

A List of Common Idioms

Idiom	Example	What it means
Keep your chin up	It's hard to keep your chin up when everything is going wrong.	Remain cheerful in a difficult situation
In hot water	Joey was in hot water after he broke Mrs. Smith's window.	In trouble
On the back burner	I put baseball practice on the back burner while I studied for the test.	Delayed until later
Put your best foot forward	Mom always encourages me to put my best foot forward on first day of school.	Leave a good first impression
Hit the books	We're having a test tomorrow, so I'm going to hit the books tonight.	Study
Cool as a cucumber	Kelly was cool as cucumber when she told the teacher that her dog ate her homework.	Calm, not nervous
Piece of cake	Learning to dive is a piece of cake.	Very easy
Wade through	Our teacher gave us so much homework it took me four hours to wade through it all!	Work on a difficult or lengthy task
Butterflies in my stomach	I always get butterflies in my stomach before a big game.	A nervous, fluttery feeling in the stomach
Be in the same boat	With us both sick, we are in the same boat	Be in the same bad situation as someone else
Cost an arm and a leg	Ta mar's new dress cost an arm and a leg!	Be extremely expensive
Hold your horses	"Hold your horses!" said Mom as I reached for a cookie. "They are still too hot to eat."	Stop or wait
Pulling someone's leg	When Uncle Bert said he used to be a pirate, he was just pulling my leg.	Teasing someone
Spill the beans	Don't spill the beans to Dan about his surprise birthday party!	Tell a secret
Get off someone's back	Dad won't get off my back until I take out the trash.	Stop nagging or reminding someone about something
Turn over a new leaf	Cissy promised to turn over a new leaf and keep her room clean from now on.	Make a positive change in your behavior
All thumbs	When it comes to sewing, I'm all thumbs.	Clumsy, or not very good at doing something

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Break a leg	Right before I walked out on stage, my mother told me to break a leg.	Have good luck
Get up on the wrong side of the bed	Evan was so grumpy I knew he must have gotten up on the wrong side of the bed.	Be in a bad mood
Go out on a limb	I'll go out on a limb and say that our team will win the championships this year.	Take a chance
Tongue-tied	I'm always tongue-tied when I meet someone new.	Unable to think of something to say
Turn the house upside down	Angie turned the house upside down, but she still couldn't find her library book.	Search everywhere
In over your head	I just want you to know you're not my first choice for the job, so if you're in over your head, please tell me.	Doing something that is more difficult than you are able to deal with
Drag one's feet	The committee is dragging its feet too long in terms of making a decision.	Deliberately take too much time to do something

A few resource web sites:

www.eslcafe.com/idioms

www.learnenglishfeelgood.com/americanidioms/index.html

www.manythings.org/voa/words

Some of the most important ways to learn English idioms

- paying attention to English speakers' ways of speaking
- asking English speakers what they mean when you do not understand an expression
- looking up in a dictionary or on the computer word groups you do not understand
- reading magazines and newspapers