

# 100 MOST FREQUENTLY USED IDIOMS

## A Idioms

### **about to (do something)**

- to be on the point of doing something

I was about to leave when the phone rang.

### **according to (someone or something)**

- as said or told by someone, in agreement with something, in the order of something, in proportion to something

According to our teacher, there will be no class next week.  
We did everything according to the terms of our agreement.  
We will dress for the hike, according to the weather.

### **account for (something)**

- to provide an explanation or an answer for something

The bad weather accounts for the fact that few people came to the meeting.

### **after all**

- considering the fact that something happened or happens, something that is usually assumed

"You don't need to phone him. After all, he never phones you."

### **all of a sudden**

- suddenly, without advance warning

All of a sudden, it became cloudy and began to rain.

### **as a matter of fact**

- actually

"As a matter of fact, we have been to the sports stadium many times."

### **as far as**

- to the extent or degree of something

As far as I know, the movie will start in a few minutes.

### **as for**

- with regard to, concerning

"As for myself, I think that I will return home now."

### **as if**

- in the same way that something would be, that

The drink tastes as if it were made with orange juice.  
It seemed as if the whole school came to the concert.

### **as long as**

- provided that, on condition that

"As long as you promise to be careful, you can borrow my car."

### **as soon as**

- just after something, when

I phoned my friend as soon as I finished dinner.

### **as to**

- with regard to, according to

"As to your question, I will answer it tomorrow."  
The players were put into groups as to their ability.

### **as well**

- in addition, also, too

I plan to take swimming lessons this summer. I plan to take a computer course as well.

### **as well as (someone or something)**

- in addition to someone or something

"Please bring your swimming suit as well as your towel."

## ***B* Idioms**

### **back and forth**

- backwards and forwards, first one way and then the other way

The argument with the lawyer went back and forth before the judge made a decision.

### **better off**

- to be in a better situation than before

My friend would be better off if he sold his old car and bought a new one.

### **break down (something) *or* break (something) down**

- to divide something into parts, to separate something into simpler substances

We tried to break down the problem for further study.  
The sugar began to break down soon after it was swallowed.

### **break up *or* break up (something) *or* break (something) up**

- to separate, to divide into groups or pieces, to put an end to something

I hope that my favorite band does not break up.  
The students did not want to break up their groups.  
The coach decided to break the team up into small groups.

### **by the way**

- incidentally

"By the way, could you please bring your laptop computer tomorrow."

## **C Idioms**

### **carry out (something) *or* carry (something) out**

- to put something into action, to accomplish something, to do something

The scientist wanted to carry out more experiments before discussing the new medicine.

### **come on!**

- please, hurry, go faster

"Come on, I only have a few minutes before I must go."

"Come on, stop doing that."

### **come up**

- to happen unexpectedly

I will not be able to go to the party if something else comes up.

### **come up with (something)**

- to produce or find a thought or idea or answer

I tried to come up with a name for the new magazine.

## ***D* Idioms**

### **deal with (something)**

- to be concerned with something, to take action about something

We will deal with the boxes tomorrow.

## ***E* Idioms**

### **end up (doing something or going somewhere)**

- to do something that one had not planned to do, to go somewhere one had not planned to go

We ended up watching a movie last night.

We ended up going to a restaurant after the movie last night.

## ***F* Idioms**

### **figure out (someone or something) *or* figure (someone or something) out**

- to try to understand someone or something, to solve something

I finally figured out how to use the new computer software.

### **fill in (something) *or* fill (something) in**

- to write words in blank spaces

"Please fill in this form and give it to the receptionist."  
I filled the form in and gave it to the receptionist.

### **find out (something)**

- to learn or discover something

My mother is angry with me because she found out that I had quit my French class.

### **first of all**

- the very first thing

First of all, we prepared the garden and then we planted the seeds.

### **for good**

- permanently

The city plans to close the public swimming pool for good.

### **for sure**

- without doubt, certainly, surely

"I will go to the movie with you for sure next week."

## **G Idioms**

### **get back to (something)**

- to return to something

I was happy to get back to my work after my holiday.

### **get into (something)**

- to become interested or involved in something

I do not want to get into an argument with my friend.  
We will get into the details of the plan tomorrow.

### **get into (somewhere)**

- to enter somewhere

My friend wants to get into a good university.  
I bumped my head as I was getting into the car.

### **get out of (somewhere)**

- to leave somewhere, to escape from somewhere

I have an appointment and I want to get out of my house quickly.

### **get rid of (something)**

- to give or throw something away, to sell or destroy something, to make a cold or fever disappear

I bought a new television so I want to get rid of my old one.

### **get through (something)**

- to complete something, to finish something

My friend is having trouble getting through her final exams.  
I have much reading that I must get through before tomorrow.

### **go ahead**

- to begin to do something

"Let`s go ahead and start now. We can`t wait any longer."

### **go on**

- to continue

The game will probably go on for an hour after we leave.

### **go over (something)**

- to examine or review something

The accountant will go over our books tomorrow.

We plan to go over that question tomorrow.

### **go through (something)**

- to discuss something, to look at something, to do something

The teacher decided to go through the exercise before the test.

### **go with (something)**

- to choose one thing rather than another

We decided to go with the small rental car rather than the large one.

## ***H* Idioms**

### **hang out (somewhere or with someone)**

- to spend one's time with no great purpose, to spend leisure time with friends

Recently, my friend has been hanging out with a bad group of people.

### **have (something) to do with (something)**

- to be about something, to be on the subject of something, to be related to something

"The book has something to do with cooking but I am not sure if you will like it."

That problem has nothing to do with me.



### **hold on**

- to wait a minute, to stop, to wait and not hang up the phone

"Please hold on for a minute while I lock the door."

"Hold on, don't say anything, I can't hear the speaker."

## ***I* Idioms**

### **in a way**

- to a certain extent, a little, somewhat

In a way, I want to go to the new restaurant, but in a way I do not really care.

### **in case**

- if, if something should happen

I will take my umbrella in case it rains.

### **in common**

- shared together or equally, in use or ownership by all

I had nothing in common with the other members of the class.

### **in detail**

- giving all the details, item by item

The saleswoman explained the new product in detail.

### **in effect**

- for practical purposes, basically

The man's silence was in effect a way of disagreeing with the other people in the meeting.

### **in fact**

- actually, the truth is

The man has been to China before. In fact, he has been there three times.

### **in favor of (someone or something)**

- to approve or support someone or something

Everybody is in favor of the new police chief.

My company is not in favor of changing our holiday schedule.

### **in general**

- in most situations or circumstances

In general, most of the people are happy with the new manager.

### **in order to**

- for the purpose of

They have decided to close down the school for the summer in order to do some major repairs.

### **in other words**

- in a different (usually more direct) way

"In other words, if you do not finish the assignment by Wednesday, you will not pass the course."

### **in place**

- in the proper place or location

Everything in the room was in place when we arrived for the meeting.

### **in some ways**

- in some unspecified way or manner, by some unspecified means

In some ways, I know what my friend wants to say but in other ways, I do not.

### **in terms of (something)**

- with regard to something

In terms of our agreement with the other company, we are not allowed to sell the products online.

### **in time**

- with enough time to do something, within a certain time, before a time limit expires

I did not arrive home in time to meet my cousin.

The girl is working hard to finish her homework in time to go to a movie.

## ***K* Idioms**

### **keep (someone or something) in mind**

- to remember and think about someone or something

I told my friend to keep the time that I must leave for work in mind.

If I need someone to help fix my computer, I usually keep my friend in mind.

### **kind of**

- somewhat, more or less, moderately

I was kind of tired when I arrived home last night.

## ***L* Idioms**

### **look for (something)**

- to try to find something, to hunt or search for something

My friend has been looking for her credit card all morning but she cannot find it.

### **look up (something) or look (something) up**

- to search for something in a dictionary or other book

I will look up my friend's name in the telephone book.  
I looked the word up in the dictionary.

## ***M* Idioms**

### **make a difference**

- to cause a change in a situation, to change the nature of something

It does not make a difference whether our boss comes to the meeting or not.  
If I study hard this weekend, it should make a difference in my test results next week.

### **make sense**

- to seem reasonable

The manager's new proposal makes sense.

### **make sure**

- to make certain, to establish something without a doubt

I want to make sure that my friend will meet me tomorrow.

### **more or less**

- somewhat, to some extent

I more or less have decided to study business next year.

## ***N* Idioms**

### **no matter**

- regardless

No matter how hard that I try, my music teacher is never satisfied.

### **not at all**

- certainly not, absolutely not

I am not at all happy with my new computer.

## ***O* Idioms**

### **of course**

- certainly, definitely, naturally

"Of course you can use my car if you want to."

### **on the other hand**

- however, in contrast, looking at the opposite side of a matter

He is very intelligent but on the other hand he is lazy and always gets low marks at school.

### **on time**

- at the scheduled time, exactly at the correct time, punctually

Our train arrived exactly on time.

### **once again**

- again, one more time, once more

I tried once again to phone my boss at his home .

### **open to (something)**

- to be agreeable to learn or hear about new ideas or suggestions

Most members of the class were open to the teacher's ideas.  
Our boss is always open to new ideas.

## ***P* Idioms**

### **pick up (something) *or* pick (something) up**

- to get or receive something

I will pick up my dry cleaning tomorrow.  
I picked up a copy of the newspaper at the station.

### **point out (someone or something) *or* point (someone or something) out**

- to explain or call attention to someone or something

My teacher was very kind when she pointed out the mistakes that I had made.

### **put out (something) *or* put (something) out**

- to produce or make something (a product or brochure or report or CD or movie or paper)

The company puts out a newsletter every month for the employees.

## **R Idioms**

### **regardless of (something)**

- without considering or thinking about something, without regard to something, in spite of something

Regardless of the weather, we are going to go fishing tomorrow morning.

### **right away**

- immediately

"I forgot my book at home but I will go and get it right away."

### **rule out (someone or something) or rule (someone or something) out**

- to decide against or eliminate someone or something

The police ruled out the man as a possible bank robber.  
We decided to rule Monday out as the day to have our meeting.

### **run into (something - a fact or trouble or problems or difficulty)**

- to experience something, to encounter something

The mechanic ran into trouble when he was fixing my car.  
I ran into some interesting facts while I was researching my essay.

## **S Idioms**

### **set up (something) or set (something) up**

- to establish something, to provide the money for something

The newspaper company provided the money to set up the new travel magazine.

The company set up a unique system to test the new product.

### **show up**

- to appear, to arrive, to be present

"What time did your friend show up for the party?"

### **so far**

- until now

So far, no one has entered the speech contest at the television station.

### **so to speak**

- as one might or could say, this is one way to say something

We had a good time at the restaurant, so to speak, although the service was not very good.

### **sort of (something)**

- to be almost something, to be similar to something, to be not quite something

"Did you finish cleaning the kitchen?"

"Sort of, but not really."

### **stick with (something)**

- to continue doing something, to not quit something

The boy has been able to stick with his music lessons since he was a child.

## ***T* Idioms**



**take advantage of (someone or something)**

- to use someone or something for one's own benefit

We took advantage of the beautiful weather and went to the beach.

**take care of (someone or something)**

- to look after or give attention to someone or something

It is good to take care of your health or you will become sick.

**take out (something) or take (something) out**

- to remove something from somewhere

The teacher told us to take out our books.  
I took out some onions from the refrigerator.

**take over (something) or take (something) over**

- to take control of something, to take command of something

The large company wants to take over the small company in our town.

**take place**

- to happen, to occur

The soccer game took place on the coldest day of the year.

**to the extent that**

- to the degree that, in so far as

I plan to provide information about the new company policy, to the extent that I am familiar with it.

**turn in (something) or turn (something) in**

- to give something to someone, to hand something to someone

I arrived at school early so that I could turn in my essay.

### **turn out**

- to be found or known, to prove to be true

It turned out that more people came to the meeting than we had expected.

## ***U* Idioms**

### **up to**

- until, as far as a certain point, approaching a certain point

Up to last week, I had never been inside a bowling alley.  
There were probably up to thirty people at the meeting.

### **up to (someone) to decide (something) or do (something)**

- to be responsible to choose or decide something

It is up to the company president to decide when the meeting will start.

### **used to (something)**

- accustomed to something

My friend is not used to living in such a big city.

## ***W* Idioms**

### **with respect to (something)**

- referring to something, concerning something

I do not know what the company will do with respect to the old computer system.

### **work out**

- to end successfully

I hope that everything will work out for my friend when she moves next month.

## **How These Idioms Were Chosen**

Which idioms to learn and which idioms to teach is important for both students and teachers. While this decision can be made in a random manner, a better way is to examine a specific collection of English material and decide which idioms are the most frequently found. A specific collection of material is called a corpus (the plural is corpora).

There are many corpora available. These include the Collins Cobuild Corpus in the United Kingdom and the Michigan Corpus of Academic Spoken English (MICASE) in the United States. The MICASE corpus is a collection of recorded speech from the University of Michigan in the United States. The material includes lectures, casual office discussions and group study sessions in various faculties of the university. The material is taken from this particular style of naturally occurring academic English. Different idioms will be used in a novel or a news report or a scientific paper. Therefore, any list of idioms will be different depending on the English corpus that is used to make that list. However, most corpora contain idioms that are common to all corpora and any list will include idioms that are found in all language material.

The MICASE corpus is easily available to anyone with Internet access and it is the corpus which was used to produce this list of the *100 Most Frequently Used English Idioms*. These idioms are the most frequent idioms that are found in an academic setting in the United States.