



25 ILLUSTRATED  
English idioms



# Introduction

Hello!

Did you know there are an estimated 25,000 idiomatic expressions in English?

That's a **ton** (you'll learn that idiom here).

So, it's vital to learn idioms if you want to understand native English speakers and reach a high level of English. That's why there's a huge list of idioms on English-efl's website.

We have also created images of many of the idioms because sometimes a picture can help you remember an idiom or at least understand some of the vocabulary in the expression.

Now, before we go any further, let's review what an idiom is:

***An idiom is a phrase (a group of words) whose meaning is different than each of the words considered separately.***

For example, "keep your pants on" is an idiom because the phrase means "stay calm and wait patiently" instead of "don't remove your pants."

At the end of this ebook, you'll find an index listing the 25 idiomatic expressions included, with links back to the website so you can read even more sentence examples. Reading idioms in context is one of the best ways to understand and remember them.

I hope you enjoy this book and find it useful!

Best wishes,

# Idiom: A man (woman) of few words



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## A MAN OF FEW WORDS

Someone who doesn't talk a lot, only when there is something important to say.

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**Jon is a man of few words but when he speaks at meetings everyone is quiet and listens.**

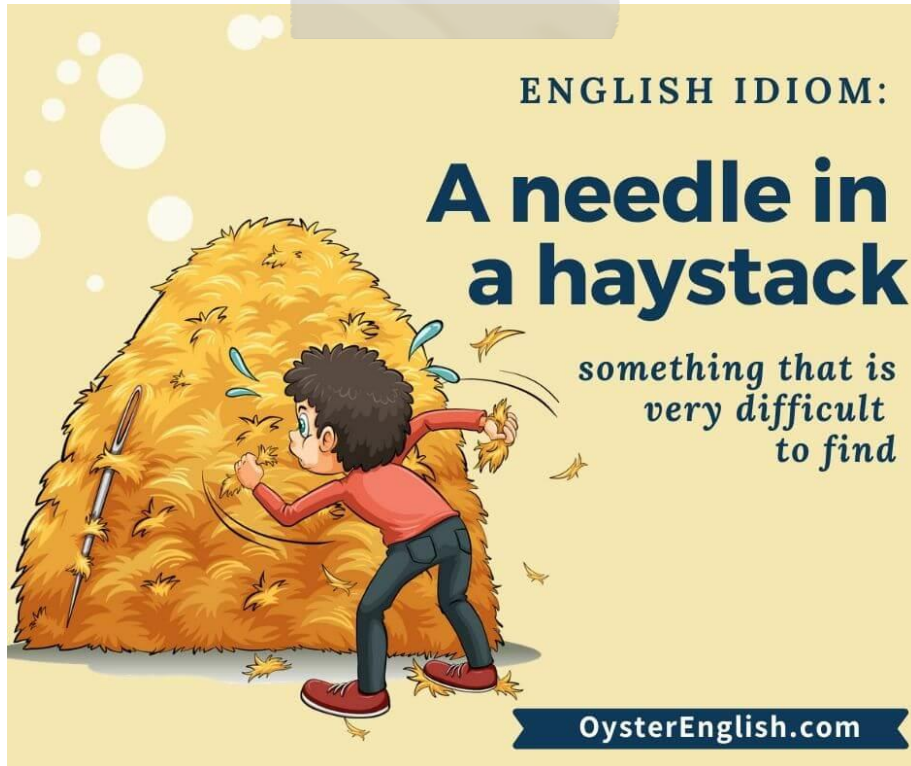
### Meaning

A person who does not talk a lot, only when he or she has something important to say.

### Example Sentences

- My father isn't shy at all—he's just *a man of few words*.
- I prefer to be with *a man of few words* than with someone who enjoys listening to himself talk all day.
- My grandfather loved you. He's *a man of few words* but his smile made his feelings for you very clear.
- My dad won't shut up but my mother's *a woman of few words*.
- My girlfriend is *a woman of few words* so when she talks, everyone stops and listens carefully.
- The smartest person in the room is often *a man of few words*.
- She's *a woman of few words* so expect a lot of silence on the ride to the retreat site.
- My assistant is *a woman of few words* but she gets things done.

# Idiom: A needle in a haystack



## Meaning

Something that is very difficult to find (especially because the area you must search is so large).

## Example Sentences

- I looked everywhere for my earring at the beach but it was like trying to find *a needle in a haystack*.
- We've been looking for an apartment in Geneva for six weeks and it's like finding *a needle in a haystack*.
- We honestly spent two hours looking for you at the music festival but it was like trying to find *a needle in a haystack*.
- There's an error somewhere in our sales log and it's *a needle in a haystack*. We can't find it.
- Rescue teams searched the canyon for three days but locating the missing hikers was like finding *a needle in a haystack*.
- Your basement is a mess! Finding your high school yearbook will be like locating *a needle in a haystack*.
- I can't find my spare key. It's here somewhere but it's like looking for *a needle in a haystack* so I'll just have a duplicate key made tomorrow.

# Idiom: A nose for something



OysterEnglish.com

**idiom:**  
**a nose for something**

to have a natural ability to find or recognize something

*Our boss has a nose for knowing when we are goofing off and not working hard.*

## Meaning

To have a talent or ability for finding or recognizing something.

## Example Sentences

- You have *a good nose for bargains* whenever we go shopping.
- I don't know. My mother has *a nose for knowing when I skip class* and she won't hesitate to tell your mother if we're absent.
- Model scouts have *a good nose for finding* people who have a certain look that will photograph well.
- You used to have *a nose for the best new artists*. What happened?
- Put Thelma on the project. She has *a nose for procuring costumes* for our plays.
- Our teenage daughter has *a nose for older boys* who get into trouble.
- Award-winning journalists not only have *a nose for important topics* but they also use storytelling to make the news interesting.
- My girlfriend has *a nose for knowing when I talk to any other girl*.

# Idiom: A bad hair day



## Meanings

1. A bad day when many things seem to go wrong.
2. A day when you can't style your hair well and this makes you feel unattractive.

## Example Sentences

- Yesterday, my mom was having *a bad hair day* so I decided to wait to show her my report card this evening.
- Sarah's crying because she's having *a bad hair day*. First, she forgot about the manager's meeting and second, she prepared the report for the wrong client.
- Sorry, I didn't go to your party last night. I was having *a bad hair day* and decided to stay home and go to bed early.
- I'm having *a real bad hair day*. When I got in the car, I noticed I was wearing my pajamas and I had to go back into my house and change into my work pants. As a result, I was 20 minutes late.
- I just put my hair up in a ponytail every time I have *a bad hair day*.
- Whenever I'm having *a bad hair day*, I just throw on a baseball cap and get going anyhow.
- He's having *a bad hair day* even though he's bald.

# Idiom: Boxed in / into

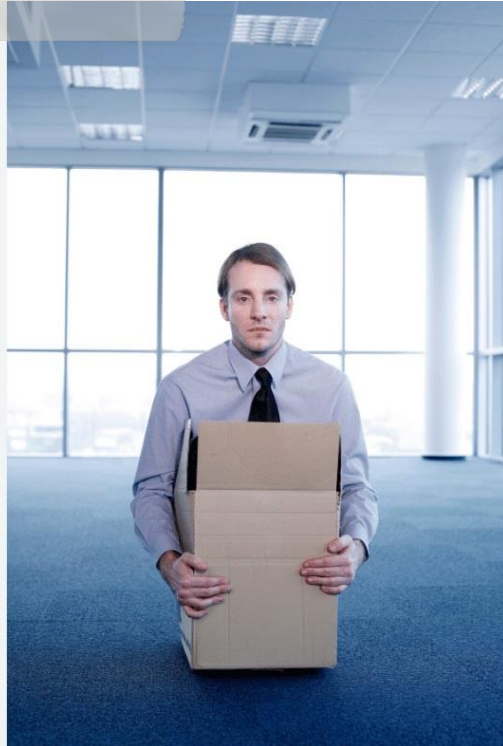


## IDIOM: BOXED IN

Feeling restricted or stuck due to one's limited options

Lewis felt **boxed in** at his company with no possibility for advancement unless he went back to school to get an MBA.

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## Meaning

Feeling restricted or stuck because of one's limited options.

## Example Sentences

- Sandra felt *boxed in* after having her third child because she couldn't afford childcare.
- A month after I got engaged, I started to feel really *boxed into* a boring family life and realized I wasn't quite ready for marriage.
- Don't specify a salary requirement before a job offer or you could get *boxed into* a lower figure than you could negotiate once they decide they really want to hire you.
- I'm not *boxed in* as a corporate lawyer with a law degree! I could go into teaching, writing or even be a producer for a legal program.
- I used to feel *boxed in* as a wedding photographer until I joined Instagram and built a wider audience for my portrait photography.
- I'm not moving back to my hometown after graduation because I'd feel so *boxed in* living in a small town with few things to do.
- I wish I'd never gone to college. Now I'm *boxed into* working in a job I hate until I pay back my \$60,000 in student loans.

# Idiom: One's ducks in a row



## Meaning

Get well prepared or organized for something that's going to happen.

## Example Sentences

- I wish we could join you but we must *get our ducks in a row* before our move this weekend.
- Too bad you didn't *have your ducks in a row* before you quit your job.
- I realized my prognosis was not very good when my doctor recommended I *get my ducks in a row* before my operation.
- Why didn't you *have your ducks in a row* before your retirement?
- I've been trying to *get my ducks in a row* for the past year so I can apply for my US citizenship.
- Don't worry, your *ducks are in a row* and I know you'll pass the bar.
- Let's meet on Tuesday to make sure our *ducks are in a row* before the product launch.
- Since the weather forecast wasn't great, we *got our ducks in a row* and reserved a nice indoor venue for the luncheon.

# Idiom: Hot potato



## Meaning

A difficult situation or problem that people don't agree on and don't want to handle.

## Example Sentences

- In the USA, gun control remains *a hot potato* in politics—even after mass shootings at schools.
- Another *hot potato* in US politics is whether to keep abortion legal.
- Raising salaries for non-managerial staff has become *a hot potato* at my office.
- Mediterranean migrants are Europe's *hot potato*.
- President Trump's trade wars are becoming *a hot potato* for farmers in several states who are negatively affected by tariff wars with foreign trading partners.
- Immigration is *a real hot potato* in the United States today since the President declared it a national emergency.
- In many places in the world, health care is considered a fundamental right but it's another *hot potato* in American politics.

# Idiom: Talk past each other



## Meaning

A situation where two or more people talk about different subjects while believing they are talking about the same thing.

## Example Sentences

- In American politics the left and the right simply *talk past each other* without having any real dialogue.
- I know my parents' marriage is going to end in divorce—they constantly *talk past each other*.
- Our company brought in an outside expert who found we were *talking past our customers* rather than having real communication.
- It's important for parents to try to improve communication with their teenagers because it's very easy to *talk past one another*.
- I thought there was agreement between us but we were merely *talking past each other*.
- I suddenly realized my boss and I were *talking past each other* when we sat down to evaluate my request for a raise.
- With such huge differences in opinions on immigration, it's not surprising everyone's *talking past each other*.
- My ex-boyfriend and I always *talked past each other* when discussing religion because we saw the concept very differently.

# Idiom: A little bird told me



## Meaning

This is used to say that you got information from someone but you are not going to say who that person is.

## Example Sentences

- Guess what? *A little bird told me* that we are having a pop quiz today in Mrs. Green's class.
- *A little bird told me* that it's your 50th birthday tomorrow so I wanted to call and wish you a very happy day.
- A: "So how did you know that Stephen and I are separated?"  
B: "Well, let's just say that *a little bird told me.*"
- *A little bird always seems to tell my mother* my personal stuff and I'm wondering whether that little bird is my little sister.
- *A little bird told me* that our company is in huge financial trouble but please don't tell anyone else about it.
- I've tried as hard as I can to find out the source of this rumor but Jessica will only say that *a little bird told her so.*
- *A little bird told me* that you're going to have a baby this spring. Congratulations!
- Either *a little bird told my girlfriend* that I've been talking to Shelly or she's been secretly reading my phone messages again.

# Idiom: Apple of someone's eye



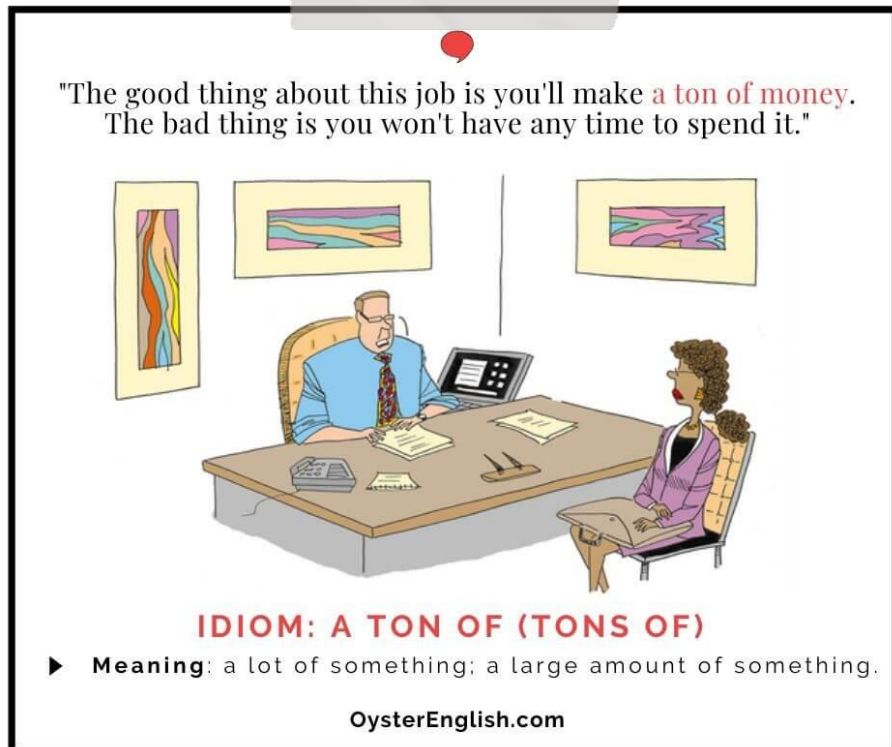
## Meaning

- Someone or something that is very important to someone.
- Someone or something that someone likes very much.

## Example Sentences

- His only son was the *apple of his eye*.
- My brother loves his wife but his Ducati motorcycle is the real *apple of his eye*.
- I know I shouldn't pick favorites but my youngest daughter is the *apple of my eye*.
- My father is an avid gardener and his orchids are the *apples of his eye*.
- My parents' favorite family member is our dog. She's the *apple of their eye* because she gives them love and doesn't ask for money.
- I used to be the *apple of my teacher's eye* until he caught me cheating on a quiz.
- My mother never liked me very much but I was the *apple of my grandmother's eye*.

# Idiom: A ton of / tons of something



## Meaning

A ton is a unit of measurement that is used to weigh very heavy things.  
1 ton = 2,000 pounds (910 kilograms).

The idiom is used to emphasize or exaggerate the amount of something.

## Example Sentences

- Gross! I hate it when girls wear *tons of makeup!*
- You must've gotten *a ton of sun* at the beach—you're so tan.
- Why do I always get *a ton of homework* when the weather's nice?
- My husband always has a *ton of excuses* why he can't get home before 8 PM.
- Bleh! This sandwich is terrible. They put *a ton of mayonnaise* in the tuna salad.
- She drank *tons of wine* at Happy Hour and passed out at the bar.
- All I care about is getting *tons of sleep* this weekend! I'm exhausted.
- My kitchen has *a ton of ants* so I'm calling the exterminator.

# Idiom: Kick in

● I'm afraid the policy won't kick in in the next 30 seconds. ●



## IDIOM: KICK IN

► **Definition:** to start to operate or become effective.

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## Meaning

- 1) To start to operate or become effective.
- 2) To contribute something (especially money).

## Example Sentences

- It took weeks for the antidepressant to finally *kick in* but I started to feel much better when it did.
- The wine started to *kick in* after the second glass and Michelle finally began to relax.
- The excitement still hasn't *kicked in* that I won the tournament. I'm still in shock.
- My roommates and I each *kicked in* \$3,500 so we could buy a low mileage used car and share it.
- I'll *kick in* a Caesar salad for the potluck dinner and some French bread as well.
- My boss—who makes ten times more than anyone else—always *kicks in* the least amount of money for our office celebrations.
- If you can *kick in* even 30% of the cost, I'll pay the rest.

# Idiom: Scare the pants off



## Meaning

To frighten someone a lot.

## Example Sentences

- Thunderstorms *scare the pants off* my children and my dogs too.
- Ugh! My girlfriend sometimes wears so much makeup *she scares the pants off* me.
- Sky diving *scared the pants off* me and I'm never going to do it again.
- Turkish cab drivers *scare the pants off* me. Sometimes they don't even stop at traffic lights!
- Speaking in public really *scares the pants off* me so I avoid it as much as I can
- When I turned on the light and my cat was staring me in the face it *scared the pants off* me.
- My little brother likes to jump out from behind things and *scare the pants off* everyone.
- I *scared the pants off* my dad when I tried to sneak in the house in the middle of the night.

# Idiom: Make off with something

## Meaning

To steal or take something you shouldn't.

## Example Sentences

- I had a party Friday night and one of the guests *made off with several of my bracelets*.
- We *made off with an extra goody bag* at the party when my friend's mother wasn't looking.
- I've had to chain the pens to the counter because of our customers keep *making off with them*.
- Call the police! Someone just *made off with my car!*
- If our employees keep *making off with office supplies*, we're going to have to keep the supply room locked.
- Here you go—have one of these brownies I *made off with* from the board meeting.
- Ugh. My boss *made off with the report* before I had a chance to proofread it.
- We have to give out napkins and utensils after purchase rather than keep them out because customers *make off with much more* than they need.

(IDIOM) MAKE OFF WITH SOMETHING:  
To steal something

My friends each **made off with jewelry** from the mall.  
I'll never shop with them again.



# Idiom: Take to someone

## Meaning

To start to like someone (or doing something).

## Example Sentences

- We are a perfect match but believe it or not, my husband and I didn't *take to each other* the first time we met.
- Wow! You must have really *taken to running* if you're planning on doing a marathon.
- My children seem to have *taken to college* very well. In fact, they're having so much fun they never call me anymore.
- If you don't take to the contact lenses, please come back and we'll find another solution.
- As a country girl, I'm surprised how well *you've taken to New York*.
- I love my new job but I haven't *taken to many of my colleagues*. Most have been unfriendly, unhelpful and even rude!
- We're absolutely delighted our kids have *taken to their new nanny*.
- I only lived in Seattle for six months because I couldn't *take to the rainy weather* there. It was so gray and depressing all the time.
- I never dreamed I'd *take to skydiving* but I love it.

"Don't worry, Skeeter, the Big Guy is really gonna to **take to you**."

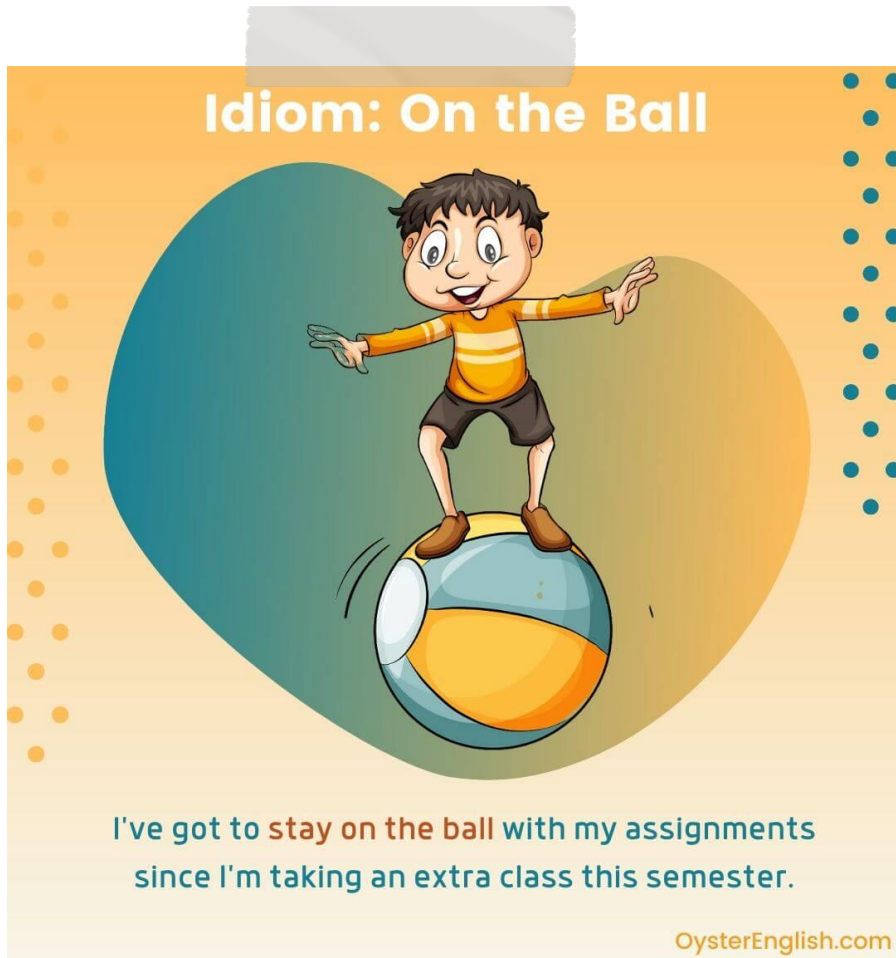


**IDIOM: TAKE TO SOMEONE / SOMETHING**

► **Meaning:** to start to like someone (or doing something).

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# Idiom: On the ball



## Meaning

- To be alert, focused and able to react to something quickly.
- To be competent and handle something effectively.

## Example Sentences

- My assistant is amazing—he's always *on the ball* noticing mistakes and offering valuable suggestions.
- Is there something going on that I should know about? Normally, you're always *on the ball* but you've made three errors already today!
- It's hard to stay *on the ball* when you've got a newborn infant and are sleep deprived.
- I don't know how you can have a beer at lunch—I'd never be able to stay *on the ball* at work after drinking alcohol.
- Thanks to Mary staying *on the ball* with the inventory she noticed we need to purchase more parts in order to meet January's orders.
- The students in my advanced placement classes are really *on the ball* so I have to be careful not to make any mistakes while I'm teaching.
- Please stay *on the ball* with this client—we really need to keep the contract with this company.

# Idiom: Nail something down



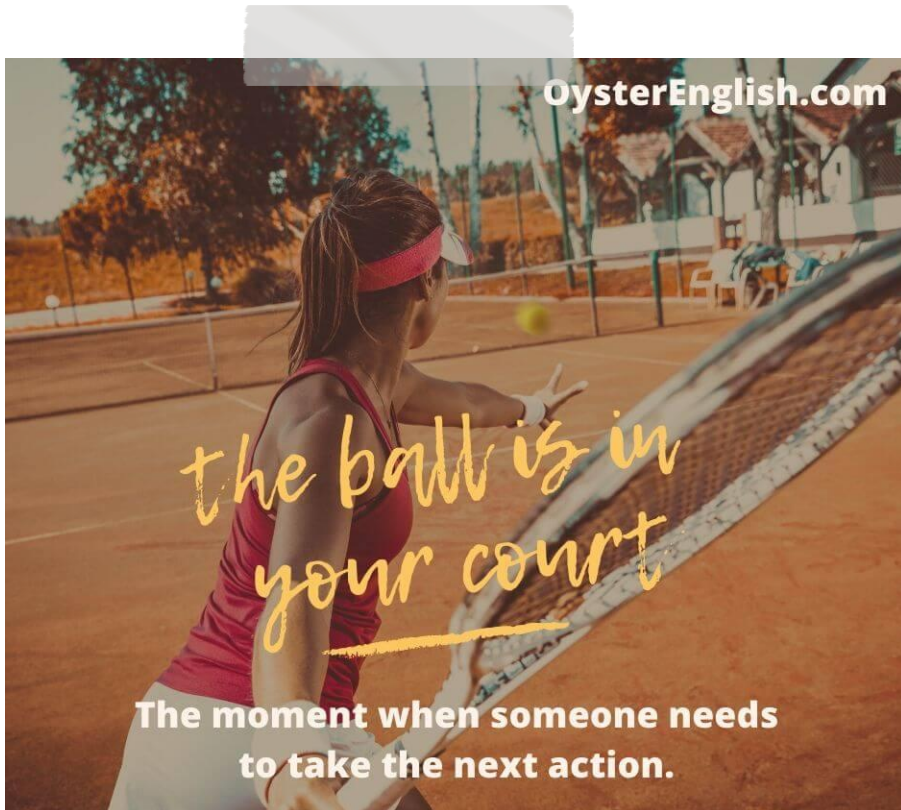
## Meaning

To determine or make an agreement about something such as a time, date, amount, price, terms, etc.

## Example Sentences

- We've got to *nail down the dates* for our vacation and start making hotel and airline reservations this weekend.
- I was able to *nail down an interview* with the governor for Friday afternoon.
- We absolutely must *nail down a time to talk tomorrow* before the meeting. Are you free at 2:00 pm?
- I was never able to *nail down a fair price* for my painting so I refused to sell it.
- Yesterday's meeting was productive. We *nailed down the details* for the fundraising gala and divided up the duties with due dates.
- I hate it when someone tries to *nail me down to a decision* before I fully understand what the agreement involves.
- Please tell me as soon as you *nail down the date* for your wedding so we can make sure we can attend.
- How were you able to *nail down a face-to-face meeting* with George Clooney?

# Idiom: The ball is in someone's court



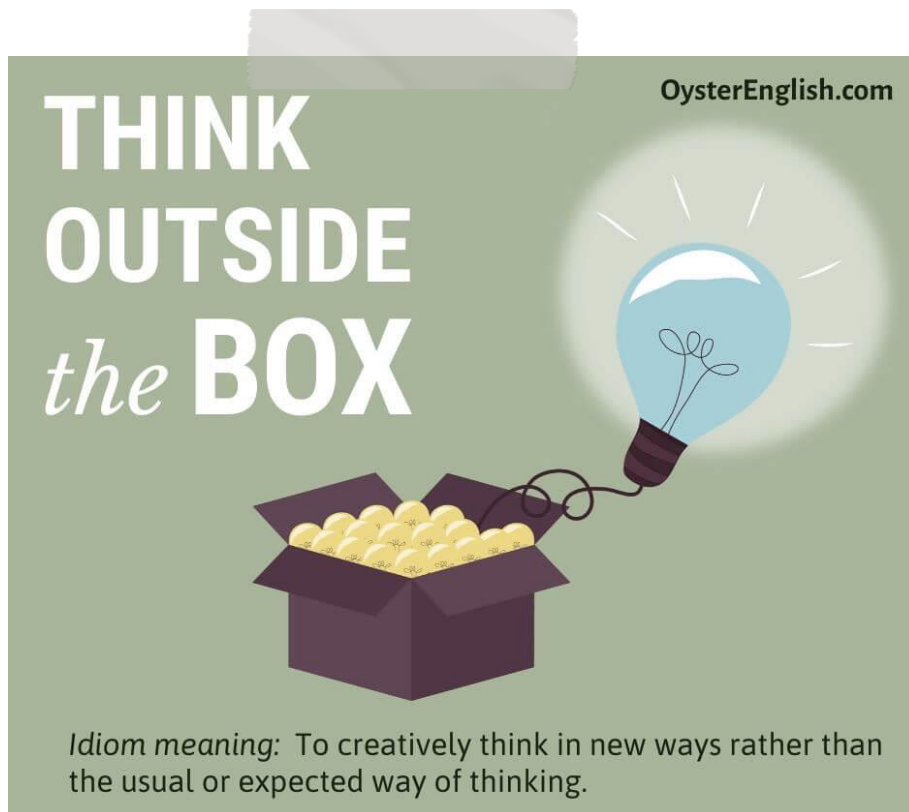
## Meaning

The moment when someone has the responsibility of taking the next action or making the next decision.

## Example Sentences

- I filled out the application and provided all the information they asked for so now *the ball's in their court* and all I can do is wait.
- I sent the agreement over for them to sign so *the ball is now in their court*.
- I called the girl I met in a bar last night and left a message. *The ball's in her court now*.
- We have approved the invoice so *the ball is now in the finance department's court* so you might want to contact them directly.
- I must admit *the ball was in my court* and I didn't respond in time so I'll have to reapply for the program next year.
- I'm sorry but *the ball is not in my court*. I can't confirm any speakers until we have firm dates for the conference.
- The sale ends this Sunday. Don't miss it, *the ball is in your court!*

# Idiom: Think outside the box



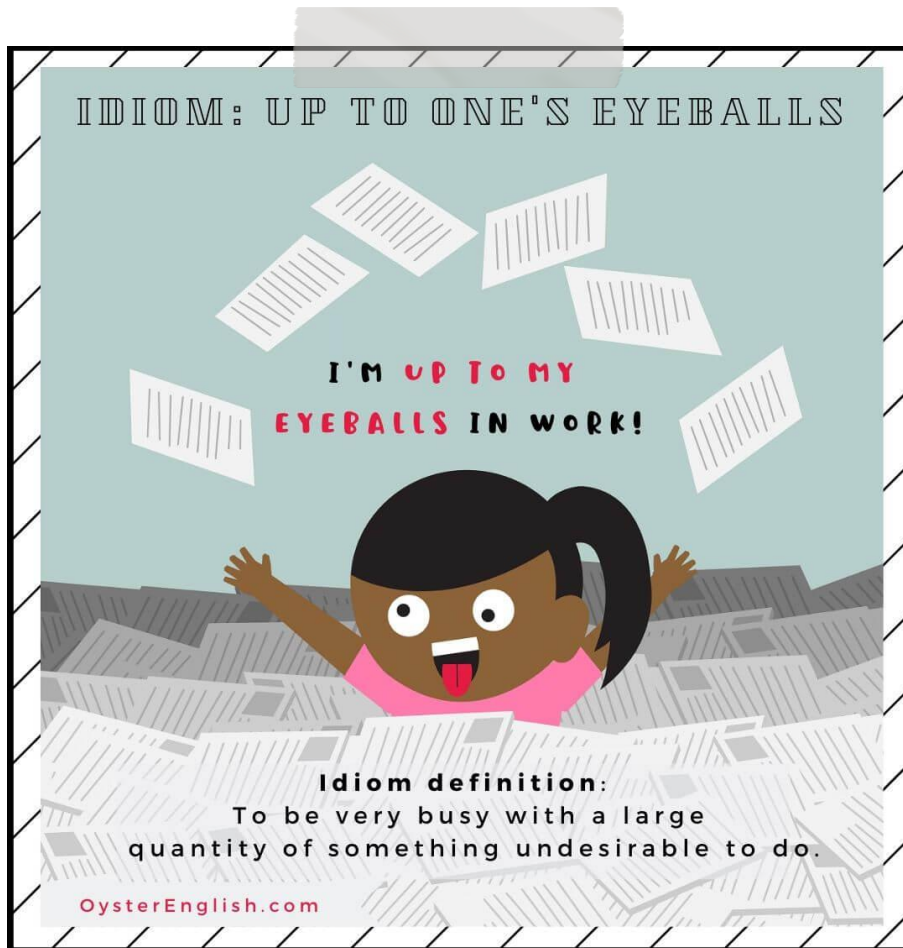
## Meaning

To creatively think in new ways rather than the usual or expected way of thinking.

## Example Sentences

- Our company encourages *thinking outside the box* by allowing us to work on whatever we want every Thursday afternoon.
- Scheduling walking meetings rather than sitting around a table is a good example of how corporate America started *thinking outside the box* about group discussions.
- If Apple hadn't *thought outside the box*, we'd probably still be using flip phones and carrying MP3 players.
- Talk about literally *thinking outside the box*! Ebay's new augmented reality feature helps sellers determine which size U.S. Postal Service Flat Rate Box will best fit their items.
- Some of the best inventions have come from someone taking a regular product and adapting it by *thinking outside the box*.
- We've hired a consultant to help us foster activities that will help our employees *think outside the box*.
- Parents who home school their children often *think outside the box* when creating educational activities.

# Idiom: Up to one's eyeballs



## Meaning

To be very busy with a large quantity of something undesirable to do.

## Example Sentences

- We've been using our credit cards so much we're now *up to our eyes in debt*.
- If you don't do wash again this weekend you'll be *up to your eyeballs in laundry*.
- I'm taking an English literature class so I'm *up to my eyes in reading* this semester.
- We're *up to our eyeballs* in back orders since our supplier had a production problem.
- I really hope we won't be *up to our eyes in last minute registrations* but I'm sure that will be the case again this year.
- My children were *up to their eyeballs in homework* this year so I'm letting them relax and do sports this summer.
- Don't make a reservation at that hotel. I looked at their TripAdvisor review and they're *up to their eyeballs in complaints*.
- I'm *up to my eyeballs in papers* to grade so unfortunately, I can't join you this evening.

# Idiom: A drop in the bucket

We all got a \$100 bonus but that's a drop in the bucket compared to what the management team got.



**Idiom: a drop in the bucket**

## Meaning

a very small or unimportant amount, especially when compared to something else.

## Example Sentences

- For years businesses have dumped toxic waste into the ocean thinking it was just *a drop in the bucket* but that behavior has destroyed many ecosystems.
- A \$30 donation may seem like *a drop in the bucket* but Wikipedia says if everyone donated that amount, their fundraising would be over in just one hour.
- I raked leaves all afternoon but I know it's just *a drop in the bucket* and the lawn will be covered again tomorrow.
- My company made a million dollars this year but that's *a drop in the bucket* compared to other businesses in the industry.
- The bake sale raised only *a drop in the bucket* of what's needed to buy the new football uniforms.
- "Two cans of beer at lunch?" "Yes. That's actually just *a drop in the bucket* of what I usually drink."
- The number of sit ups and pull ups you did today are just *a drop in the bucket* of what you'll be doing in future workouts.

# Idiom: One's head in the sand



## Meaning

To ignore or refuse to think about a problem or something unpleasant.

Note: This idiom is often used as “have” or “bury” one’s head in the sand.

## Example Sentences

- You cannot *keep your head buried in the sand* much longer—there isn't enough money to pay our employees' salaries next month.
- Everyone *had their head in the sand* about Sandy's binge drinking until she came to church and passed out in front of the whole congregation.
- When his wife left him for another man, *he buried his head in the sand* and didn't remove his wedding band for three months.
- Dad I'm begging you to stop *burying your head in the sand!* The mole on your arm is growing and you need the doctor to have a look at it immediately!
- Every day he throws his bills in a drawer in his desk. *He's got his head completely buried in the sand* and his credit history will be ruined.
- Stop *burying your head in the sand!* Even if you don't tell your parents you were expelled, they're going to find out soon and then they'll be even more angry.
- Her ex-boyfriend blocked her on Facebook a month ago but she *has her head buried in the sand* and refuses to stop calling him.

# Idiom: Wear your heart on your sleeve



**WEAR YOUR heart ON YOUR SLEEVE**

**Meaning:** To show your feelings openly.

*Jerome was not ashamed to wear his heart on his sleeve after just a few dates but it scared Sarah because she'd just ended a long-term relationship.*

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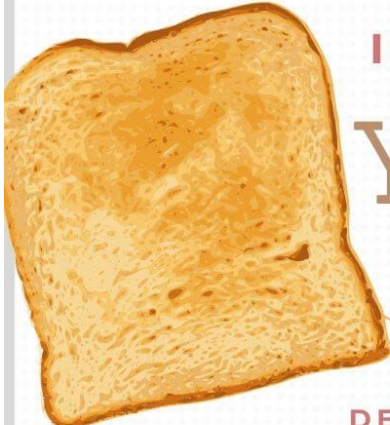
## Meaning

To show your feelings openly.

## Example Sentences

- My father was raised to be a tough guy so he could never *wear his heart on his sleeve*.
- Sometimes in business it's not great to *wear your heart on your sleeve*.
- You'd never be good a poker player. You always *wear your heart on your sleeve*.
- When I'm in love, it's impossible for me not to *wear my heart on my sleeve*.
- My advice is *not to wear your heart on your sleeve* so soon or you might scare this woman away.
- I'm not going to wait forever for a guy to *wear his heart on his sleeve*. If he likes me, he should show it and not play games.

# Idiom: You're toast (to be toast)



**IDIOM**

## YOU'RE TOAST

**DEFINITION:**  
You're in trouble.

**EXAMPLE:**  
You're toast when your mom discovers you ruined her silk blouse.

OysterEnglish.com

## Meaning

You're in trouble or have a big problem.

## Example Sentences

- *We're toast* if the teacher notices we skipped class today.
- *You're toast* if you fail the exam and lose your scholarship.
- *I'm toast* when my parents see everything that I've charged on their credit card this month.
- *We're toast* if we don't make it to the airport in time to catch our flight.
- I thought I *was toast* when I arrived late at the meeting but the speaker also hadn't arrived yet so I didn't miss anything.
- This is your last warning—one more missed class and *you're toast*.
- There're so many orders to fill, *we're toast*. Call Manpower to see if they can send out a temporary employee to help us.
- What are you doing playing video games? *You're toast* if mom and dad see you haven't finished your homework yet.

# Idiom: It's / that's a wrap



## Meaning

A phrase used to say that something is finished or complete.

## Example Sentences

- After a long day of taking pictures wearing various bikinis, the photographer told the model *it was a wrap* and she could get dressed.
- We're not sure if *it's a wrap* or if we may have one more season of the show.
- Let's do the scene again. *It's not a wrap* until I say so!
- I think after we do the next interview the show *will be a wrap*.
- And with that final shot, *that's a wrap* on one of the most successful basketball careers of any player in the NBA.
- And...*that's a wrap!* Congratulations! We're done filming and you can all go home.
- We're hoping *that's a wrap* but the producer makes the final decision about the show.