To set the thames on fire :
 (a) To do something remarkable
 (b) To try to do the impossible
 (c) To burn something to ashes
 (d) To fling inonical remarks
- To cast pearls before a swine :
 (a) To offer some a thing which he cannot appreciate
 (b) To bring something good before the eyes of a greedy person
 (c) To spend racklessly on a useless fellow
 (d) To indulge in fruitless endeavours
- To bear the palm :
 (a) To win (b) To accept a challenge
 (c) To accept defeat (d) To endure something
- To change colour :
 (a) To change appearance
 (b) To shift allegiance to
 (c) To favour the wrong person
 (d) None of these
- To cut the gordian knot :
 (a) To solve a difficult problem
 (b) To be victorious
 (c) To break ties with someone
 (d) To defeat to powerful person
- To wrangle over an ass's shadow :
 (a) To act in a foolish way
 (b) To do something funny
 (c) To quarrel over trifles
 (d) To quarrel over the possession of an ass
- To have one's heart in one's boots :
 (a) To be deeply depressed
 (b) To be frightened
 (c) To get angry
 (d) To keep a secret
- To strike one's colours :
 (a) To fight vigorously (b) To work hard
 (c) To surrender (d) To make a rude gesture

19. To ride hell for Leather :
 (a) To ride with furious speed
 (b) To adopt false means to succeed
 (c) To work hard for a small accomplishment
 (d) To earn money by all means
20. To speak daggers :
 (a) To abuse someone
 (b) To indulge in varacious talks
 (c) To speak to a person with hostility
 (d) None of these
21. Be in the mire :
 (a) Be under debt (b) Be in love
 (c) Be in difficulties (d) Be uneasy
22. To give a rap on the knuckles :
 (a) To eulogise (b) To chatise
 (c) To condemn (d) To rebuke
23. To be above board.
 (a) To have a good height
 (b) To be honest in any business deal
 (c) Having no debts
 (d) To try to be beautiful
24. To cry wolf.
 (a) To listen eagerly (b) To give false alarm
 (c) To turn pale (d) To keep off starvation
25. He is on the wrong side of seventy.
 (a) more than seventy years old
 (b) less than seventy years old
 (c) seventy years old
 (d) eighty years old
26. To have an axe to grind.
 (a) a private end to serve (b) to fail to arouse interest
 (c) to have no result (d) to work for both sides
27. To drive home.
 (a) To find one's root
 (b) To return to place of rest
 (c) Back to original position
 (d) To emphasise
- DIRECTIONS (Qs. 28-42) :** In the following questions, four alternatives are given for the idiom / phrase and bold italicised in the sentence. Choose the alternative which best expresses the meaning of the idiom / phrase and mark it in the Answer-Sheet.
28. Once the case reached the court, the police washed their hands off it.
 (a) waited for a response to
 (b) claimed credit for
 (c) disassociated themselves from
 (d) seemed eager to continue
29. She wanted to go hitch-hiking but her mother put her foot down and now she's going by bus.
 (a) took a firm stand (b) expressed her displeasure
 (c) scolded her badly (d) got irritated
30. Adolescence is a period of halcyon days.
 (a) hard days (b) of mental pressure
 (c) happy days (d) days of preparation
31. My sincere advice to my maidservant fell on stony ground.
 (a) was counter productive
 (b) had a strong impact
 (c) made on stubborn
 (d) had little success
32. He has all his ducks in a row; he is complacent.
 (a) has everything ready (b) is well organised
 (c) always scores a zero (d) never gets confused
33. With great difficulty, he was able to carve out a niche for himself.
 (a) became a sculptor
 (b) did the best he could do
 (c) destroyed his career
 (d) developed a specific position for himself
34. You will succeed if you follow my advice to the letter.
 (a) about writing letters (b) written in the letter
 (c) in every detail (d) very thoughtfully
35. A critic's work is to read between the lines.
 (a) to comprehend the meaning
 (b) to appreciate the inner beauty
 (c) to understand the inner meaning
 (d) to read carefully
36. Where discipline is concerned I put my foot down.
 (a) take a firm stand (b) take a light stand
 (c) take a heavy stand (d) take a shaky stand
37. The convict claimed innocence and stood his ground in spite of the repeated accusations.
 (a) knelt
 (b) surrendered
 (c) kept standing
 (d) refused to yield
38. We must work with all our might and main, otherwise we cannot succeed.
 (a) full force (b) complete trust
 (c) exceptional skill (d) full unity
39. The sailors nailed their colours to their mast.
 (a) put up a colourful mast
 (b) refused to climb down
 (c) took over the ship
 (d) decided to abandon the ship
40. We had (had) better batten down the hatches. The weather is unpredictable.
 (a) stay in-door
 (b) prepare for a difficult situation
 (c) go somewhere safe
 (d) face the obstacles
41. It is difficult to have a sensible discussion with her as she flies off at a tangent.
 (a) gets carried away
 (b) starts discussing something irrelevant
 (c) loses her temper easily
 (d) does not really understand anything

42. The students found it hard to go at equal speed with the professor.
 (a) get away from (b) put up with
 (c) keep up with (d) race against

DIRECTIONS (Qs. 43-47) : In the following questions, four alternatives are given for the idiom / phrase and bold italicised in the sentence. Choose the alternative which best expresses the meaning of the idiom / phrase and mark it in the Answer-Sheet.

[SSC CGL 2012]

43. Once the case reached the court, the police *washed their hands off it*.
 (a) waited for a response to
 (b) claimed credit for
 (c) disassociated themselves from
 (d) seemed eager to continue
44. She wanted to go hitch-hiking but her mother *put her foot down* and now she's going by bus.
 (a) took a firm stand
 (b) expressed her displeasure
 (c) scolded her badly
 (d) got irritated
45. Adolescence is a period of *halcyon days*.
 (a) hard days (b) of mental pressure
 (c) happy days (d) days of preparation
46. My sincere advice to my maidservant *fell on stony ground*.
 (a) was counter productive (b) had a strong impact
 (c) made on stubborn (d) had little success
47. He *has all his ducks in a row*; he is complacent.
 (a) has everything ready (b) is well organised
 (c) always scores a zero (d) never gets confused

DIRECTIONS (Qs. 48-52) : In the following questions, four alternatives are given for the Idiom/Phrase underlined. Choose the alternative which best expresses the meaning of the Idiom/Phrase and mark it in the Answer Sheet

[SSC CGL 2013]

48. To be above board.
 (a) To have a good height
 (b) To be honest in any business deal
 (c) Having no debts
 (d) To try to be beautiful

49. To cry wolf.
 (a) To listen eagerly (b) To give false alarm
 (c) To turn pale (d) To keep off starvation
50. He is on the wrong side of seventy.
 (a) more than seventy years old
 (b) less than seventy years old
 (c) seventy years old
 (d) eighty years old
51. To have an axe to grind.
 (a) a private end to serve
 (b) to fail to arouse interest
 (c) to have no result
 (d) to work for both sides
52. To drive home.
 (a) To find one's root
 (b) To return to place of rest
 (c) Back to original position
 (d) To emphasise

DIRECTIONS (Qs. 53-57) : In the following questions, four alternatives are given for the Idiom/Phrase underlined in the sentence. Choose the alternative which best expresses the meaning of the Idiom/Phrase and mark it in the Answer Sheet.

[SSC CGL 2014]

53. With great difficulty, he was able to carve out a niche for himself.
 (a) became a sculptor
 (b) did the best he could do
 (c) destroyed his career
 (d) developed a specific position for himself
54. You will succeed if you follow my advice to the letter.
 (a) about writing letters (b) written in the letter
 (c) in every detail (d) very thoughtfully
55. A critic's work is to read between the lines.
 (a) to comprehend the meaning
 (b) to appreciate the inner beauty
 (c) to understand the inner meaning
 (d) to read carefully
56. Where discipline is concerned I put my foot down.
 (a) take a firm stand (b) take a light stand
 (c) take a heavy stand (d) take a shaky stand
57. The convict claimed innocence and stood his ground in spite of the repeated accusations.
 (a) knelt (b) surrendered
 (c) kept standing (d) refused to yield



Hints & Solutions



LEVEL - I

1. (d) 2. (b) 3. (c) 4. (a)
5. (b) 6. (b) 7. (d) 8. (b)
9. (d) 10. (d) 11. (b) 12. (c)
13. (d) 14. (c) 15. (c) 16. (c)
17. (a) 18. (d) 19. (b) 20. (a)
21. (d) 22. (c) 23. (d) 24. (a)
25. (d) 26. (d) 27. (b) 28. (d)
29. (d) 30. (a) 31. (c) 32. (b)
33. (c) 34. (d) 35. (a) 36. (a)
37. (a) 38. (d) 39. (c) 40. (a)
41. (c) 42. (d) 43. (d) 44. (c)
45. (a) 46. (c) 47. (a) 48. (d)
49. (b) 50. (c)
51. (d) The meaning of as duck takes to water easily and naturally.
52. (a)
53. (c) Squandered means use up, cash out.
54. (b) The meaning of against the clock : in a great hurry to get something done before a particular time.
55. (b) The meaning of let off steam : to release one's pent-up emotions, such as anger, usually verbally.
56. (a) Feel pulse = to try to know someone's views.
57. (a) Take somebody to task = to criticize somebody strongly for something they have done.
58. (d) Have/keep something up your sleeve = to keep a plan or an idea secret until you need to use it.
59. (a) Rule the roost = to be the most powerful member of a group.
60. (a) Eat humble pie = to say and show that you are sorry for a mistake that you made.
61. (a) The idiom 'with all our might and main' means with great physical strength; great force.
62. (b) The idiom 'nailed their colours to their mast' means to defiantly display one's opinions and beliefs. Also, to show one's intention to hold on to those beliefs until the end. Its origin dates back to 17th century. In 17th century nautical battles colours (flags) were struck (lowered) as a mark of submission. It was also the custom in naval warfare to direct one's cannon fire at the opponent's ship's mast, thus disabling it. If all of a ship's masts were broken the captain usually had no alternative but to surrender. If the captain decided to fight on this was marked by hoisting the colours on the remnants of the ship's rigging, that is, by 'nailing his colours to the mast'.
63. (b) The idiom 'batten down the hatches' means to prepare for difficult times.
64. (b) The idiom 'she flies off at a tangent' means to pursue a somewhat related or irrelevant course while neglecting the main subject.
65. (b) The idiom 'go at equal speed' means to go neck-to-neck and put up with the teacher.
66. (a) Turned pale means colourless
67. (b) a clumsy person means plump
68. (d) tidy means clean

LEVEL - II

1. (d) 2. (c) 3. (d) 4. (c)
5. (d) 6. (a) 7. (a) 8. (b)
9. (b) 10. (a) 11. (b) 12. (a)
13. (a) 14. (b) 15. (a) 16. (c)
17. (a) 18. (c) 19. (a) 20. (c)
21. (c) 22. (d) 23. (b) 24. (b)
25. (a) 26. (a) 27. (d) 28. (c)
29. (a) 30. (c) 31. (d) 32. (b)
33. (d) 34. (c) 35. (c) 36. (a)
37. (d) 38. (a) 39. (b) 40. (b)
41. (b) 42. (b)
43. (c) Idiom washed their hands off means : to absolve oneself of responsibility or future blame.
44. (a) Idiom put her foot down means : to tell someone in a strong way that they must do something or that they must stop doing something.
45. (c) Idiom Halcyon days means : a very happy or successful period in the past.
46. (d) Idiom fell on stony ground means : It a request, a warning, or advice falls on stony ground, people ignore it.
47. (b) Idiom has all his ducks in a row means : to organize things well.
48. (b) If somebody is above board, he/she is honest in any business deal.
49. (b) To cry wolf means that someone is giving false alarm.
50. (a) If somebody is on the right/ wrong side of 30/ 40 etc that means he/she is younger/ older than 30/ 40 etc.
51. (a) If you have an axe to grind; that means you have a private end to serve.
52. (d) If you drive something home, that means you are making something completely clear to someone. She didn't have to drive the point home. The movie had done that.
53. (d) In the sentence, 'to carve out a niche' means 'to develop a specific position for him'. The word 'niche' means 'a specialized area or sector'.
54. (c) The alternative meaning of the phrase 'to the letter' is 'in every detail'.
55. (c) The meaning of the idiom 'to read between the lines' is 'to understand the inner meaning'. So, the critic's work is to understand the inner meanings.
56. (a) The meaning of the idiom 'put my foot down' is 'to take a firm stand'. So, as the meaning of the sentence implies that where discipline matters, one should take a firm stand.
57. (d) The idiom 'stood his ground' means 'refuse to yield'. So, as the meaning of the sentence implies, the convict claimed his innocence and refused to yield for the blames that were laid upon him.