

In the Name of God
The Most Compassionate, the Most Merciful

High-frequency
English Idioms
for
EFL Learners

By

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Introduction

Idioms are groups of words whose meaning is not the same as the combination of the meaning of the individual words in it. So, *can't make head nor tail of something* has nothing to do with the literal meaning of 'head' or 'tail'. These idiomatic phrases which are frequently used in both written and spoken English cause lots of problems for English language learners and therefore need a special focus and treatment in EFL/ESL classes.

How the book is organized?

In *High-frequency English Idioms for EFL Learners* 630 idioms are introduced in 35 units. After each idiom is defined, it is used in several sentences to give the learner a chance to see how these idioms are used in context. To reinforce the learning, the 18 idioms in each unit are used in three different types of exercises. In addition to this, after five units a review is included to provide further practice and testing.

Different dictionaries do not agree on the basic forms of idiomatic phrases. In this book the forms of idioms, i.e. the use of words such as *one, you, somebody, something, etc.* as well as the spelling are exactly the same as we find them in *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary, 8th Edition*. At the beginning of each unit, the 18 idioms of the unit are written in alphabetical order and the main word of each entry is put in boldface type to help the learners find the idioms in their dictionary under the bold word. Whenever an idiom has more than one sense, only the first and more frequent meaning is taught. At the end of the book, two idiom finder indexes are included to show a) in which unit the idiom is used, b) to help the learners find the idiom easily in their dictionary. If the learner only remembers that the idiom he wants has the word, 'carpet' in it, they can just look up 'carpet' in phrase finder to find the intended idiom and the unit in which it is practised.

Tips for Teachers

- The meaning of some idioms such as *I take my hat to sb; look daggers at sb; draw a blank; toe the line, etc.* may be demonstrated in different ways without giving their L₁ equivalent.
- Some idioms such as *beat around/about the bush; learn the ropes, etc.* have stories behind them. In this case the students will need more information or world knowledge. Encourage the learners to use the internet and other sources to find more stories related to the idioms they learn.
- The examples in which the idioms are used illustrate their meaning much better than the definitions. Help the students get the meaning of the idioms even if they cannot come up with acceptable L₁ equivalents for them.
- Ask the students to find their own examples for the idioms they learn.
- Recommend readings, in which students may come across some of the idioms they learn.
- Encourage the students not to decide about and write down the L₁ equivalents of the idioms the first time they read them in the book. After doing the exercises and seeing the idioms in several sentences, they will have a better sense of the idioms and will be in a better position to decide about their L₁ equivalents.
- The learners should not write down the meaning of the new words and idioms on their books while they are studying the units. Ask them to write their notes on a piece of paper or a notebook in the class and then at home copy their notes and correct answers for the exercises using the page at the end of each unit which is designed for this purpose.

Unit 1

a feather in your cap

be at your wits' end

be in/get into hot water

catch sb red-handed

charity begins at home

draw a blank

every dog has his/its day

get in/be on the ground floor

hammer and tongs

high and low

in full swing

lay/put your cards on the table

lose heart

mind your own business

take the plunge

take the words right out of sb's mouth

throw a (monkey) wrench in/into sth

toe the line

a feather in your cap an action that you can be proud of *It's a real feather in our cap to be representing our country in this contest. | So you topped the sales this month, that must be a feather in your cap.*

be at your wits' end to be so worried by a problem that you do not know what to do next *I can't pay the bills, the bank won't lend me any money, and I don't know what to do. I'm at my wits' end. | Kelvin says he's been trying to get tickets for the game all day, but he's at his wits' end. Nobody's got any left.*

be in/get into hot water to be in or get into trouble *The new clerk was in hot water because she forgot to ask for a receipt for the money. | This sort of behaviour will get him in hot water.*

catch sb red-handed to catch sb in the act of doing sth wrong or committing a crime *The thief was caught red-handed as she was emptying the till. | He was caught red-handed taking money from the till.*

charity begins at home you should help and care for your own family, etc. before you start helping other people *She spends the little money that she earns on social work and neglects her own family, forgetting that charity begins at home.*

draw a blank to get no response or result *There was no sign of the murder weapon. The police searched every inch of the forest but drew a blank.*

every dog has his/its day (saying) everyone has good luck or success at some point in their life *Don't worry, you'll get chosen for the team. Every dog has its day. | You may become famous someday. Every dog has its day.*

get in/be on the ground floor to become involved in a plan, project, etc. at the beginning *Reg came in on the ground floor and saw the value of his investment double in two years.* | *Can someone tell me how you get in on the ground floor of a money-making deal like that?*

hammer and tongs if two people are at it hammer and tongs or go at it hammer and tongs, they argue or fight with a lot of energy and noise *We could hear the neighbours going at it hammer and tongs.* | *The dogs were fighting each other hammer and tongs.*

high and low everywhere *I've been hunting high and low for that certificate and I still can't find it!* | *Janet searched high and low, but she couldn't find the kitten.*

in full swing having reached a very lively level *When we arrived at 10 o'clock, the party was already in full swing.* | *The tourist season in London is in full swing at the moment.*

lay/put your cards on the table to tell sb honestly what your plans, ideas, etc. are *It's time I put my cards on the table; I can't afford the price.* | *I would have a confrontation with him and put my cards on the table.*

lose heart to lose one's courage and confidence *Students lost heart after receiving low marks in the mid-term.* | *Don't lose heart, there'll be plenty more chances for promotion.*

mind your own business to think about your own affairs and not ask questions about or try to get involved in other people's lives –*What are you reading?* –*Mind your own business!* | *I was just sitting there, minding my own business, when a man started shouting at me.*

take the plunge to decide to do sth important or difficult, especially after thinking about it for a long time *After working for twenty years he's decided to take the plunge and go back to college.* | *I've decided to take the plunge and start up my own business.*

take the words right out of sb's mouth to say what sb else was going to say –*The speed limit on motorways should be raised.* –*I agree completely! You've taken the words right out of my mouth!* | –*This movie is going to put me to sleep.* –(yawning): *You took the words right out of my mouth.*

throw a (monkey) wrench in/into sth to cause a delay or problem with sth that sb is planning or doing *Let's get this finished before the boss comes along and throws a monkey wrench in the works.* | *The boss threw a monkey wrench into our plans when he said we'd have to work Saturday.*

toe the line to say or do what sb in authority tells you to say or do, even if you do not share the same opinions, etc. *The Prime Minister is angry because some members of the government are not toeing the line.* | *He might not like the rules but he'll toe the line just to avoid trouble.*