

EC Fundamentals

IDIOMS

VOL. 1

An illustrated guide for English Learners

PUT YOUR
HEART INTO IT



What are idioms?

Idioms are words, phrases, or expressions which are often grammatically 'strange' and are not meant to be understood literally. Idioms are a very important part of any language, so learning a few of the most common ones is useful in two main ways.

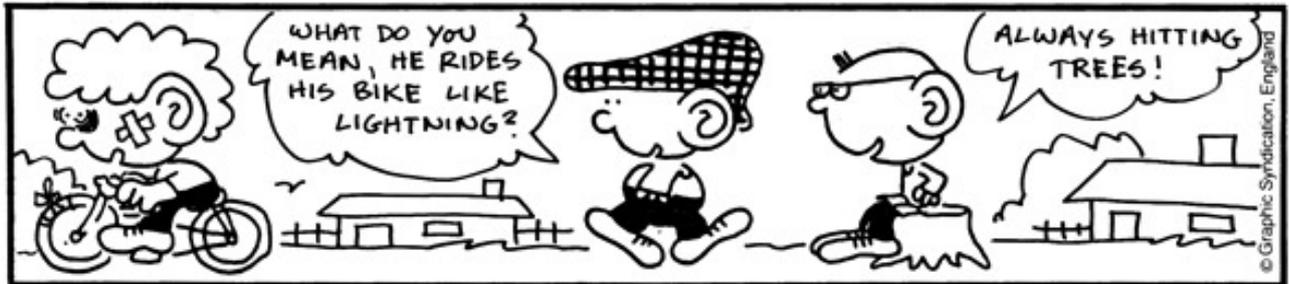
1. The more idioms you know how to use correctly, the more 'natural' your speech will sound
2. Idioms can teach us a lot about the culture or community who speak that language

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There are hundreds of Idioms in the English language.
Let's take a look at illustrated examples of some of the most useful ones!

Like lightning



What are the boys in this cartoon trying to say? Well, to do something **'like lightning'** means **'to do it very quickly'** – that's the idiom here.

The boy rides his bicycle very fast, but he is not very good at it because he is 'always hitting trees' (that's why he's hurt). The boy wearing glasses is joking, because it is also quite common for lightning flashes to hit trees! Let's look at a couple more examples to make sure we've understood this idiom:

e.g. As soon as the race began, the cars were off **like lightning**,

e.g. Muhammad Ali was a fantastic professional boxer. He moved **like lightning!**

Put your heart into it



If you say you **'put your heart into'** something, it means that you've put a lot of work or effort into it.

e.g. He's the kind of person who **puts his heart into his job**.

e.g. She wanted her company to be a success and **really¹ put her heart into it**. She worked hard every day.

To **'put your heart and soul into (something)'** is also used and has the same meaning.

e.g. The author **put his heart and soul into the writing of this book**.

¹ 'Really' is used here to add emphasis.

My lips are sealed



When you promise to keep something a secret you can say **'my lips are sealed'**. It's something you say to let someone know that **they can trust you** and that **you will not tell anyone else** what they have just told you.

e.g. Don't worry, Joseph. I won't tell anyone what you told me. **My lips are sealed.**

In the cartoon above, the man's lips are LITERALLY sealed – they are stuck because he accidentally ate some glue!

*Another common way of telling someone that they can trust you is to say **'your secret is safe with me.'**

Don't stand in my way



If something is **'in the way'**, then it is stopping you from getting to where you want to go. For example:

e.g. We had to stop the car because a cow was **in the way!** (I couldn't continue driving because the cow was in the middle of the road)

We use the idiom **'stand in the way'** when we want to talk about something or someone that tries to stop or prevent something from happening. Let's look at some examples to make this clearer:

e.g. You know I **won't stand in your way** if you want to apply for a job abroad. (If you want to work in another country, I will not stop you)

e.g. I'd **never stand in the way** of her plans. (I would never stop her from doing what she want to do)

e.g. She plans to become a doctor and **no one** had better **stand in her way**. (She wants to become a doctor and nothing will stop her)

Rub it in

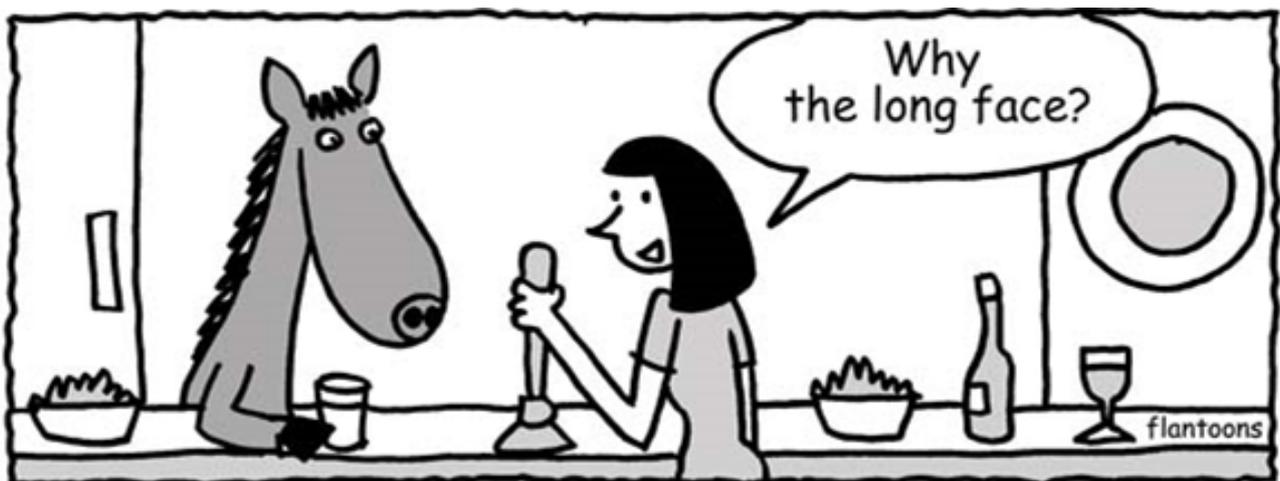


There are two ways of using this idiom: we can say '**rub it in**' or '**rub it in (someone's) face**'. If someone 'rubs it in', they **continue talking about something or doing something that makes you upset or embarrassed**.

e.g. We all know she made a mistake, but you don't have to **rub it in**.

e.g. I wanted to **rub it in their faces**, so I said, "I'll be thinking of you working while I'm on vacation."

Long face



Here's a popular, old joke that everyone in the English-speaking world knows:

A horse walks into a bar. The bartender asks, "Why the long face?"

'**Why the long face?**' is an idiomatic expression meaning '**why do you look sad?**'

As you know, a horse, compared to a human, really does have a long face! We can use 'long face' to describe someone's physical appearance

e.g. "I have a long face but my brother's is quite round, but as an idiom long face means to look unhappy or sad:

e.g. "Why the long face, Chiharu?" "I failed my exam!"

Float my boat



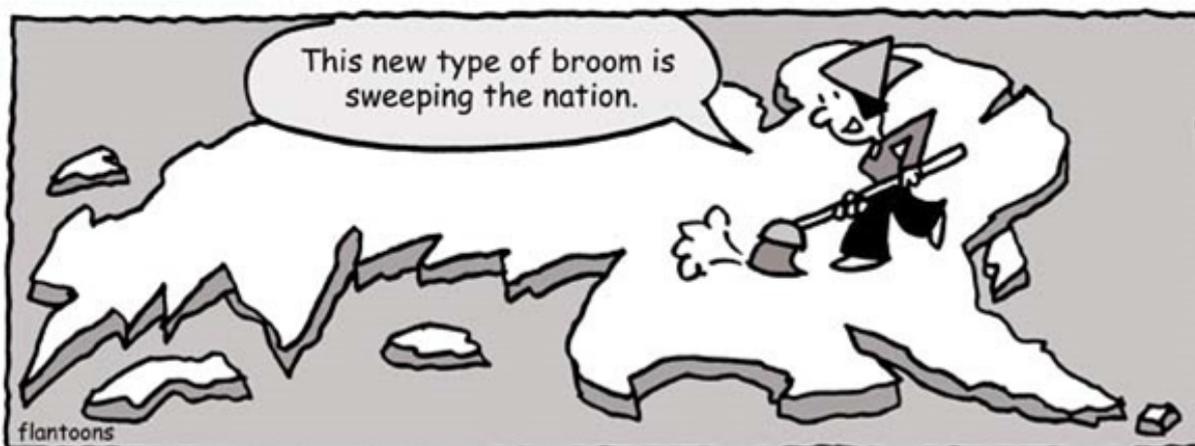
If something **'does not float your boat'**, you **do not really enjoy it or want it**; it's not well-suited to you or your tastes. When something **'floats your boat'**, you like it.

e.g. The idea of playing football on a cold winter morning **doesn't float my boat**. (I don't like the idea of playing football when it is cold)

e.g. Reading books **doesn't really float my boat**. (I don't like reading so much)

e.g. What kind of music **floats your boat**? (What kind of music do you enjoy?)

Sweeping the nation



In the cartoon we can see a woman using her broom to sweep² the large map she is standing on. Here, she's literally sweeping the country on the map, but what does this phrase mean as an idiom?

Well, when something is **'sweeping the nation'** it is **'becoming very popular everywhere'**.

e.g. There's a new style of music that is **sweeping the nation**. (Everyone in the country seems to be listening to this music)

e.g. iPhones **swept the nation** from the moment they were released in 2007. (When iPhones were released, they immediately became extremely popular)

² To sweep: to clear or clean a floor of dirt, dust, or litter using a broom or brush.

Take a shot



'To take a shot' is an informal way of saying 'to try to do something'; 'to attempt to do something without knowing if you will succeed.'

e.g. I don't know the answer to your question, but I'll **take a shot** anyway. (I'll try to guess the answer)

e.g. I haven't played tennis before but I'm going to **take a shot** this weekend. (I'm going to try to play tennis, but I don't know how)

*'To take a shot' can also mean (literally) to use a gun to try and shoot at something.

Get a grip



'To get a grip' is an idiomatic way of saying 'to understand how to deal with something' or 'to control your emotions.'

e.g. This book really helped me **get a grip** on politics. (This book helped me to understand politics.)

e.g. Angie – **get a grip!** You are behaving like a child and need to calm down. (Angie, please control yourself and calm down!)

On the house



If food or drink is **'on the house'** in a bar or restaurant, it is given to you **free** by the owner.

e.g. The waiter gave us a cup of coffee **on the house**. (The waiter gave us a free coffee.)

e.g. It was my birthday, so the waiter said my ice-cream was **on the house**. (It was my birthday, so the restaurant gave me my ice-cream for free.)

What's the catch?



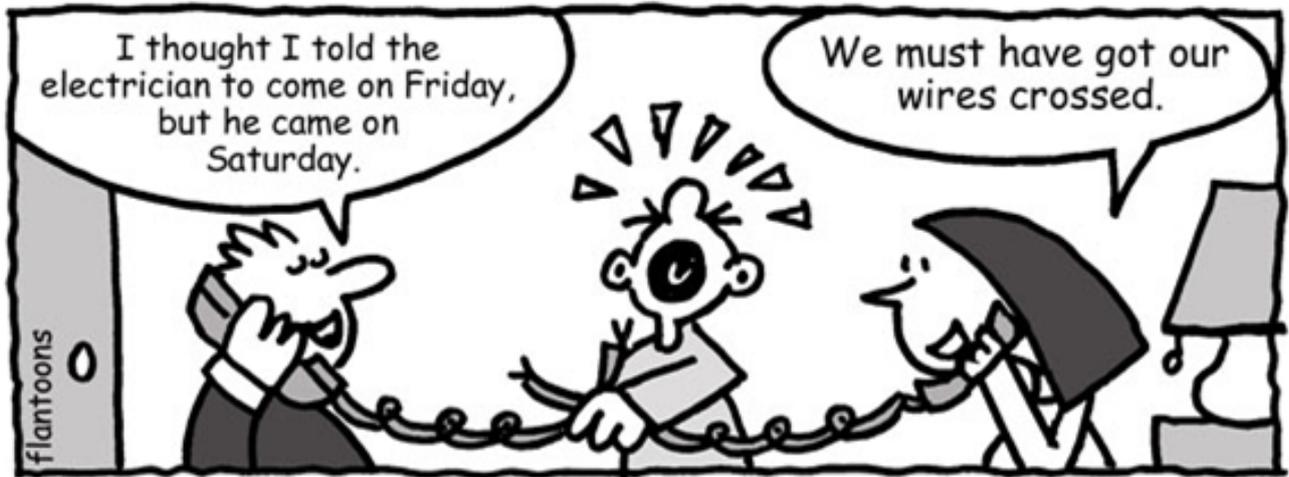
'What's the catch?' is not an idiom about fishing! In this sense, 'catch' is used as a noun, **not a verb**.

We use it when **something sounds good, but we are worried or suspicious about any hidden problems**. We are asking 'what are the drawbacks? What are the negative points?' So when something is too good to be true, we say **'what's the catch?'**

e.g. This job offer sounds too good to be true. **What's the catch?** (This job sounds so amazing that I don't believe it's true. There must be something 'bad' about it!)

e.g. The restaurant is offering free lunch, but **what's the catch?** (This offer sounds too good to be possible. What's the negative side of this?)

Wires crossed



When people **'get their wires crossed'**, they have a **different understanding** of the same situation. They **get confused, mixed up or make a mistake**; there is a **misunderstanding**.

e.g. I think we **got our wires crossed** because I thought we were going to meet at the coffee shop and Sarah thought we were meeting at the bar.

Rub me the wrong way



When we **'rub (someone) up the wrong way'**, we annoy, anger or irritate them.

e.g. The way he talks to his employees really **rubs me up the wrong way**. (I don't like the way he speaks to the people who work for him. It annoys me.)

This expression comes from the idea that if you rub a dog or cat's fur the wrong way, you annoy it or make it angry (just like the dog in the cartoon).

On the way out



Two meanings of the expression **on the way out**:

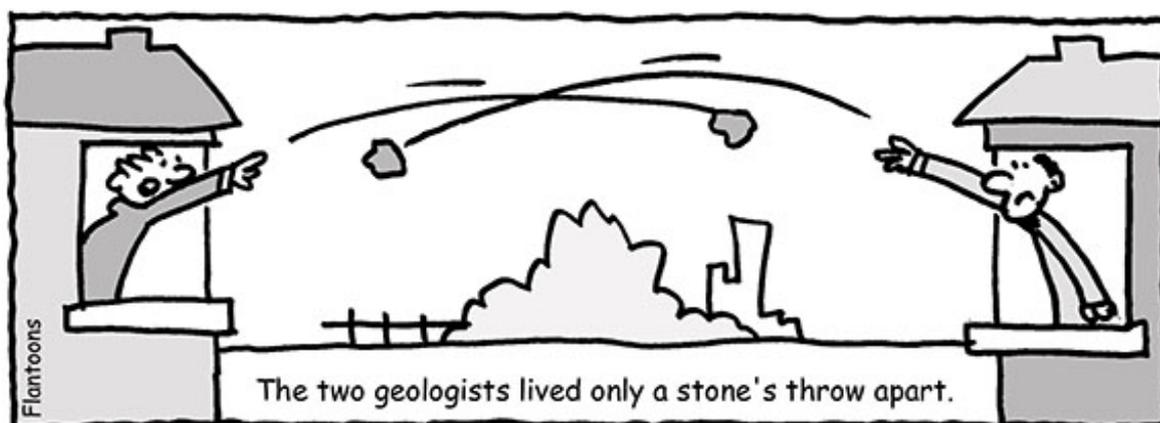
On the way out: Near the exit.

e.g. *If it's raining, take one of the umbrellas **on your way out**. (Before you leave the house, take an umbrella with you)*

On the way out: Going out of fashion, becoming obsolete.

e.g. *Big cars are **on the way out**. They have no future. People now prefer smaller, more economical cars. (Big cars are becoming less popular.)*

A stone's throw away



What's happening here? In the cartoon above, the two geologists³ are neighbours. The two scientists in the cartoon live close to one another, so they are **a stone's throw apart** or **a stone's throw away from one another**. Let's look at another two examples using this idiom:

e.g. *This hotel is perfect – it's just **a stone's throw away** from the train station! (The hotel is just a few minutes away from the train station)*

e.g. *My parents and my grandparents live **a stone's throw apart**, so it's easy for them to visit. (My parents live very close to my grandparents.)*

³ Geologist: A scientist who studies the solid and liquid substances, or matter, that make up the Earth (e.g. Rocks and stones).

Hole in one



This joke is an example of **a play on words** - meaning that a phrase or word can be used for more than one meaning to make a joke.

Hole in one - is used in golf when a golfer gets the ball into the hole with just one shot.

e.g. I was playing a round of golf with my father when I got a hole in one! (I got the golf ball into the hole in one turn!)

Hole in one - in this case the 'hole' means a hole in one pair of trousers.

e.g. I need some new socks. There's a hole in one of these. (These socks are old and there is a hole in them. I need new ones)

Test your knowledge

Now that you've found out about all these idioms, it's time to test your knowledge. Use these exercises to make sure that you've understood the meaning behind each idiom, then check your answers on the last page.

Exercise 1:

Fill in the gap with one word to complete the idiom in each sentence.

1. A new fashion trend from Italy is sweeping the _____.
2. Francesca is determined to become a great politician. She won't let anyone or anything _____ in her way.
3. 75% off everything in the shop? That sounds too good to be true – what's the _____?
4. I know you've never tried karaoke, but you should give it a _____! It's fun.
5. You have to calm down and get a _____. Panicking isn't going to help us here.
6. These drinks are on the _____. Happy anniversary!
7. The party was very last minute, so we had to move like _____ to organise it and book a cake.
8. I know you're going on holiday next week – don't rub it ____!
9. We were supposed to meet this morning but she thought we were meeting tomorrow. We got our wires _____.
10. Jack finally finished writing his book! He really worked hard and put his _____ into it.
11. I didn't enjoy that dinner last night. The waitress really _____ me the wrong way with her attitude.
12. I don't really want to watch that film tonight. Horror films don't float my _____ at all.
13. You can trust me to keep your secret. My _____ are sealed.
14. Why such a _____ face? It's your birthday! Smile a little more.

Exercise 2:

Sentence Scramble

1. like He moved lightning

2. into it my really put heart into I

3. lips sealed are My

4. won't I in way your stand

5. not to it Try rub in

6. long face? the Why

7. doesn't Chocolate float boat my

8. sweeping This trend is the nation new

9. take I'll shot a

10. and grip a down get Calm

11. the house was cake on The

12. catch? What's the

13. they think got their crossed wires I

14. me wrong They way the rubbed

Answers:

Exercise 1

1. nation
2. get
3. catch
4. shot
5. grip
6. house
7. lighting
8. in
9. crossed
10. heart
11. rubbed
12. boat
13. lips
14. long

Exercise 2

1. He moved like lightning
2. I really put my heart into it
3. My lips are sealed
4. I won't stand in your way
5. Try not to rub it in
6. Why the long face?
7. Chocolate doesn't float my boat
8. This new trend is sweeping the nation
9. I'll take a shot
10. Calm down and get a grip/ Get a grip and calm down
11. The cake was on the house
12. What's the catch?
13. I think they got their wires crossed
14. They rubbed me the wrong way



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