

Familiar English Idioms & Proverbs

Common English Sayings and What They Mean

Idiom: a set of words that has a meaning to a group of people that may not be obvious to others based solely on the meanings of the words themselves

Expression: a word or phrase used to convey an idea

Saying or Proverb: a short, commonly known expression which generally offers advice or wisdom

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 stitch in time saves nine.	Fix the problem now because it will get worse later	by itself
a tempest 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

Idiom	Meaning	Usage
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
hear something straight from the horse's mouth	Hear something from the person involved	as part of a sentence

Idiom	Meaning	Usage
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 make excuses	by itself
It is always darkest before the dawn.	Things are going to get better	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 or by itself
Let sleeping dogs lie.	Stop discussing an issue that isn't pressing	as part of a sentence or by itself
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 or by itself
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

Idiom	Meaning	Usage
Run like the wind.	Run fast	as part of a sentence or by itself
Shape up or ship out.	Work better or leave	by itself
snowed under	Busy	as part of a sentence
Sooner begun is half done.	Getting started on something sooner is best	by itself
That ship has sailed,	It's too late	by itself
the pot calling the kettle black	Someone criticizing someone else when he is the same way	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

Idiom	Meaning	Usage
You can catch more flies with honey than you can with vinegar.	You're more likely to 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