



# Idioms

## What is an Idiom?

An idiom is a phrase comprised of words that has a meaning that cannot be derived from the conjoined meanings of its individual words. If an idiom contains all parts of a sentence or can be used as a command, it can be said on its own. For example, “It takes two to tango” has a subject, a verb, and a predicate. “All ears” does not have a verb, so it must be used within a sentence.

## Some Popular Idioms

Idiom	Meaning	Idiom	Meaning
easy does it	slow down	spill the beans	tell a secret
it's not rocket science	it's not difficult	see eye to eye	to agree
once in a blue moon	rarely	when pigs fly	impossible
all ears	listening intently	break a leg	good luck
call it a day	declare the end	costs an arm and a leg	very expensive
couch potato	lazy person	hit the road	leave
have a blast	have fun	hit the hay	go to bed
piece of cake	easy	cat nap	short nap
it takes two to tango	requires multiple people	bed of roses	an easy situation

## Example Sentences with Idioms

Example Sentence	Meaning
That science test was a <i>piece of cake!</i>	That science test was <i>easy!</i>
<i>Have a blast!</i>	<i>Have fun!</i>
You will run a marathon <i>when pigs fly!</i>	You will <i>never</i> run a marathon!
He visits <i>once in a blue moon.</i>	He <i>rarely</i> visits.
If you ever need to talk, I'm <i>all ears.</i>	If you ever need to talk, I will <i>listen intently.</i>
<i>It's not rocket science.</i>	<i>It's not difficult.</i>
Stop being a <i>couch potato!</i> Go outside!	Stop being <i>lazy!</i> Go outside!



## Prepositional Idioms

Prepositional idioms are prepositional phrases whose meaning depends on the preposition used. A preposition is a word that explains the relation between one subject in the sentence or clause and another. Some examples of prepositions include: on, up, off, at, with, under, over, and to. Different prepositions following a single word can lead to different definitions. For example, in the chart below, “to catch” can be followed by “on” or “up”, but each preposition gives the entire phrase a unique meaning.

### Some Prepositional Idioms

Idiom	Meaning	Idiom	Meaning
to catch <b>on</b>	to understand	in favor <b>of</b>	to approve
to catch <b>up</b>	to reach someone's level	adept <b>at</b>	to be good at
to be <b>on</b> track	to be following a plan	<b>on</b> time	punctual
to be <b>off</b> track	not going as planned	native <b>to</b>	to be from the place
<b>at</b> first	in the beginning	predisposed <b>to</b>	to have prior experience
<b>at</b> last	finally	sensitive <b>to</b>	to be wary of something

## Phrasal Verbs

Phrasal verbs are phrases comprised of a verb and a preposition. The addition of the preposition alters the meaning of the verb. For example, “call” means to communicate with someone through a phone, but “call off” means to cancel. Phrasal verbs are considered prepositional idioms. Certain phrasal verbs can be separated within a sentence, meaning words can split the verb and the preposition. Some examples include “**ask out**”→ “**ask him out**” and “**cross out**”→ “**cross it out.**” Other phrasal verbs must be kept together with no words dividing the verb and preposition, such as “**look into.**”

### Some Phrasal Verbs

Idiom	Meaning	Idiom	Meaning
ask out	to ask someone on a date	grow up	to become an adult
blow up	to get angry	look into	to investigate
break out	to escape	pass out	to faint
call off	to cancel	run out	to have none left
cross out	to draw a line through	take after	to resemble someone else
dress up	to wear nice clothes	wear off	to fade

**Further Assistance:** This resource is available at [lewisuwritingcenter.wordpress.com](http://lewisuwritingcenter.wordpress.com). For more ELL resources, go to [lewisuwritingcenter.wordpress.com/job-resources](http://lewisuwritingcenter.wordpress.com/job-resources) or book an appointment with one of our ELL specialists. For more detailed help or if you have questions, visit the Writing Center located in the Lewis University Library or call 815-836-5427.

**Sources Consulted:** Education First, GrammarCheck, Merriam-Webster, Purdue University