

Idioms quiz – part one

Explain the meaning of each of the idioms in bold.

1. I tried to stop the kids dropping their clothes on the floor, but finally decided it was a **lost cause**.
2. Why can't you put all those bad feelings behind you and **let bygones be bygones**?
3. I'll get you to the airport by 12 o'clock, **come hell or high water**.
4. Carol **spends money like water** - no wonder she's always broke.
5. The smell of fish and chips **made my mouth water**.
6. We've certainly had our disagreements in the past, but **that's all water under the bridge now**.
7. I don't think we should **throw the baby out with the bath water**. There are some good features of the present system that I think we should retain.
8. I'm **all at sea** with this computer manual.
9. I'm **caught between a rock and a hard place**. If I go with Isabel, it'll be much more expensive and if I go with Julie, Isabel probably won't speak to me again.
10. We certainly don't want anyone **rocking the boat** just before the election.
11. **When my ship comes in**, I'll build you a huge house in the country.
12. Amy took a step forward and finally **found her tongue**. 'I'm Rhoda's friend,' she said.
13. You will receive notification of the results **in due course**.
14. **Look on the bright side**. Our accident insurance might cover the cost of a new car.
15. You can't vote until you **come of age**.
16. 'What if the flight is delayed?' **'I'll cross that bridge when I come to it.'**
17. Nothing you could say about Pete would surprise me. The man couldn't even **lie straight in bed**.
18. He finally decided **to come out of the closet** so his mother would stop asking him why he wasn't married.
19. 'What's amazing is that Pauline's half sister's son is the father of her cousin's child.' **'Come again?'**
20. I'll be there tonight **come what may**.
21. Jenny's **as crazy as they come**.
22. We could talk about this problem **until the cows come home**, but it wouldn't solve anything.
23. Les certainly knew how to spend money. **Easy come, easy go** it was with him.
24. Tickets for the show are limited and we operate **on a first-come, first-served basis**.
25. She took her university entrance exam in December and passed **with flying colours**.
26. I came **within an inch of** losing my life on the rocks below.
27. I don't want to wait **until kingdom come** for you to decide what you're going to do.
28. Cars are banned from the city centre so a bicycle really **comes into its own** here.
29. Is shopping on the Internet **the shape of things to come**?
30. They don't want the police to investigate because they're afraid of what might **come out in the wash**.
31. After you've been in a relationship for a long while, all sorts of little secrets start **to come out of the woodwork**.
32. Banks are **bending over backwards** to help those in difficulties.
33. Her **can-do attitude** is the reason we chose her for the job.
34. **Far be it from me to** tell you what to do, but don't you think you should apologize?
35. You're looking really tired. Why don't you **do yourself a favour and** take a break?
36. 'Why don't you go out with Brian?' **'Oh, do me a favour!** He's almost 50, and he still lives with his mother!'
37. They hadn't **done their homework**, or they'd have known it was a waste of time asking her that question.

Idioms quiz KEY

1. It refers to something or someone that has no chance of success.
2. This is something that you say in order to tell someone to forget about unpleasant things that have happened in the past
3. You mean you are determined to do it even if it is difficult.
4. She spends too much.
5. If the smell or the sight of food makes your mouth water, it makes you want to eat it.
6. It happened a long time ago and no one is upset about it now.
7. It refers to getting rid of the good parts as well as the bad parts of something when you are trying to improve it.
8. If someone is all at sea, they are completely confused.
9. You have to make a difficult decision between two things that are equally unpleasant.
10. It means to do or say something that causes problems, especially if you try to change a situation which most people do not want to change.
11. It means when you are rich and successful.
12. She began to speak after being silent because she felt nervous or frightened.
13. It will happen at a suitable time in the future.
14. You try to see something good in a bad situation.
15. It means to reach the age when you are an adult and are legally responsible for your behaviour.
16. This is something that you say in order to tell someone that you will not worry about a possible problem but will deal with it if it happens.
17. You mean he is very dishonest.
18. It means to stop hiding the fact that you are gay.
19. This is something that you say when you want someone to repeat what they have just said because you did not hear or understand it.
20. I'll be there whatever happens.
21. It means to be very rich, honest, crazy etc. to be as ... as they come
22. For a very long time.
23. This is something that you say in order to describe someone who thinks that everything is easy to achieve, especially earning money, and who therefore does not worry about anything.
24. It means that the people who ask for something first will be the ones who get it, when there is not enough for everyone.
25. It means to pass an examination with a very high score or to complete a difficult task very successfully.
26. It means to very nearly do something, especially something dangerous or exciting.
27. I don't want to wait for a very long time.
28. It means to be very useful or successful in a particular situation.
29. A sign of what is likely to become popular in the future.
30. If something secret or unpleasant comes out in the wash, people discover the truth about it.
31. It means to appear after being hidden or covered up for a long time, especially with an unpleasant outcome.
32. It means to try very hard to do something, especially to help or please someone else.
33. It means you are willing to try different ways to solve problems and confident that you will succeed.
34. This is something that you say when you are giving advice or criticizing someone and you want to seem polite.
35. This is something that you say when you are advising someone to do something which will have a good effect or will give them an advantage.
36. This is something that you say in order to tell someone that what they have just said is stupid.
37. It means to make careful preparations so that you know all you need to know about something in advance and are able to deal with it successfully.

Idioms quiz – part two

Explain the meaning of each of the idioms in bold.

1. 'That's my beer you're drinking.' 'Do you want **to make something of it?**'
2. I hate catching spiders. Still, **a man's got to do what a man's got to do.**
3. **Do you mind!** That's my brother you're talking about!
4. You have to give your children a certain amount of freedom **to do their own thing.**
5. **I went to great pains** to get this record for you.
6. I wouldn't be a teacher **for all the tea in China.**
7. **Well, what do you know!** The Raiders lost again.
8. I had to explain to Sam that it was only **make believe** and that they weren't real monsters.
9. He always **makes a big thing out of** helping me cook.
10. Times are hard - you have **to make a fast buck** wherever and however you can.
11. After months of lying about the money, I decided **to make a clean breast of it** and tell the truth.
12. I was so pleased to hear from Peter. **It really made my day.**
13. Working with a nice bunch of people can **make all the difference** to your job
14. David talks as if he's an expert on everything, but **empty vessels make most noise.**
15. My wages were so low that I had to take a second job just **to make ends meet.**
16. Sally spent the whole evening **making eyes at** Stephen.
17. He only swore at you - there's no need **to make a federal case out of it!**
18. He wanted to get into medical school but he failed **to make the grade.**
19. I've got a few hours to finish the housework before the kids come home so I might as well **make hay while the sun shines.**
20. 'What does his message say?' 'I don't know - **I can't make head nor tail of it.**'
21. We **made ourselves at home**, using the bathroom and drinking all their beer.
22. You've been living with Jean for five years, isn't it time you **made an honest woman of her?**
23. 'You never know, Pete might help out.' 'Pete? Help out? **Don't make me laugh!**'
24. I didn't travel much as a young adult but I'm certainly **making up for lost time** now.
25. We decided to go on to a club after the show and really **make a night of it.**
26. This advertising campaign will either **make or break** the product.
27. A good lawyer would have **made mincemeat of** them in court.
28. As soon as Ellen left the room, her boyfriend **made a move on** me.
29. We couldn't get in to see the movie - **everyone and his brother** had decided to go.
30. I think she liked my presentation. She certainly **made all the right noises.**
31. I think you'd better **make yourself scarce** - at least until I've had a chance to talk to your father.
32. We'd like four coffees please, and **make it snappy!**
33. He **made a real song and dance about** giving up meat.
34. The couple next door go swimming in the sea in the middle of winter. Well, **it takes all sorts,** as they say.
35. Joe, it's getting late - we'd better **make tracks.**

Idioms quiz 2 – KEY

1. This is something that you say to someone who disagrees with you in order to threaten them and challenge them to a fight.
2. It is something men say when they are going to do something which may be unpleasant or which they are pretending will be unpleasant as a joke.
3. This is something that you say when someone does something that annoys you.
4. It means to do exactly what you want without following what other people do or worrying about what they think.
5. It means to try very hard to do something.
6. You mean that nothing could persuade you to do it.
7. This is something that you say when you are surprised by a piece of information.
8. It's imaginary or invented.
9. It means to exaggerate the importance of something.
10. It means to earn money quickly and often in a way that is not honest.
11. It refers to telling the truth about something, especially something bad or illegal that you have done, so that you do not have to feel guilty any more.
12. It means to make someone very happy.
13. It has a very good effect on a thing or a situation.
14. Something that you say which means that people who talk a lot and frequently express their opinions are often stupid.
15. It means to have just enough money to pay for the things that you need.
16. It means to look at someone in a way that shows them that you think they are sexually attractive.
17. It means to make something seem more important or serious than it really is.
18. It refers to succeeding at something, usually because your skills are good enough.
19. It means to do something while the situation or conditions are right.
20. You are not able to understand something at all.
21. It means to behave in a relaxed way in a place, as if it was your own home.
22. If a man makes an honest woman of someone that he is having a relationship with, he marries her.
23. It is something that you say when someone has suggested something that you think is not at all likely to happen.
24. It means to spend a lot of time doing something because you did not have the opportunity to do it previously.
25. You spend a whole day, night, weekend, etc. somewhere, instead of only a short time, so that you can enjoy it more.
26. It means to make something a success or a failure.
27. It means to defeat someone very easily.
28. It means to try to start a romantic or sexual relationship with someone.
29. It refers to a very large number of people.
30. It means to seem to be enthusiastic about something.
31. It means to leave, especially in order to avoid trouble.
32. It's an impolite way of telling someone to hurry.
33. It refers to making something seem more important than it really is so that everyone notices it.
34. You mean that everyone is different and even strange people should be accepted.
35. It means to leave a place in order to go somewhere.

Idioms quiz – part three

Explain the meaning of each of the idioms in bold.

1. She was an absolute pain when she stayed with us and we were both really pleased **to see the back of her**.
2. He says he's going to decorate the house, but **I'll believe it when I see it**.
3. I knew his face so well from the photographs that it felt a bit strange when I finally saw him **in the flesh**.
4. It's the story of a corrupt policeman who finally **sees the error of his ways**.
5. Sarah used to have very racist views, but I think she's finally **seen the light**.
6. Hi there, Paul. **Long time no see**.
7. I wasn't surprised when the shop closed down. You **could see it coming**.
8. After you've spent years researching a single topic you get to a point where **you can't see the wood for the trees**.
9. If she wins you know **we'll never hear the end of it**.
10. **I heard on the grapevine** that she was pregnant, but I don't know anything more.
11. Something terrible is going to happen. **I can feel it in my bones**.
12. If you want to use my computer for your report, **feel free**.
13. **You look like a million dollars** in that dress!
14. Looking at those pieces of raw meat **I felt sick to my stomach**.
15. I'm **feeling a little under the weather** - I think I may have caught a cold.
16. I've **started the ball rolling** by setting up a series of meetings.
17. She's **set her heart on** a big wedding.
18. His father died when he was young and the inheritance **set him up for life**.
19. She is writing her memoirs **to set the record straight** once and for all.
20. These are just a few ideas to be discussed - **nothing is carved in stone**.
21. His late-night visit to her home has **set tongues wagging**.
22. A phone call to the right person should **set the wheels in motion**.
23. She'll never **buy** that story about you getting lost!
24. I don't see what you're **driving at**.
25. Staying at home all day was **driving her round the bend**.
26. We **need** a new shopping centre in our neighbourhood **like we need a hole in the head!**
27. It's no good asking him to organize anything - **he can't tell his arse from his elbow**.
28. I should imagine very few people have fallen from that height **and lived to tell the tale**.
29. 'I never drive over the speed limit.' 'Oh, yeah? **Tell me another one!**'
30. 'I've got so much work to do.' '**Tell me about it!**'
31. She's a straight talker, is Karen. **She tells it like it is**.
32. Bullying often goes unreported because children don't want to be seen as **tell-tales**.
33. 'Can we open our presents now?' '**All in good time**. Let's wait till Daddy comes.'
34. I know she will be a great novelist. **It is only a matter of time**.
35. We got there just **in the nick of time**. A minute later and she'd have left.
36. Very little of the drama from this period **has stood the test of time**.

Idioms quiz 3 KEY

1. It means to be pleased when someone leaves or when something ends because you did not like them.
2. You say this to show that you do not think something will happen, and you will not believe it until it does happen.
3. It means to meet or see someone in person, instead of watching them in a film or on television, etc.
4. It means to realize that you have been behaving badly and to decide to improve your behaviour.
5. It means to understand something clearly, especially after you have been confused about it for a long time.
6. This is something that you say in order to greet someone you have not seen for a long time.
7. It means to foresee that something is likely to happen, especially something bad.
8. It means people are unable to understand what is important in a situation because they are paying too much attention to details.
9. This means that someone will continue to talk about something they have achieved for a long time and in an annoying way.
10. This refers to hearing news from someone who heard the news from someone else.
11. This is something that you say when you intuitively feel that something is true or will happen, although you have no proof.
12. This is something that you say in order to tell someone that they are welcome to do something.
13. It means to look or feel extremely attractive.
14. It was so unpleasant that it made you feel ill.
15. This means to feel unwell.
16. It means to do something which starts an activity, or to start doing something in order to encourage other people to do the same.
17. This means you want something or want to do something very much.
18. It means to provide someone with enough money for the rest of their life.
19. It means to tell the true facts about a situation in order to show people that what they believed previously was not correct.
20. If an arrangement, a plan, or a rule is carved in stone, it is completely fixed so that it cannot be changed (Usually used in the negative.).
21. If something that someone says or does sets tongues wagging, it causes people to talk about them.
22. It means to cause a series of actions to start that will help you achieve what you want.
23. It means to believe that something is true.
24. You want someone to be explicit about what they really mean.
25. It was making her very bored or very frustrated.
26. You mean you do not need it and do not want it.
27. It means you are stupid and become confused about simple things.
28. It means to still be alive after a dangerous or frightening experience.
29. This is something that you say when you do not believe what someone has just said.
30. You show sympathy to someone who has the same problem or bad experience as you.
31. It means to describe a situation honestly, not avoiding any of the unpleasant details.
32. A tell-tale tells someone in authority about something bad that someone has done because he or she wants to cause trouble for them.
33. You tell someone to be patient because the thing they are eager for will happen when the time is right.
34. You mean that you are sure it is going to happen, although you do not know when.
35. We got there at the last possible moment.
36. It remains popular or respected for a long time.

Idioms quiz – part four

Explain the meaning of each of the idioms in bold.

1. There is plenty of time for you to have a baby. At twenty-five **you still have time on your side**.
2. 'Do you remember the Watergate scandal?' 'No, **that was before my time**.'
3. Her family had farmed that land **since time immemorial**.
4. He **had the time of his life** working on the ranch.
5. He's so arrogant, **he won't even give you the time of day**.
6. **Once upon a time** there lived a young girl called Cinderella.
7. We've decided to do without a car **for the time being**.
8. I don't like to see people kissing in the street. **There's a time and a place for that sort of thing**.
9. 'When do you think I should phone Mr Hughes about that job?' '**Well, there's no time like the present**.'
10. You should get rid of that **two-timing** boyfriend of yours.
11. Unlike other bosses, he's not afraid **to get his hands dirty** and the men like that in him.
12. I'd only been out of prison three months so I was **trying to keep my nose clean**.
13. Journalists have been trying to discover whether the Senator really is as **squeaky clean** as he claims to be.
14. I felt it was time **to come clean** and tell her what the doctor had told me.
15. **Read my lips**. You're not having any more ice-cream.
16. You're bored, aren't you? **I can read you like a book**.
17. **Reading between the lines**, I'd say that Martin isn't very happy with the situation.
18. Don't **read too much into** her leaving so suddenly - she probably just had a train to catch.
19. This is my advice to wives whose husbands have left them for a younger woman - **don't get mad, get even!**
20. She's just qualified and is looking for a chance **to try her wings** as a design consultant.
21. I might **try my hand at** a bit of Indian cooking.
22. As long as he **does the business** on the football field, the club is happy with him.
23. I've been trying to make sense of all these figures and **it's doing my head in**.
24. 'Let's eat. **Shall I do the honours?**'
25. I **went to great lengths** to explain the situation to him but he still didn't seem to understand.
26. They really **went out of their way** to make us feel welcome.
27. You're never going to hear Maggie criticizing Jim - **she thinks the sun shines out of his arse!**
28. She seems to have an opinion on every subject **under the sun**.
29. I don't know why I bought that CD-ROM for my computer - I only ever use it **once in a blue moon**.
30. When they sacked her, she simply set up a rival company of her own. **You can't keep a good woman down**.
31. **He was man enough to** admit he had made a mistake.
32. A study of **man's best friend** shows that the relationship between humans and dogs started 100,000 years ago.
33. It might be a civilized place to shop at other times but come the January sales, **it's every man for himself**.

Idioms quiz – part four

KEY

1. You still have enough time to do something without having to hurry.
2. It happened before you were born or before you were involved with a person or thing.
3. It means for longer than anyone can remember.
4. It means to enjoy yourself very much.
5. To refuse to speak to someone or say hello because you do not like them or because you think you are better than them.
6. It means a long time ago.
7. You mean it will be like that for a period of time, but may change in the future.
8. This is something that you say when someone is behaving in a way which you think is inappropriate for the situation they are in.
9. This is something that you say in order to show that you think it is a good idea to do something immediately.
10. It refers to having a sexual or romantic relationship with two people at the same time.
11. It means to involve yourself in all parts of a job, including the parts that are unpleasant, or involve hard, practical work.
12. It means to avoid getting into trouble or doing anything illegal.
13. Someone who is squeaky clean is completely good and honest and has no vices.
14. It means to tell the truth, often about something bad that you have been trying to keep a secret.
15. This is a slightly impolite way of telling someone to listen to what you are saying.
16. You know exactly what they are feeling or thinking without having to ask.
17. This means to try to understand someone's real feelings or intentions from what they say or write.
18. This means to believe that an action, remark or situation has a particular significance, often when this is not the case.
19. This is something that you say in order to tell someone not to be angry when someone has upset them, but to do something that will upset them as much.
20. It means to try to do something that you have recently learned to do.
21. It means to try doing something for the first time.
22. It refers to achieving what is expected or required in a situation.
23. It makes the person feel confused and frustrated.
24. It means to pour drinks or serve food.
25. It refers to trying very hard to achieve something.
26. It means to try very hard to do something pleasant for other people.
27. This refers to loving or admiring someone so much that you do not think they have any faults.
28. Everything under the sun is everything that exists or is possible.
29. I use it very rarely.
30. It means that a person with a strong character will always succeed, even if they have a lot of problems.
31. It means to be brave enough to do something.
32. Man's best friend is a dog.
33. This is something that you say which means that everyone in a particular situation is trying to do what is best for themselves and no one is trying to help anyone else.

Idioms quiz – part five

Explain the meaning of each of the idioms in bold.

1. She had a reputation as a **man-eater**.
2. When I found a packet of condoms in David's bedroom, I decided it was time for a **man-to-man** talk.
3. I felt like **the odd one out** yesterday. Everyone was watching football except me.
4. I wouldn't like to do her job, but she seems to love it. Oh well, **one man's meat is another man's poison**.
5. Some say that tuna is **the poor man's** salmon.
6. He's a poet, astronomer, musician - **an all-round Renaissance man**.
7. As a **man of the world**, Roger, I'd appreciate your advice on a rather delicate matter.
8. She doesn't look very intelligent, but **you can't judge a book by its cover**.
9. These pop bands that you hear nowadays **can't hold a candle to** the groups we used to listen to in the sixties.
10. Once you start making concessions to individual members of staff, you really open up a **can of worms**.
11. We were working round the clock to finish the project so food and sleep were **catch-as-catch-can**.
12. If she **can't cut the mustard**, we'll have to find someone else to do the job.
13. He says he didn't realize banking was such a stressful job. Well, **if you can't stand the heat, get out of the kitchen**.
14. I know I filed it somewhere but **I can't for the life of me** remember where.
15. **Don't bite off more than you can chew**. Let someone else organize the party.
16. Twenty jobs will have to be cut if the company's going to be made more efficient. **But you can't make an omelette without breaking eggs**.
17. I think you should stick to a simple menu for your dinner party. There's no point trying **to run before you can walk**.
18. 'That was an absolutely delicious lunch.' '**You can say that again!**'
19. I don't know why she wants more shoes - she's already got more pairs **than you can shake a stick at**.
20. And you're telling me I'm lazy? **You should talk!**
21. I'm a bit disappointed I didn't get the job. Oh well, **you can't win 'em all**.
22. A pay increase? **You should be so lucky!**
23. Luckily, my bus arrived before I had time to reply. **Saved by the bell**.
24. This is a private deal - we don't have **to do everything by the book**.
25. I'm not sure how long I'll stay at the party. **I'll just play it by ear**.
26. Ashley's reading has come on **in leaps and bounds** since she's been at her new school.
27. 'Do you think it's as good as her last movie?' '**No, not by a long shot.**'
28. When he liked a person, he loved them, and, **by the same token**, when he didn't like a person, he hated them.
29. She was never a great player, **not by any stretch of the imagination**.
30. Peace and democracy **hang by a thread** in this troubled country.
31. She was used to **calling the shots**.
32. I had to go into the woods **to answer the call of nature**.
33. After playing together for 20 years the band have finally decided **to call it a day**.

Idioms quiz – part five

KEY

1. She is a woman who attracts men very easily and has many relationships.
2. A man-to-man talk is when men talk honestly about subjects which may be difficult or embarrassing.
3. It refers to someone or something that is different from the other people or things in a group.
4. This is something that you say which means that something one person likes very much can be something that another person does not like at all
5. This refers to someone or something that is similar to a well-known person or thing but is not as good.
6. He is an intelligent and well-educated man who knows a lot about many different subjects.
7. You say this to someone who has a lot of experience of life, and is not usually shocked by the way people behave.
8. This is something that you say which means you cannot judge the quality or character of someone or something just by looking at them.
9. This means they are not as good as that other person or thing.
10. It is a situation which causes a lot of trouble for you when you start to deal with it.
11. It is achieved any way that is possible and not in a planned way.
12. This means you cannot deal with problems or difficulties.
13. This is something that you say which means if you are not able to deal with a difficult or unpleasant situation, you should leave.
14. You mean that you cannot remember it at all.
15. Don't try to do more than you are able to do.
16. This is something that you say which means it is difficult to achieve something important without causing any unpleasant effects.
17. This refers to trying to do something complicated and difficult before you have learned the basic skills you need to attempt it.
18. This is something that you say in order to show you completely agree with something that someone has just said.
19. This refers to a very large number of something.
20. This is something that you say when someone criticizes another person for doing something that they do themselves.
21. This is something that you say which means it is not possible to succeed at everything you do.
22. This is something that you say in order to tell someone that what they want is not likely to happen.
23. You say this when a difficult situation is brought to an abrupt end before you have to do or say something that you would prefer not to.
24. It means to do something exactly according to the rules.
25. It means to decide how to deal with a situation as it develops rather than planning how you are going to react.
26. It happens very quickly.
27. This is something that you say when you want to emphasize that something is not at all true.
28. This is something that you say which means that the thing you are going to say next is true for the same reasons as the thing you have just said.
29. You mean that this way of describing them is certainly not correct.
30. It is likely to fail in the near future.
31. This means to be the person who makes all the important decisions and who has the most power in a situation.
32. It means to go to the toilet.
33. This means to stop doing something, especially working.