

Idioms

WHAT ARE IDIOMS?

Idioms are words, phrases, or expressions that are either grammatically unusual, as in, "Long time, no see!", or their meaning cannot be taken literally, as in, "It's raining cats and dogs!"

This expression does not mean that cats and dogs are falling from the sky, but it is a metaphorical expression (word picture) that means that it is raining very heavily

FOR EXAMPLE:

He cried crocodile tears because he wanted his dad to buy him something just as a crocodile cannot cry, the boy was not crying at all! He was just acting!

People use idioms to make their language richer and more colorful. Idioms and idiomatic expressions can be more precise than the literal words, often using fewer words but saying more.

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.
- 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.
- 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 someone through (to recover, to help one recover): Armed with the latest medicines, the doctor will pull him through.

- 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 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 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. 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 too many irons in the fire (to have so much work in hand that some part of it is left undone or done very badly): Let the Government not go in for nationalization so fast. If they have too many irons in the fire they are bound to fare badly.
- 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 every day to keep the wolf from the door.
- To make common cause with (to unite, to co-operate with): During the last elections the princes made 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 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 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 put the cart before the horse (to begin at the wrong end to do a thing): Preparing the blue print of project without the provision of funds is like putting the cart before the horse.
- 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 world tour by declaring that I could never stand the strain of it.
- 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 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, and in the Shakargarh area 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 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 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 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 burn one's fingers (to get oneself into unexpected trouble): They were happily placed in the woolen 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 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 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 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 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 rule the roast 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 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 see how the wind blows (to observe what influence, favourably 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 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 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 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 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 venous problems.
- 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.
- 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 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 someone in power.
- A good Samaritan: (one who befriends 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.
- 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.
- 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 stabilization 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 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.
- 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 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.
- 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.
- 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 worth its weight in gold: (extremely valuable): In the desert a bottle of water is often worth its weight in gold
- 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 the last legs: (about to collapse): With science dominating life more and more, religion seem to be on its last legs.
- Chip off 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 strike one's flag or colours or to show the white flag : to surrender
- 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.
- 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,
- 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
- 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.
- Look before you leap: Don't be reckless and impulsive.
- Make hay while the sunshine's: 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.
- A willing 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