

# THE MOST COMMON ENGLISH IDIOMS

These English idioms are extremely common in everyday conversation in the United Kingdom. You will hear them in movies and TV shows and can use them to make your English sound more like that of a native speaker.

Idiom	Meaning	Usage
A blessing in disguise	a good thing that seemed bad at first	as part of a sentence
A dime a dozen	Something common	as part of a sentence
Beat around the bush	Avoid saying what you mean, usually because it is uncomfortable	as part of a sentence
Better late than never	Better to arrive late than not to come at all	by itself

Bite the bullet

To get something over with because it is inevitable

as part of a sentence

Break a leg

Good luck

by itself

Call it a day

Stop working on something

as part of a sentence

Cut somebody some slack

Don't be so critical

as part of a sentence

Cutting corners

Doing something poorly in order to save time or money

as part of a sentence

Easy does it

Slow down

by itself

Get out of hand

Get out of control

as part of a sentence

Get something out of your system	Do the thing you've been wanting to do so you can move on	as part of a sentence
Get your act together	Work better or leave	by itself
Give someone the benefit of the doubt	Trust what someone says	as part of a sentence
Go back to the drawing board	Start over	as part of a sentence
Hang in there	Don't give up	by itself
Hit the sack	Go to sleep	as part of a sentence
It's not rocket science	It's not complicated	by itself

Let someone off the hook

To not hold someone responsible for something

as part of a sentence

Make a long story short

Tell something briefly

as part of a sentence

Miss the boat

It's too late

as part of a sentence

No pain, no gain

You have to work for what you want

by itself

On the ball

Doing a good job

as part of a sentence

Pull someone's leg

To joke with someone

as part of a sentence

Pull yourself together

Calm down

by itself

So far so good	Things are going well so far	by itself
Speak of the devil	The person we were just talking about showed up!	by itself
That's the last straw	My patience has run out	by itself
The best of both worlds	An ideal situation	as part of a sentence
Time flies when you're having fun	You don't notice how long something lasts when it's fun	by itself
To get bent out of shape	To get upset	as part of a sentence
To make matters worse	Make a problem worse	as part of a sentence
Under the weather	Sick	as part of a sentence

We'll cross that bridge when we come to it

Let's not talk about that problem right now

by itself

Wrap your head around something

Understand something complicated

as part of a sentence

You can say that again

That's true, I agree

by itself

Your guess is as good as mine

I have no idea

by itself

# COMMON ENGLISH IDIOMS & EXPRESSIONS

These English idioms are used quite regularly in the United States. You may not hear them every day, but they will be very familiar to any native English speaker. You can be confident using any of them when the context is appropriate.

Idiom	Meaning	Usage
A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush	What you have is worth more than what you might have later	by itself
A penny for your thoughts	Tell me what you're thinking	by itself
A penny saved is a penny earned	Money you save today you can spend later	by itself
A perfect storm	the worst possible situation	as part of a sentence

A picture is worth 1000 words	Better to show than tell	by itself
Actions speak louder than words	Believe what people do and not what they say	by itself
Add insult to injury	To make a bad situation worse	as part of a sentence
Barking up the wrong tree	To be mistaken, to be looking for solutions in the wrong place	as part of a sentence
Birds of a feather flock together	People who are alike are often friends (usually used negatively)	by itself
Bite off more than you can chew	Take on a project that you cannot finish	as part of a sentence
Break the ice	Make people feel more comfortable	as part of a sentence



By the skin of your teeth	Just barely	as part of a sentence
Comparing apples to oranges	Comparing two things that cannot be compared	as part of a sentence
Costs an arm and a leg	Very expensive	as part of a sentence
Do something at the drop of a hat	Do something without having planned beforehand	as part of a sentence
Do unto others as you would have them do unto you	Treat people fairly. Also known as "The Golden Rule"	by itself
Don't count your chickens before they hatch	Don't count on something good happening until it's happened.	by itself
Don't cry over spilt milk	There's no reason to complain about something that can't be fixed	by itself

Don't give up your day job	You're not very good at this	by itself
Don't put all your eggs in one basket	What you're doing is too risky	by itself
Every cloud has a silver lining	Good things come after bad things	by itself
Get a taste of your own medicine	Get treated the way you've been treating others (negative)	as part of a sentence
Give someone the cold shoulder	Ignore someone	as part of a sentence
Go on a wild goose chase	To do something pointless	as part of a sentence
Good things come to those who wait	Be patient	by itself
He has bigger fish to fry	He has bigger things to take care of than what we are talking about now	by itself

He's a chip off the old block

The son is like the father

by itself

Hit the nail on the head

Get something exactly right

by itself

Ignorance is bliss

You're better off not knowing

by itself

It ain't over till the fat lady sings

This isn't over yet

by itself

It takes one to know one

You're just as bad as I am

by itself

It's a piece of cake

It's easy

by itself

It's raining cats and dogs

It's raining hard

by itself

Kill two birds with one stone

Get two things done with a single action

by itself

Let the cat out of the bag

Give away a secret

as part of a  
sentence

Live and learn

I made a mistake

by itself

Look before you leap

Take only calculated risks

by itself

On thin ice

On probation. If you make another mistake, there will be trouble.

as part of a sentence

Once in a blue moon

Rarely

as part of a sentence

Play devil's advocate

To argue the opposite, just for the sake of argument

as part of a sentence

Put something on ice

Put a projet on hold

as part of a sentence

Rain on someone's parade

To spoil something

as part of a sentence

Saving for a rainy day

Saving money for later

as part of a  
sentence

Slow and steady wins the race

Reliability is more important than speed

by itself

Spill the beans

Give away a secret

as part of a  
sentence

Take a rain check

Postpone a plan

as part of a  
sentence

Take it with a grain of salt

Don't take it too seriously

as part of a  
sentence

The ball is in your court

It's your decision

by itself

The best thing since sliced bread

A really good invention

as part of a  
sentence

The devil is in the details	It looks good from a distance, but when you look closer, there are problems	by itself
The early bird gets the worm	The first people who arrive will get the best stuff	by itself
The elephant in the room	The big issue, the problem people are avoiding	as part of a sentence
The whole nine yards	Everything, all the way.	as part of a sentence
There are other fish in the sea	It's ok to miss this opportunity. Others will arise.	by itself
There's a method to his madness	He seems crazy but actually he's clever	by itself
There's no such thing as a free lunch	Nothing is entirely free	by itself
Throw caution to the wind	Take a risk	as part of a sentence

You can't have your cake and eat it too	You can't have everything	by itself
You can't judge a book by its cover	This person or thing may look bad, but it's good inside	by itself

## FAMILIAR ENGLISH IDIOMS & PROVERBS

These English idioms and proverbs are familiar and easily understood by native English speakers, but they are not usually used in everyday conversation. If you haven't mastered the more frequent idioms yet, they are a better place to start, but if you're already familiar with those expressions, the idioms below will further spice up your English.

Idiom	Meaning	Usage
A little learning is a dangerous thing	People who don't understand something fully are dangerous	by itself
A snowball effect	Events have momentum and build upon each other	as part of a sentence

A snowball's chance in hell	No chance at all	as part of a sentence
A stitch in time saves nine	Fix the problem now because it will get worse later	by itself
A storm in a teacup	A big fuss about a small problem	as part of a sentence
An apple a day keeps the doctor away	Apples are good for you	by itself
An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure	You can prevent a problem with little effort. Fixing it later is harder.	by itself
As right as rain	Perfect	as part of a sentence
Bolt from the blue	Something that happened without warning	as part of a sentence



Burn bridges

Destroy relationships

as part of a sentence

Calm before the storm

Something bad is coming, but right now it's calm

as part of a sentence

Come rain or shine

No matter what

as part of a sentence

Curiosity killed the cat

Stop asking questions

by itself

Cut the mustard

Do a good job

as part of a sentence

Don't beat a dead horse

Move on, this subject is over

by itself

Every dog has his day

Everyone gets a chance at least once

by itself

Familiarity breeds contempt

The better you know someone the less you like him

by itself

Fit as a fiddle

In good health

as part of a  
sentence

Fortune favours the bold

Take risks

by itself

Get a second wind

Have more energy after having been tired

as part of a  
sentence

Get wind of something

Hear news of something secret

as part of a  
sentence

Go down in flames

Fail spectacularly

as part of a  
sentence

Haste makes waste

You'll make mistakes if you rush through something

by itself

Have your head in the clouds

Not be concentrating

as part of a  
sentence

He who laughs last laughs loudest	I'll get you back for what you did	by itself
Hear something straight from the horse's mouth	Hear something from the person involved	as part of a sentence
He's not playing with a full deck	He's dumb	by itself
He's off his rocker	He's crazy	by itself
He's sitting on the fence	He can't make up his mind	by itself
It is a poor workman who blames his tools	If you can't do the job, don't blame it on others	by itself
It is always darkest before the dawn	Things are going to get better	by itself
It takes two to tango	One person alone isn't responsible. Both people are involved.	by itself

Jump on the bandwagon

Follow a trend, do what everyone else is doing

as part of a sentence

Know which way the wind is blowing

Understand the situation (usually negative)

as part of a sentence

Leave no stone unturned

Look everywhere

as part of a sentence

Let sleeping dogs lie

Stop discussing an issue

as part of a sentence

Like riding a bicycle

Something you never forget how to do

as part of a sentence

Like two peas in a pod

They're always together

as part of a sentence

Make hay while the sun shines

Take advantage of a good situation

as part of a sentence

On cloud nine	Very happy	as part of a sentence
Once bitten, twice shy	You're more cautious when you've been hurt before	by itself
Out of the frying pan and into the fire	Things are going from bad to worse	by itself
Run like the wind	Run fast	as part of a sentence
Shape up or ship out	Work better or leave	by itself
Snowed under	Busy	as part of a sentence
That ship has sailed	It's too late	by itself
The pot calling the kettle black	Someone criticizing someone else he is just as bad	as part of a sentence

There are clouds on the horizon

Trouble is coming

by itself

Those who live in glass houses shouldn't throw stones

People who are morally questionable shouldn't criticize others

by itself

Through thick and thin

In good times and in bad times

as part of a sentence

Time is money

Work quickly

by itself

Waste not, want not

Don't waste things and you'll always have enough

by itself

We see eye to eye

We agree

by itself

Weather the storm

Go through something difficult

as part of a sentence

Well begun is half done

Getting a good start is important

by itself

When it rains it pours

Everything is going wrong at once

by itself

You can catch more flies with honey than you can with vinegar

You'll get what you want by being nice

by itself

You can lead a horse to water, but you can't make him drink

You can't force someone to make the right decision

by itself

You can't make an omelet without breaking some eggs

There's always a cost to doing something

by itself