



English idioms that everyone should know

Idioms

Native English speakers love using them in conversation, and you'll often find them popping up in books, TV shows and movies too. To perfect your English, you really need to become confident in using idioms and knowing the difference between breaking a leg and pulling someone's leg.

1. Under the weather

What does it mean? To feel ill

How do you use it? In England we love to talk about the weather and will do so often, but don't be fooled by this common phrase. If someone says they're feeling under the weather, your response should be 'I hope you feel better!', not 'Would you like to borrow my umbrella?'.

2. The ball is in your court

What does it mean? It's up to you

How do you use it? It's your move now, but this idiom refers to life rather than a sport. If you've got the 'ball,' the decision is yours and someone is waiting for your decision.

3. Spill the beans

What does it mean? To give away a secret

How do you use it? If you told someone about their own surprise party, you'd have 'spilled the beans' or even 'let the cat out of the bag'. The secret is out.

4. Break a leg

What does it mean? To wish someone luck

How do you use it? This idiom is not at all threatening. Often accompanied by a thumbs up, 'Break a leg!' is an encouraging cheer of good luck. It originates from when successful theater performers would bow so many times after a show that they would break a leg.

5. Pull someone's leg

What does it mean? To play a practical joke

How do you use it? This is the perfect phrase to learn if you're a fan of practical jokes. 'Pull their leg' is similar to 'wind someone up'. Use it in context: 'Relax, I'm just pulling your leg!' or 'Wait, are you pulling my leg?'.

6. Sat on the fence

What does it mean? To be undecided

How do you use it? If you're sat on the fence, you've not decided which side of an argument you agree with. 'I'm on the fence about hot yoga classes,' translates as 'I'm not sure whether I enjoy yoga in a sauna yet.'

7. Through thick and thin

What does it mean? To be loyal no matter what

How do you use it? Often used to describe families or BFFs, 'through thick and thin' means that you're by each other's side no matter what happens, through the bad times, as well as the good.

8. Once in a blue moon

What does it mean? Rarely

How do you use it? This charming phrase is used to describe something that doesn't happen often. Example: 'I remember to call my parents from my study abroad trip once in a blue moon.'

9. It's the best thing since sliced bread

What does it mean? It's really, really good

How do you use it? Sliced bread must have revolutionised life in England because it's since been used as the ultimate benchmark for things that are great. We love it almost as much as tea.

10. Take it with a pinch of salt

What does it mean? Don't take it too seriously

How do you use it? 'I heard that elephants can fly now, but Sam often makes up stories so I take everything he says with a pinch of salt.'

11. Come rain or shine

What does it mean? No matter what

How do you use it? You guarantee to do something, regardless of the weather or any other situation that might arise. 'I'll be at your football game, come rain or shine'.

12. Go down in flames

What does it mean? To fail spectacularly

How do you use it? This phrase is fairly obvious. 'That exam went down in flames, I should have learned my English idioms.'

13. You can say that again

What does it mean? That's true

How do you use it? Generally exclaimed in agreement. When a friend says 'Ryan Reynolds is gorgeous!', you can reply 'You can say that again!'

14. See eye to eye

What does it mean? To agree completely

How do you use it? We're not suggesting a staring contest – to see eye to eye with someone is to agree with the point they're making.

15. Jump on the bandwagon

What does it mean? Following a trend

How do you use it? When a person joins in with something popular or does something just because it's cool. See this brunch-based example: 'She doesn't even like avocado on toast. She's just jumping on the bandwagon.'

16. As right as rain

What does it mean? Perfect

How do you use it? Another weather-based idiom, but this one is slightly trickier. We moan about the rain, but 'right as rain' is actually a positive comment. 'I'm as right as rain!' may be exclaimed with glee when asked if everything is okay, and it is.

17. Beat around the bush

What does it mean? Avoid saying something

How do you use it? Beating around the bush is when you speak nonsense, avoiding a question because you don't want to express your opinion or answer truthfully.

18. Hit the sack

What does it mean? Go to bed

How do you use it? This idiom is super easy to learn to use. 'I'm exhausted, it's time for me to hit the sack!'

19. Miss the boat

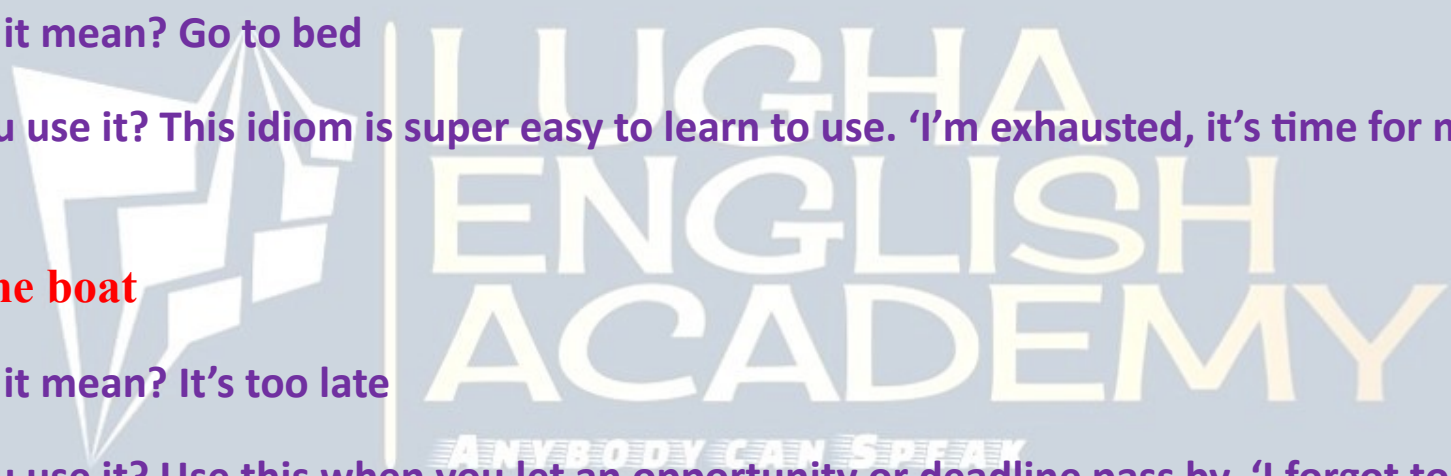
What does it mean? It's too late

How do you use it? Use this when you let an opportunity or deadline pass by. 'I forgot to apply for that study abroad program, now I've missed the boat.'

20. By the skin of your teeth

What does it mean? Just barely

How do you use it? 'Phew, I passed that exam by the skin of my teeth!' Hopefully you'll ace your exams, but if you only just pass you can whip out this idiom.



Cold feet	Becoming nervous	It was her chance to speak and she was getting <i>cold feet</i> .
Apple of my eye	Used to refer to someone whom you are very fond of or like	My younger brother is the <i>apple of my eye</i> .
Kill two birds with a stone	Achieve two results by doing one thing	None of us understood that he was trying to <i>kill two birds with a stone</i> when he joined the military forces.
Snowed under	To be busy	My father seems to have been <i>snowed under</i> for the last few weeks.

Walk on eggshells	To be very careful with your actions and words	Talking to my mom about my grades made me feel like I was <i>walking on eggshells</i> .
Bite the bullet	Finish something no matter how unsatisfying or unpleasant it is / Get something over with	Danny had been putting off discussing the financial management of the company but decided to <i>bite the bullet</i> and talk to Sid today.
Make two ends meet	To have just enough money for all your needs	Harry and Hani are finding it really difficult to <i>make two ends meet</i> .
To be at loggerheads with someone	To quarrel or disagree	Jithin's parents seem <i>to be at loggerheads</i> over something or the other all the time.

Pretty penny	Expensive	The dress she wants for her birthday will cost a <i>pretty penny</i> .
Cut corners	Purchase something in the least expensive way or do something easily / reduce expenses	I often <i>cut corners</i> in order to buy something for my brother.
Call it a day	To stop doing something	After the movie, we had planned to go to the beach, but we decided to <i>call it a day</i> as everyone was tired.
Stick to your guns	Stay morally strong or be firm in decisions especially when being opposed	The lawyer asked Rakesh to <i>stick to his guns</i> if he wants to win the case.

Clouds on the horizon	Problems/ Trouble	Vishnu sensed that there were multiple <i>clouds on the horizon</i> .
A blessing in disguise	Something that you think is bad but turns out to be a blessing	Me catching a cold was <i>a blessing in disguise</i> .
Blue in the face	To be exhausted due to strain or anger	Usha looked <i>blue in the face</i> after the marathon.
Elephant in the room	A controversial problem or a major issue	We had to identify the <i>elephant in the room</i> before we made a decision.