

IDIOMS AND PHRASES

Idioms and phrases are recognized through experience. Sometimes ordinary words fail to embody the experience or catch the spirit of the special situation. Idioms and phrases are meant for such situations; they enrich a language. Thus, in order to have a native's command over English, it is necessary to understand idioms. The Oxford Dictionary of Current Idiomatic English defines an idiom by calling it as a combination of two or more words which function as a unit of meaning as opposed to non-idiomatic expressions which "are made up of distinct meaningful parts". Thus, often, the unit of meaning is different from what the words actually suggest. For example, the expression 'blue blood' does not mean that blood is blue, but it means 'to belong to a royal family'. Similarly, the 'apple of somebody's eye' does not imply any real apple; it means 'a person or thing that is loved more than any other' or 'Pandora's box' means a cause of several problems and does not imply any real box though it has an association with the box of Pandora.

EXAMPLES

Let us study the patterns and few examples. The test is usually set in two forms; either in direct multiple choice or in a sentence form.

A. Direct Multiple Choice

Choose the exact meaning of the idiomatic expression/phrase given below.

1. To get in hot waters.

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| A) to get into trouble | B) to enter waters heated by the sun |
| C) to be in a confused state of mind | D) to drink hot waters |

2. Between the devil and the deep sea.

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|------------------------|----------------------------|
| A) to be in a dilemma | B) to be angry in a temper |
| C) to choose correctly | D) to live dangerously |

3. To smell a rat

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|----------------------------|-------------------------|
| A) To misunderstand | B) bad smell |
| C) to see a hidden meaning | D) to suspect treachery |

B. In Sentence Form

Choose the substitute of the underlined phrase/idiom.

4. For the first week, the apprentice felt like fish out of water.

- A) Frustrated B) homeless C) disappointed D) uncomfortable

5. The company has been handed over to the new masters lock, stock and barrel.

- A) Completely B) financially C) administratively D) partially.

6. Our house is within a stone's throw of the railway station.

- A) With a certain radius B) very far-off
C) at a short distance D) within a definite circumstance.

Answers:

1) A; 2) A; 3) D; 4) D; 5) A; 6) C

One should try to understand the real implication of idioms and phrases and should learn it by constantly using them in their writing and speech and through continuous practical exercises.

STOCK OF PHRASES

- **To show white feathers** : to show fear.
- **A feather in the cap** : a very good achievement.
- **A good Samaritan** : a really kind man.
- **To rise like a phoenix** : to start afresh from a low position.
- **To meet one's Waterloo** : to meet one's defeat.
- **To have cold feet** : to be reluctant.
- **To raise a dust** : to create confusion.
- **To bring home the bacon** : to be successful.
- **To carry the day** : to win after a long effort.
- **To stick to one's gun** : to maintain one's point against all opposition.
- **Come cap in hand** : very humble.
- **Man of Iron** : a man of strong will power.
- **Man of straw** : insignificant.
- **Man of letters** : scholar.

- **To have several irons in the fire** : so many engagements at a time.
- **At a low key** : at reducing.
- **At crossroads** : be in confusion because of many choices.
- **At stake** : in danger.
- **To die a dog's death** : unheroic death.
- **To fine on all cylinders** : to exert with all force.
- **To break the duck** : to begin.
- **To play ducks and drakes** : to squander money.
- **A big shot** : important person.
- **A boon in disguise** : a benefit in loss.
- **A cry in the wilderness** : an irrelevant effort.
- **To beat about the bush** : to talk about unimportant things.
- **To sound a red alert** : to make alert.
- **Rise from ashes** : to rise high from low.
- **To put the cat among pigeons** : to be placed in a wrong situation.
- **Cut the Gordian knot** : to perform a difficult task.
- **To talk shop** : to talk nonsense.
- **To turn a deaf ear** : to disregard.
- **To gain ground** : to become more general.
- **Through thick and thin** : under all circumstances.
- **To have finger in the pie** : to do something in an affair.
- **To have one's heart in the right place** : to be kind.
- **My hands are full** : I am busy
- **To give someone a piece of mind** : to scold.
- **To kick up a row** : to make great noise and fuss.
- **To bury the hatchet** : to make peace.
- **To set the Thames on fire** : to do some remarkable or surprising things.
- **High and dry** : isolated, stranded.
- **To be at the end of one's tether** : to have no resources left.
- **Odds and ends** : various articles.
- **A hot line** : direct telephone line between heads of states.

- **To shoot a line** : to exaggerate about one's success.
- **To read between the lines** : to understand more than the actual words.
- **To feather one's nest** : to provide money even dishonestly.
- **To black-ball** : prevent from doing something.
- **To be in the black (of one's Money)** : to be in the credit.
- **A blue book** : A government report.
- **To paint the town red** : to celebrate noisily in public places.
- **To make no bones about Something** : to do or say a thing openly if it is unpleasant.
- **Pull the wool over somebody's Eyes** : to deceive.
- **To have several iron in the fire** : to have many tasks or many pieces of work.
- **To keep one's fingers crossed** : to remain anxious, wishing good for somebody.
- **To keep one wolf away from the door** : to keep off poverty from oneself.
- **A red letter day** : an important day.
- **To work like a dog** : to work very hard.
- **To foot the bill** : to make payment.
- **Bone of contention** : cause of quarrel.
- **To beggar description** : beyond description.
- **To play a second fiddle** : to act as a subordinate to do the secondary role.
- **Cut no ice** : to make no effect.
- **Under a cloud** : to be in bad book.
- **Once and for all** : forever.
- **Oily tongue** : one who flatters.
- **Hand in glove** : close friendship.
- **Hole and corner policy** : improper policy.
- **Far and wide** : all around.
- **Far and away** : certainly.
- **Fair-weather friends** : friends only in good days.
- **In deed** : really.
- **Face value** : superficially,

- **Fancy price** : High price.
- **Stick one's neck out** : to take risk.
- **To put a spoke in one's wheel** : to disturb.
- **To Brown study** : in reverie.
- **Moot point** : controversial point.
- **To plough a lonely furrow** : to do without anybody's help.
- **Bring home** : to emphasise.
- **Make hay while the Sun shines** : to make best use of the favourable opportunities.

- **Rank and file** : common man.
- **Talk through one's hat** : talk nonsense.
- **To lead one by the nose** : To cause to follow blindly.
- **To explore every avenue** : To try every method.
- **at the drop of a hat** : For no reason at all.
- **To kick one's heels** : to waste time.
- **To smell something fishy** : To feel that there is something wrong.
- **To get away with** : to escape.
- **All agog** : In a state of excitement.
- **Adam's ale** : ordinary water.
- **One's cup of tea** : what one likes and can do well.
- **In a flutter** : in a state of nervous excitement.
- **A chip of the old block** : characteristics of one's ancestors.
- **A close shave** : a lucky escape.
- **Blow hot and cold** : to be inconsistent.
- **A bull in the china shop** : an awkward, tactless or clumsy person.
- **To have the floor** : to make a speech.
- **A case in point** : an illustrative case connected to the subject of discussion.