

Glossary of Commonly Used Idioms

Idiom	Meaning
a black sheep	: someone who is regarded as a disgrace to the family or group
a bolt out of the blue	: something that happens unexpectedly
a bull in a china shop	: a very clumsy person
a chip off the old block	: a son who is like his father
a close shave	: a narrow escape
a cock and bull story	: a silly and incredible story
a greenhorn	: someone new and inexperienced
a pain in the neck	: somebody who is annoying or tiresome
a rolling stone	: a person who moves from one job to another
a stone's throw	: a very short distance
a tall story	: a story that is hard to believe
a wet blanket	: someone who tries to spoil other people's fun
a white lie	: a lie one tells in order to avoid hurting someone
add fuel to fire	: make a bad situation even worse
all and sundry	: everyone, not just a selected few
an old hand	: someone with a lot of experience
at one's fingertips	: to know thoroughly
at the eleventh hour	: at the last moment
blow one's own trumpet	: boast about oneself
break the ice	: to make people who have not met before feel more relaxed so that they are willing to talk to each other
building castles in the air	: daydreaming
burning the midnight oil	: to work or study till late at night
bury the hatchet	: agree to stop quarrelling and become friends again
by hook or by crook	: by fair means or by foul means
by leaps and bounds	: very much, very quickly
by trial and error	: to test different methods of doing something in order to find the best method
child's play	: a very easy job or task
cry wolf	: to appeal for help unnecessarily
donkey's years	: a very long time
eat one's words	: to admit what one said was wrong

Idiom	Meaning
face the music	: to accept the punishment
face to face	: very close and in front of
follow someone's footsteps	: to do the same job as someone else who did it before you
follow suit	: to act in the same way as someone did previously
forty winks	: a very short sleep
give someone the cold shoulder	: to make someone feel unwelcome
give the green light	: to give (someone) the permission to do something
hard of hearing	: almost deaf
has a sweet tooth	: likes to eat sweet things
in black and white	: write it down on paper
in cold blood	: deliberately and calmly
in the nick of time	: only just in time
in the same boat	: in the same difficult situation
in the red	: owe more money than one has
jack-of-all-trades	: someone who can do many things, but is not skilled in any one of them
keep one's fingers crossed	: to hope that something will be successful
keep the ball rolling	: to keep things going
kill two birds with one stone	: to achieve two aims from one action
like a bear with a sore head	: to be very bad-tempered
live from hand to mouth	: just able to survive with no savings
make a beeline for	: to go quickly and directly towards someone or something
make a clean breast of	: to confess in full
mind one's P's and Q's	: to be careful how one behaves
(not) make head or tail of (something)	: (not) to make sense of (something)
no laughing matter	: a serious matter
once in a blue moon	: very rarely
out of the question	: not possible or allowed
pour cold water on (someone)	: to make someone feel discouraged
pull one's socks up	: to make an effort to improve one's work
put on airs	: to behave in a way that makes one seem more important than other people
put one's foot down	: to be firm
see eye to eye	: to have the same point of view
see red	: to lose one's temper

Idiom	Meaning
show one's true colours	: to reveal one's real character
smell a rat	: to suspect that something is wrong
the lion's share	: the largest part
to be chicken-hearted	: to be weak and cowardly
to be on cloud nine	: to be extremely happy
to be up to the mark	: to be up to a certain standard
to bear in mind	: to remember
to carry weight	: to be important
to cry over spilt milk	: to be upset over something about which nothing can be done
to drop someone a line	: to write a letter to someone
to feel run-down	: to feel unwell
to fly into a rage	: to become angry suddenly
to foot the bill	: to pay the bill
to get into hot water	: to get into serious trouble
to have a big mouth	: not being able to keep secrets
to have green fingers	: to be good at making plants grow
to hit the nail on the head	: to come to the right conclusion
to hold one's tongue	: to keep quiet
to keep a person at arm's length	: to avoid being too familiar with a person
to keep an eye on	: to watch carefully
to keep in touch	: to keep in contact
to learn by heart	: to memorize
to leave no stone unturned	: to try one's hardest
to lend a ear	: to listen to someone
to lend a hand	: to help
to look daggers at	: to look angrily at someone
to lose heart	: to feel discouraged
to make a mountain out of a molehill	: to exaggerate
to make ends meet	: to spend within one's income
to mind one's own business	: to concern oneself with one's own affairs
to pass the hat round	: to collect donations
to pass with flying colours	: to do very well in a test
to pick and choose	: to choose very carefully
to pull a face	: to change one's expression

Idiom	Meaning
to rain cats and dogs	: to rain very heavily
to receive with open arms	: to welcome cordially
to save for a rainy day	: to save for a time when money is needed
to shed crocodile tears	: to shed false tears
to show the white flag	: to surrender
to strike while the iron is hot	: to seize the opportunity when it comes
to take to one's heels	: to run away at great speed
to talk through one's hat	: to talk nonsense
to turn a blind eye to	: to pretend not to see (something)
to turn a deaf ear to	: to deliberately ignore
to turn over a new leaf	: to change one's conduct for the better
to turn tail	: to run away
to turn turtle	: to turn upside down