

ESL Brains

Mastering idioms

EXERCISE 1: COMMUNICATION IDIOMS

Part 1: Choose the correct words to complete the underlined idioms. Then, watch a [video](https://youtu.be/FmX84uU-lKg) [https://youtu.be/FmX84uU-lKg] and check your answers.

- A. You agree to come out to dinner with me and, at the same time, you want to give me the silent/quiet treatment.
- B. But we can go back, see the guys, spread/chew the fat, and it'll be just like it always was.
- C. Well, I'll have to take a rain/hail check, but thanks for the offer.
- D. But this time, I'm just gonna pretend that I don't know cause somehow kicking up a fuse/fuss just doesn't seem worth the trouble this time.
- E. She's gonna walk in there, take one look at that idiot, and send him packing/begging.
- F. Look, I know this is my fault, so if you wanna rip/bite my head off, go ahead.
- G. But the people you associate yourself with... They talk/speak volumes.
- H. Well, I would've, but this is the first time tonight I've managed to get a sound/word in edgeways.

Part 2: Watch a [video](https://youtu.be/8b8BeoxrCiw) [https://youtu.be/8b8BeoxrCiw] containing more film clips and respond to each situation using the idioms from Part 1.

EXAMPLE: video excerpt: Why didn't you talk to me about this?
 response: *Because I knew you'd bite my head off!*

ESL Brains

Mastering idioms

EXERCISE 2: LET'S TALK FILMS

Part 1: Complete the texts with the idioms in the boxes in the correct form.

bad books

burn one's bridges

carry a torch

go back a long way

out on a limb

through thick and thin

throw someone under the bus

wet blanket

A. Caleb and Mason _____ – from scraped knees to street hustles. But when a drug bust puts Mason under the spotlight, Caleb, now a promising detective, _____ to save his career. Mason doesn't handle it well and gets involved in shady deals, _____ with everyone he once cared about. Meanwhile, Caleb tries to move on, but guilt gnaws at him. When new evidence surfaces that could clear Mason's name, Caleb must go _____, risking his career and reputation, to make things right.

B. Ellie has always been the perfect student – responsible and rule-abiding – and, because of this, often labelled a _____. She's also been _____ for her charming, rebellious classmate, Leo, for years.

When the senior class hatches a risky prank that could get them all expelled, Ellie faces an impossible choice: break the rules to impress Leo or stay true to herself and end up in everyone's _____, including his.

Facing challenges, Ellie leans on her childhood best friend, Max – the one person whom she's been with _____.

Part 2: Choose a genre and create a synopsis for a film using the idioms from Part 1.

sci-fi thriller

comedy horror

romantic fantasy

psychological thriller

crime drama

action comedy

ESL Brains

Mastering idioms

EXERCISE 3: WORKPLACE WISDOM

Match the statements (A–G) with the follow-up questions (1–7). Each question contains the meaning of one of the idioms in bold. Then, discuss the questions.

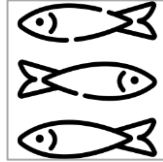
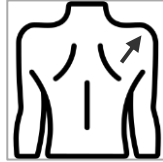
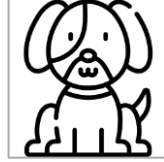
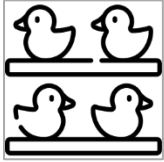
- A. Sometimes, the smartest thing you can do at work is **throw in the towel**.
 - B. Sometimes, a little extra effort can **grease the wheels** and make everything move faster.
 - C. Those who **have skin in the game**, such as owning company shares, tend to be more motivated to perform well.
 - D. Be ready to make sacrifices if you want to **go places** in your career.
 - E. If you try to **boil the ocean**, you risk losing focus and achieving very little.
 - F. Wise leaders know how to **nip problems in the bud** before they become serious.
 - G. If you **play your cards right**, even a small opportunity can turn into something huge.
-
1. Is the ability to make smart choices and strategic moves the most essential skill for achieving your goals?
 2. Do you agree? When is it wise to give up on a project or even a job?
 3. What are some simple ways a good leader can make things easier for their team?
 4. Do you agree? Or do you think a person can become successful without any trade-offs?
 5. Have you ever tried to take on a way too big or unrealistic task? How did it turn out?
 6. Do you always deal with minor issues immediately to avoid bigger problems later? Give examples.
 7. Should companies encourage employees to get financially invested in the business?

ESL Brains

Mastering idioms

EXERCISE 4: PICTURE THE IDIOM

Complete the idioms in bold using the words represented in the pictures. Then, write new lines a for lines b provided below.



- A. a: Can you believe he asked me for a raise after showing up late all month?
b: Wow, he really **has the** _____ !
- B. a: My startup just lost a huge client to a competitor.
b: I'm not surprised – it's a _____ **-eat-**_____ **world** out there.
- C. a: What did you think of the new place?
b: I don't know... It's **neither** _____ **nor fowl**.
- D. a: You almost missed the train!
b: I know! That was **a close** _____ .
- E. a: Why isn't he talking to anyone?
b: I guess he's got **a chip on his** _____ about something.
- F. a: Are you really going skydiving tomorrow?
b: Yep. I decided to **throw caution to the** _____ and just go for it.
- G. a: Are you ready for the big meeting?
b: Absolutely. I've **got all my** _____ **in a row**.
- H. a: That film is incredibly moving.
b: Yeah, it **hits close to** _____ when you've been through it yourself.

ESL Brains

Mastering idioms

EXERCISE 5: REACTING WITH IDIOMS

Part 1: Match the statements with the responses. Then, underline the idiom in each response and explain what it means.

- | | |
|---|---|
| A. Sorry, but I'm really busy right now. | 1. I know! I just can't put my finger on what happened exactly. |
| B. They've just sold the company for ten million dollars. | 2. That's OK. I'll get out of your hair as soon as you tell me who else might be able to help me. |
| C. She said she didn't get your email. | 3. Hats off to you for throwing this amazing party! |
| D. I don't think Josh would agree with you. | 4. Hmm... I can't for the life of me remember if I even sent it to her or not. |
| E. So they finally broke up. | 5. Definitely! We'd better get our act together if we want to finish by the end of the month. |
| F. Seeing you all here makes me truly happy. | 6. What he thinks about it is neither here nor there. It's not his problem. |
| G. I noticed you stopped taking notes in the lecture. | 7. Wow. It goes to show that hard work pays off after all. |
| H. We might need to push a little harder with this project. | 8. The syntax explanations went over my head and, at one point, I was just completely lost. |

Part 2: Respond to the comments using the idioms in Part 1.

EXAMPLE: I can't believe you still haven't asked your boss for a raise.
*I can't **for the life of me** work up the courage.*

- A. It must be fun to work at a theme park.
- B. I loved her new film.
- C. I'm pretty sure they'll go bust soon.
- D. Remember our neighbour Joe? I wonder what happened to him.
- E. His speech was absolutely phenomenal!
- F. I'm not sure we should hire her. She doesn't have much experience.
- G. I'm in a bit of a hurry today, but I suppose we could have a quick coffee.

ESL Brains

Mastering idioms

EXERCISE 6: PREFERENCES AND SKILLS

Part 1: Match the idioms in bold with their synonyms on the right. Then, choose three sentences that are not true for you and rewrite them using different idioms from the task.

- | | |
|--|------------------|
| A. I like working on my strength and meditating, so martial arts are right up my street . | 1. happy |
| B. I find doing simple DIY projects relaxing even though I don't have an artistic bone in my body . | 2. avoid |
| C. I give extreme sports a wide berth because I'm not a fan of adrenaline rushes. | 3. perfect (x2) |
| D. Hosting parties ticks all the right boxes for me: I get to see people, cook for them and make them happy. | 4. be untalented |
| E. I know I would be a good politician because I have the gift of the gab . | 5. overwhelmed |
| F. I imagine I would be out of my depth with hundreds of people reporting to me. It's not something I've ever trained for. | 6. be articulate |
| G. I'm truly in my element when I work on complex problems. Figuring out efficient solutions is what I thrive on. | 7. leading |
| H. I'm ahead of the curve in terms of embracing new tech trends. I'm a typical early adopter who starts using new tech as soon as it becomes available. | |

Part 2: Talk about whether you have given or would like to give some of the ideas in the boxes a try using the idioms in Part 1. Then, explain why some of the ideas are not of interest to you.

fostering a dog	being a CEO of a big company	being a fashion designer	participating in a paintball tournament
gardening	doing stand-up comedy	camping	being in a band
hosting a podcast about technology	learning to play the guitar	learning a new language	taking a cooking class

ESL Brains

Mastering idioms

EXERCISE 7: CHALLENGING SITUATIONS

Part 1: Complete the idioms in bold with the words in the boxes.

better

bombshell

eyelid

head

home

motions

straws

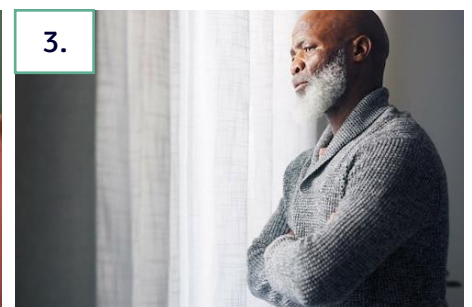
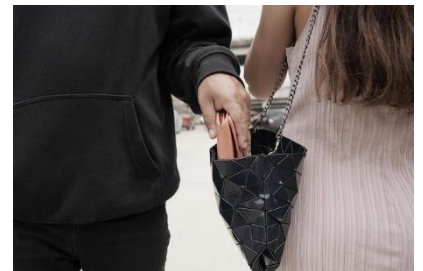
tether

- A. At some point he found himself **going through the** _____ at work – he attended meetings and replied to emails, but he was completely burnt out.
- B. I apologize for my outburst. My jealousy **got the** _____ **of me** when I heard about your promotion.
- C. Abbie has invested in a get-rich-quick scheme. She is **grasping at** _____ to keep herself out of debt.
- D. After accepting the managerial position, Marcus quickly realized he was **in over his** _____ with the sheer volume of responsibilities and high expectations.
- E. When I told them about my situation, they **didn't bat a/an** _____. At that point I knew I was alone.
- F. He suddenly **dropped the** _____ that he was breaking up with Christine and moving abroad.
- G. Seeing the rising numbers of homeless people **brought** _____ **to him** how urgent the housing crisis had become.
- H. After trying everything to calm the baby down, Ron was **at the end of his** _____ and didn't know what else to do.

Part 2: Look at the people in the photos. Imagine their situations and discuss what social issues the photos might illustrate. Use the idioms in Part 1.

EXAMPLE:

*Both people in the photo might be **in over their head**: the victim might be losing significant amounts of money and the pickpocket might have very few choices as to how to earn their living, so they might be **grasping at straws**. The photo shows the issue of petty crime like pickpocketing, which is not considered a serious crime and therefore authorities might **not bat an eyelid** at the news of someone getting their purse stolen.*



ESL Brains

Mastering idioms

EXERCISE 8: THE GAME OF JEOPARDY

You are going to play a game. Take turns choosing a topic and a number. The number indicates how many points you will earn if you complete the task successfully. The higher the number, the more challenging the task is. The person who gets the most points wins.

parts of the body 100	verbs 100	communication 100	prepositions 100	work 100
parts of the body 200	verbs 200	communication 200	prepositions 200	work 200
parts of the body 300	verbs 300	communication 300	prepositions 300	work 300
parts of the body 400	verbs 400	communication 400	prepositions 400	work 400