

Idiomatic Expressions

Idiom means language peculiar to a people or community or a class. It is the expression in the usage of a language that is peculiar to itself either grammatically or in having a meaning that can't be derived from the conjoined meanings of its words.

Phrasal verbs or idioms may consist with prepositions, pairs of adverbs, pairs of verbs / nouns / adjectives and many more.

Example:

Let me have a glass of '**Adam's ale**'.

'Adam's ale' means water.

'Kick the bucket' means to die.

This definition has nothing to do with the individual meaning of each of the words used in this expression. Given below is the list of a few commonly used idiomatic expressions.

A Chip on Your Shoulder

Meaning: Being upset for something that happened in the past.

A Taste of Your Own Medicine

Meaning: When you are mistreated the same way you mistreat others.

An Arm and A Leg

Meaning: Very expensive. A large amount of money.

Back to Square One

Meaning: Having to start all over again.

Bite Off More Than You Can Chew

Meaning: To take on a task that is way too big.

Beat A Dead Horse

Meaning: To force an issue that has already ended.

Cross Your Fingers

Meaning: to hope that things will happen in the way you want them to.

Cry over Spilt Milk

Meaning: When you complain about a loss from the past.

Don't count your chickens before they hatch

Meaning: Don't rely on it until you're sure of it.

Don't Put All Your Eggs in One Basket

Meaning: Do not put all your resources in one possibility.

Drive someone up the Wall

Meaning: To irritate and/or annoy very much.

Every Cloud Has A Silver Lining

Meaning: Be optimistic, even difficult times will lead to better days.

Go the Extra Mile

Meaning: Going above and beyond whatever is required for the task at hand.

- ☞ **Have an Axe to Grind**
Meaning: To have a dispute with someone.
- ☞ **Hold Your Horses**
Meaning: Be patient.
- ☞ **Icing on the Cake**
Meaning: When you already have it good and get something on top of what you already have.
- ☞ **Let Bygones Be Bygones**
Meaning: To forget about a disagreement or argument.
- ☞ **Pulling Your Leg**
Meaning: Tricking someone as a joke.
- ☞ **Raining Cats and Dogs**
Meaning: A very loud and noisy rain storm.
- ☞ **Smell Something Fishy**
Meaning: Detecting that something isn't right and there might be a reason for it.
- ☞ **The Ball is in Your Court**
Meaning: It is your decision this time.
- ☞ **The Best of Both Worlds**
Meaning: There are two choices and you have them both.
- ☞ **Beat around the bush**
Meaning: To talk about for a long time without coming to the main point.

- ☞ **By the skin of one's teeth**
Meaning: To just manage to do it
- ☞ **Keep one's nose to the grindstone**
Meaning: To work hard for a long period of time
- ☞ **Make a mountain out of a mole hill**
Meaning: To make an unimportant matter seem important
- ☞ **Wet behind the ears**
Meaning: Young and without much experience

Some of the most important Idioms:

- ☞ **The bare bones of something:** The basic facts of something.
Ex: The bare bones of the air crash have not yet come into light.
- ☞ **Bare your soul to somebody:** To tell somebody your deepest and most private feelings.
Ex: An ideal husband shouldn't bare his soul especially to his wife.
- ☞ **Ad nauseam:** To talk about something that it becomes very boring.
Ex: She talks ad nauseam about how brilliant her children are.
- ☞ **Albatross around or round one's neck:** Something that keeps causing your problems and stops you from being successful.
Ex: The air line that he founded is now an albatross around his neck making losses of several hundreds of thousands a year.

☞ **Have an axe to grind:** To have a personal; often selfish, reason for being involved in something.

Ex: I have no axe to grind. I just want to help you.

☞ **Bark up the wrong tree:** To attempt to do the wrong thing in the wrong way from the wrong direction.

Ex: He didn't know that he was barking up the wrong tree when he tried to influence the judge for bail.

☞ **Full of beans:** Full of energy and very cheerful.

Ex: She has been ill but she is full of beans.

☞ **At someone's beck and call:** Always ready to carry out someone's order or wishes.

Ex: He has always plenty of men at his beck and call ('Beck' is another form of 'beckon')

☞ **A bed of roses:** An easy or a comfortable place, job, path etc.

Ex: The path to success is never a bed of roses.

☞ **Better off:** Happier, improved, more successful (goes with "with or without")

Ex: He would be better off starting with something simpler.

☞ **Have a bee in one's bonnet:** To have an idea which has become too fixed in one's mind.

Ex: He has a bee in his bonnet about going to America.

☞ **A little bird told me something:** To say that you know something but you will not say how you found out.

Ex: A little bird told me that you have got engaged.

☞ **Amiss:** Wrong, not as it should be.
Ex: She sensed that something was amiss and called the police.

☞ **What the doctor ordered:** The very thing that is needed. To be exactly what is wanted or needed.

Ex: At this moment, a cup of tea is just what the doctor ordered.

☞ **be like a dog with a bone:** To refuse to stop thinking about or talking about a subject.

Ex: On the subject of belt shops, the liquor king is like a dog with a bone.

☞ **The dog days:** The hottest days of summer.

Ex: The sale of air coolers rises during the dog days.

☞ **A doubting Thomas:** A person who refuses to believe something without having in controvertible proof; a sceptic. (Skeptic is US)

Ex: Being the president of a party, he shouldn't always be a doubting Thomas.

Choose the correct alternative from the given options

1. "Dead tired" means ____.

- a. no longer living
- b. very tired

- c. someone doesn't have long to live
2. A "dime a dozen" means ____.
- it is expensive
 - something is unusual
 - something is easy to get
3. A man "after my own heart" means ____.
- liking the same things as me
 - looks like me
 - follows me
4. "He didn't bat an eye" means the same as ____.
- he didn't see
 - he wasn't happy
 - he didn't show surprise
5. To put the "cart before the horse" means ____.
- to plan ahead
 - that you can't do something
 - to do things in the wrong order
6. A "pain in the neck" means something is ____.
- unusual
 - bothersome
 - difficult to see
7. To "make up your mind" means to ____.
- decide
 - be confused
 - be efficient
8. To "face the music" means ____.
- accept your punishment
 - listen carefully
 - ask a lot of questions
9. If it's a "feather in your cap" it means it's ____
- a problem
 - cowardly
 - an honour
10. The "gift of the gab" means you are ____
- experienced
 - very intelligent
 - skilled in talking
11. "In the nick of time" means ____
- too late
 - on time
 - in time
12. "Once in a blue moon" is ____
- often
 - sometimes
 - rarely
13. If you "see eye to eye" with someone, you ____ them.
- oppose
 - encourage
 - agree with
14. To go "through thick or thin" is to ____
- lose a lot of weight
 - get married
 - have many kinds of experiences
15. If you are "no spring chicken" you ____
- are inexperienced
 - aren't energetic
 - aren't young
16. To "nip it in the bud" means to ____
- prevent it at the start

- b. encourage something
- c. expect greatness from it

17. To "nail it down" means to ____

- a. start it
- b. finalize it
- c. talk about it

18. In this "neck of the woods" is ____

- a. the way we do something
- b. around here
- c. the way things were

Answers

1. B 2. C 3. A 4. C 5. C
6. B 7. A 8. A 9. C 10. C
11. B 12. C 13. C 14. C 15. C
16. A 17. B 18. B

Practice Test

Directions: which of the phrases (a), (b), (c) and (d) given below each sentence should replace the phrase printed in bold type to make the sentence grammatically correct? If the sentence is correct as it is, mark (e) i.e. No correction required as the answer.

1. Why do you wish to tread on the toes?
a) To give offence to them
b) To treat them indifferently
c) To follow them grudgingly
d) To be kicked by them
e) No correction required

2. To keep one's temper
a) To be in good mood
b) To preserve one's energy
c) To be angry
d) To be aloof from
e) No correction required
3. To play second fiddle
a) To be happy
b) To reduce importance of one's senior
c) To support the role and view of another person
d) To do back seat driving
e) No correction required
4. Action is the glorious principle of life and the one that saves man from _____.
a) The use of faculties, physical or mental
b) Stagnation and unhappiness
c) The sorrow of fellow beings
d) The prerequisites of happiness
e) No correction required
5. Being the head of a large family it difficult to keep his head above water.
a) To take rest
b) To work properly
c) To avoid quarrel
d) To keep out of debt
e) No correction required
6. To leave someone in the lurch
a) To come to compromise with someone
b) Constant source of annoyance to

someone

- c) To put someone at ease
- d) to leave someone at a time when they need you to stay and help them
- e) No correction required

7. And really the only reason you were there was because you had a bone to pick with him.
- a) You wanted to have a discussion with him
 - b) You wanted to chat
 - c) You wanted to talk
 - d) You wanted to have an argument with him
 - e) No correction required
8. He doesn't really go around with many people because he is a bit a lone wolf.
- a) Single person
 - b) Lonely person
 - c) Unhappy person
 - d) Simple person
 - e) No correction required
9. I don't honestly think he is capable of being polite as the leopard never changes his spots.
- a) Always complain
 - b) Differ in opinion
 - c) Never change
 - d) Shout
 - e) No correction required
10. The issue was taken before the Municipal Corporation meeting last week.
- a) Taking place at

- b) Taken after
- c) Being taken up
- d) Taken up at
- e) No correction required

11. As the maestro lifted his baton the theatre was so still you could hear ____.
- a) His heartbeat
 - b) A pin drop
 - c) Bird wings
 - d) Drum beating
 - e) No correction required
12. I don't agree with you, but your idea certainly gives me food ____.
- a) For fun
 - b) For consideration
 - c) For thought
 - d) For thinking
 - e) No correction required
13. Look, I will pay you back. Would you please call the ____.
- a) Hunters off
 - b) Tigers off
 - c) Dogs off
 - d) Apes off
 - e) No correction required
14. Just a moment... I've got the answer on the ____ of my tongue.
- a) Top
 - b) back
 - c) Tip
 - d) Front
 - e) No correction required

15. I'm afraid Chess isn't my cup of _____.
a) Tea
b) Coffee
c) Wine
d) Java
e) Milk
16. I think I understand the nuts and _____ of the operation.
a) Screws
b) Hammer
c) Nails
d) Bolts
e) No correction required
17. Oh, I'm sorry. I shouldn't have said that. I guess I really put my _____ in my mouth.
a) Foot
b) Hand
c) Elbow
d) Knee
e) No correction required
18. I'll be back in the twinkling of _____.
a) An eye
b) A Lighting bolt
c) A smile
d) A laugh
e) No correction required
19. He is plain, simple and sincere man. He will always call a spade a spade.
a) Find meaning or purpose in your action
b) Avoid controversial situations
c) Be outspoken
d) Resist from making controversial statement
e) No correction required
20. He has rejoined after a week and looks run down.
a) Cheerful and bubbly
b) Weak and tired
c) Active and energetic
d) Busy and preoccupied
e) No correction required
21. To hit the nail on the head
a) To do the right thing
b) To destroy one's reputation
c) Announce one's fixed views
d) To teach someone a lesson
e) None of these
22. All these promises these politicians make are just _____ in the sky.
a) Pie
b) Ocean
c) Music
d) Rags
e) No correction required
23. The small amount of money donated is just a _____ in the ocean compared to the large sum of money needed.
a) Spot
b) Drop
c) Speck
d) Sea
e) None of the above

24. They had had a dispute yesterday.
That's why she gave him the cold

_____.

- a) Arm
- b) Hand
- c) Shoulder
- d) Music
- e) None of the above

25. He has been successful in his life.
He went from _____ to riches.

- a) Rags
- b) Shoulder
- c) Colours
- d) Poor
- e) None of the above

Answers

- 1) a 2) a 3) c 4) b 5) d
6) d 7) d 8) b 9) c 10) d
11) b 12) c 13) c 14) c 15) a
16) d 17) a 18) a 19) c 20) b
21) a 22) a 23) b 24) c 25) a