101 ESSENTIAL ENGLISH IDIOMS

101 STEPS CLOSER TO ENGLISH

FLUENCY

extra info

78 US



idiom

SAVE FOR A RAINY DAY

save money for an emergency

I had to pay a £300 dental bill. Thank goodness I saved for a rainy day. definition

image

example



WELCOME TO 101 ESSENTIAL ENGLISH IDIOMS!



I'm so excited to share this with you!

After receiving so many questions from my students, I've put together 101 Idioms in this very special ebook which I hope you find to be extremely useful.

Each idiom is relevant in today's English (unlike 'it's raining cats and dogs') and is used frequently by native English speakers!

Each idiom comes with an image which will make the idiom more memorable, a definition and an example sentence.

Throughout this book I have also included Study Tips, Interesting Idiom Origins, Cultural Notes, and Mini Grammar Notes.

Please send me an email, or contact me through my website and tell me:



a) which idiom is your favourite b) if you've used any of these recently

arnel@arnelseverydayenglish.com







This book is dedicated to all of you you lovely English lovers.

Arnel Nisbet

101 ESSENTIAL ENGLISH IDIOMS

- 1. keep your chin up
- 2. a couch potato
- 3. break a leg

Interesting Idiom Origin [1]

- 4. a storm in a teacup
- 5. a blessing in disguise
- 6. a dime a dozen
- 7. hit the books
- 8. beat around/about the bush
- 9. bite the bullet

Study Tip!

- 10. at the drop of a hat
- 11. better late than never
- 12. call it a day
- 13. it takes two to tango
- 14. let sleeping dogs lie
- 15. it's like riding a bike
- 16. stab someone in the back

mini grammar note

- 17. sit tight
- 18. be on cloud nine
- 19. the ship has sailed
- 20. cut somebody some slack

Interesting Idiom Origin [2]

- 21. keep banging your head
- against a wall
- 22. better luck next time
- 23. go cold turkey
- 24. face the music
- 25. ring a bell

Study Tip!

- 26. cut corners
- 27. look/feel like a million bucks/
- dollars
- 28. get out of hand
- 29. get something out of your
- system
- 30. get your act together

Cultural Note

- 31. like two peas in a pod
- 32. be on the rocks

mini grammar note

33. pull out all the stops

- 34. give someone the benefit of the
- doubt
- 35. go back to the drawing board
- 36. hang in there
- 37. no pain no gain
- 38. pull yourself together
- 39. so far so good
- 40. speak of the devil

Interesting Idiom Origin [3]

- 41. long story short
- 42. the last straw
- 43. the best of both worlds
- 44. through thick and thin
- 45. time flies (when you're having
- fun)
- 46.feel under the weather

Cultural Note [4]

- 47. curiosity killed the cat
- 48.beat a dead horse
- 49. get wind of something
- 50. we'll cross that bridge when we
- come to it

Study Tip!

- 51. actions speak louder than
- words
- 52. add insult to injury
- 53. bite off more than you can
- chew
- 54. break the ice
- 55. have your head in the clouds
- 56. cut to the chase

Interesting Idiom Origin[5]

- 57. don't put all your eggs in one
- basket
- 58. sit on the fence
- 59. jump on the bandwagon
- 60. find your feet

Cultural Note

- 61. every cloud has a silver lining
- 62. calm before the storm
- 63. come rain or shine
- 64. get your foot in the door
- 65. go on a wild goose chase
- Study Tip!

- 66. have a sweet tooth
- 67. keep an eye out for
- 68. good things come to those
- who wait
- 69. it's a piece of cake
- 70. kill two birds with one stone
- 71. the early bird gets the worm

mini grammar note

- 72. let the cat out of the bag
- 73. burn bridges
- 75. once in a blue moon
- 76. grease someone's palm
- 77. play devil's advocate
- 78. save for a rainy day
- 79. have a chip on your shoulder

Interesting Idiom Origin [6]

- 80. take it with a pinch of salt
- 81. it's the best thing since sliced bread
- 82. in the red
- 83. an elephant in the room

Study Tip!

- 84. when it rains it pours
- 85. there's method to the madness
- 86. you can't judge a book by its
- cover
- 87. as right as rain
- 88. better luck next time
- 89. hit the nail on the head
- 90. see eye to eye
- 91. look at something through
- rose-tinted glasses

mini grammar note

- 92. hit the sack
- 93. get itchy feet
- 94. I'm all ears
- 95. make ends meet
- 96. be on the same wavelength
- 97. pull the plug
- 98. the ball's in your court

Interesting Idiom Origin

- 99. it goes without saying
- 100. be put on the spot

Cultural Note [7]

101. the sky's the limit



WHAT IS AN IDIOM?

An idiom is a group of fixed words which has a different meaning to its literal meaning:

- it's a piece of cake
- kill two birds with one stone
- once in a blue moon

As you can see from idiom 60, 'find your feet' means: to become familiar in a new situation.



FIND YOUR FEET

to become familiar in a new situation

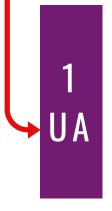
My new job is so confusing but I'm slowly finding my feet.

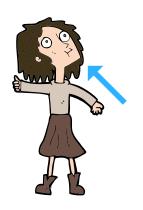


Okay, is everything clear? Let's get started!

UA = Used Alone. This idiom can be used alone as a complete sentence.







KEEP YOUR CHIN UP

continue to be positive

There are 101 idioms that you need to memorise in this book. Keep your chin up!



A COUCH POTATO

a person who is lazy and
watches a lot of TV

My flatmate is the biggest couch
potato I know. He watches TV and
plays video games all day!

US = Use in a Sentence. This idiom is normally used in a sentence.



BREAK A LEG

good luck

We are all going to be thinking of you in your interview tomorrow. Break a leg!

idiom origin:

For actors and actresses in theatres, it's considered bad luck to say 'good luck'! So, they say something negative (break a leg), instead, hoping it will bring them good luck.



A STORM IN A TEACUP

a small problem which feels like a very big problem

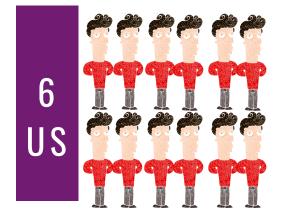
Don't worry. Your fight with your boyfriend is a just a storm in a teacup. Tomorrow you'll both feel better.

5 US

A BLESSING IN DISGUISE

a negative situation which becomes a positive situation

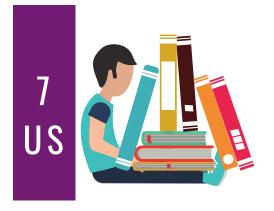
Getting really sick was actually a blessing in disguise. When I went to the hospital I met my future wife!



A DIME A DOZEN

not special/very common

University graduates are a dime a dozen. Everyone has a degree now.



HIT THE BOOKS

study very hard

Guys I can't go out tonight. I gotta hit the books. Sorry.



BEAT AROUND/ABOUT THE BUSH

to talk about everything except for the most important point

Stop beating about the bush and tell me the truth!

9 US



BITE THE BULLET

to do something you don't want to do, but you must do

I hate going to my girlfriend's parents' house. But, I always bite the bullet and put on a smile.

study tip:



step 1: print



step 2: cut

step 3:



Every morning, take out 1 idiom. Try to use it during the day.

10 US



AT THE DROP OF A HAT

immediately, without thinking

My wife called to say that the baby was coming. I left work at the drop of a hat.





BETTER LATE THAN NEVER

now is better than never

I forgot my mum's birthday and called her a week late. Better late than never.

12 US



CALL IT A DAY

to stop doing something because you are tired

Shall we call it a day? We can continue working on this project tomorrow morning.

13 U A



IT TAKES TWO TO TANGO

you need 2 people to have an argument

Jeff says the divorce is Amy's fault. But, it takes two to tango.

LET SLEEPING DOGS LIE

don't speak about old problems because it can make people angry again

know Rebecca stole your boyfriend 3 years ago. But seriously, let sleeping dogs lie. Don't speak to her at the party tonight.

15 UA

LIKE RIDING A BIKE

it's easy to remember how to do something

Susan: Oh my goodness, I can't remember how to dance flamenco.

Ria: Oh come on, it's like riding a bike!

STAB SOMEONE IN THE BACK

to do something bad to someone who trusts you

My ex business partner stabbed me in the back. He had been secretly stealing all of the company money.



we use the past perfect continuous tense to speak grammar about a longer action before another past action

17 UA

16

US

SIT TIGHT

be patient and wait

The pizza delivery is going to be 30 minutes late. Ugh, we just need to sit tight.



O BE ON CLOUD NINE

very happy

My daughter's in love. She's on cloud nine.

19 U A



THAT/THE SHIP HAS SAILED

you are too late for an opportunity

I love Maria a lot, but that ship has sailed.

She's now married.

20 UA



CUT SOMEBODY SOME SLACK

don't be too strict with someone

You need to cut Hanna some slack.
She's only 12.



When sailors used to tie ships to the dock, they needed a lot of rope. They would say 'give me more slack' if they needed more rope. Cut me some slack is used metaphorically to say: give me more 'space', don't be too strict.





BANG YOUR HEAD AGAINST A WALL

to try and do something difficult many times without success

I keep trying to explain Facebook to my mum. It's like banging your head against a wall.

22 U A



this time was not good, next time will be better

I had an interview last week, but I didn't get the job. Better luck next time.



GO COLD TURKEY

to completely stop smoking,drinking,drugs very quickly

When I got pregnant, I went cold turkey and stopped smoking.

24 US



bad, they need to accept the criticism and punishment

You stole the money, so you need to face the music. Tomorrow, tell the boss everything.



RING A BELL

this sounds familiar, maybe I know this

Tom: Do you remember Julie Andrews? Agatha: Hm.... that name rings a bell. Who is she again?

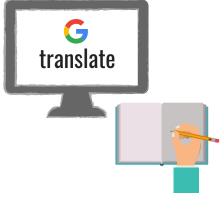
study tip: You are now 25% through this book. Well done!

step 1: meet a friend



step 2: ask your friend to read any idiom 1-25 step 3: tell your friend the definition of that idiom

26 US



CUT CORNERS

to be lazy and do something the fast, cheap and easy way

You can't cut corners if you want a high IELTS score. You need to study every day.

27 US



FEEL/LOOK LIKE A MILLION BUCKS/DOLLARS

to feel very attractive

This Chanel dress is incredible. Oh man, I look like a million bucks.

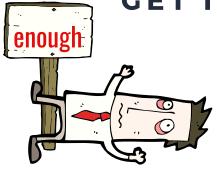


GET OUT OF HAND

for a situation to become uncontrollable

The protest got out of hand and became really violent.

29 U A

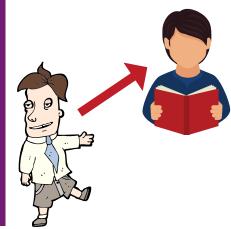


GET IT OUT OF YOUR SYSTEM

to do something many times so you won't want to do it again

You should drink a whole bottle of vodka. Get it out of your system.

3 O U A



GET YOUR ACT TOGETHER

you need to be more organised and mature

You have 2 kids. Stop drinking so much. Get your act together!



If you go to a pub, try some mushy peas! Traditional, tasty, and very healthy. Why am I talking about peas?

Check out IDIOM 31...

LIKE TWO PEAS IN A POD

to look the same, or have the same characteristics

My dad and my uncle are like two peas in a pod.

32 US



BE ON THE ROCKS

to be in a bad situation in a marriage or business

Gary and Mimi have only been married for 6 months and their marriage is already on the rocks.



we use for + period of time

- for 2 weeks
- for 5 hours
- for a few minutes

[NOT since]

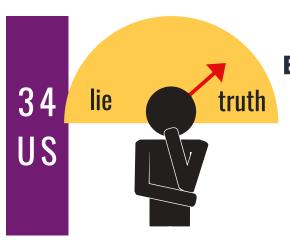
33 US



PULL OUT ALL THE STOPS

to try very hard to make something successful

My girlfriend's parents are coming over tomorrow for dinner. I'm pulling out all the stops and making beef Wellington.



GIVE SOMEONE THE BENEFIT OF THE DOUBT

Is someone telling the truth? You are not sure, but you want to believe them.

Karen said she's going to be late because of traffic. Well, I'm giving her the benefit of the doubt.

35 US



BACK TO THE DRAWING BOARD

you need to start from the beginning again

Okay, this website I'm building is a disaster. It's back to the drawing board for me.



HANG IN THERE

the situation is difficult but don't give up, continue

You only have 2 more weeks before your Cambridge Exam. Hang in there!

37 U A



NO PAIN NO GAIN

If you want to be successful, you need to work very hard.

Yuri: I hate studying. All I do is study. Bea: Well, no pain no gain.



PULL YOURSELF TOGETHER

stop being emotional and think logically

Pull yourself together Ria! Stop crying about Jacob. He doesn't love you.







SPEAK OF THE

we say this, when the person we are speaking about walks in the room

Do you know where Sven is? Oh, speak of the devil. Here he is!

The complete sentence is: Speak of the Devil and he will appear. In the past, people in England thought that if you speak about the Devil, he will The complete sentence is: Speak of the Devil come. Now this idiom is used in a fun way.

FINISH

43 US

44 US

LONG STORY SHORT

you say this, when you don't want to give details to a story

I haven't been feeling well lately. You know, dizzy and tired. Well, long story short, I'm pregnant.

THE LAST STRAW

the final problem, after many problems that makes you stop something

I finally broke up with Steve. The last straw was when he said I was stupid.

THE BEST OF BOTH WORLDS

you can enjoy the advantages of two different things

I work in the morning and I look after my kids for the rest of the day. I really have the best of both worlds.

THROUGH THICK AND THIN

during the good times and bad times

My husband loves me through thick and thin.



TIME FLIES (WHEN YOU'RE HAVING FUN)

time passes quickly because you are having a good time

I can't believe it's already 5 PM. Wow. time flies!

46 US

UNDER THE WEATHER

to feel ill

I'm feeling a bit under the weather. I think I'll stay home today.

47 U A



CURIOSITY KILLED THE CAT

stop asking so many questions because it can bring you trouble Harry: Where did you get this car?

Jake: Curiosity killed the cat, man.





The UK is full of cat lovers. There are approximately 8.5 million pet cats!



BEAT/FLOG A DEAD HORSE

to waste time on something that will never be successful

Your app is never going to make you a millionaire. You're just beating a dead horse.

49 US



GET WIND OF SOMETHING

to learn information of a secret

If social media gets wind of this story, we'll be in big trouble.



WE'LL CROSS THAT BRIDGE WHEN WE COME TO IT

don't worry about future problems

We might need to move to a new flat next year. Well, I guess we'll cross that bridge when we come to it.

You are now 50% through this book. Well done!

study tip:

step 1: choose an idiom 1-50

step 2: make a list of all the different situations you could use that idiom



- future husband/wife
- future illness
- future job

51 LOVE YOU HONEY.

ACTIONS SPEAK LOUDER
THAN WORDS

your actions are more powerful than speaking

Kyle: I love you Mary.

Mary: You always say that. Show me!

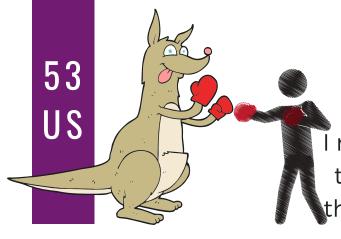
Actions speak louder than words.



ADD INSULT TO INJURY

something makes your bad situation worse

I didn't get the promotion at work, Jane did. And to add insult to injury, she's only 21!



BITE OFF MORE THAN YOU CAN CHEW

to try and do something that isn't possible for you

I need more money so I told my boss that I want to work 7 days a week. I think I bit off more than I can chew.



BREAK THE ICE

to make new people more comfortable in a social situation

At a party all you need are a few vodka shots to break the ice.

HAVE YOUR HEAD IN THE CLOUDS

to be daydreaming (not thinking in the moment)

I usually have my head in the clouds when I'm on the bus. I have to be careful not to miss my stop!

56 U A



CUT TO THE CHASE

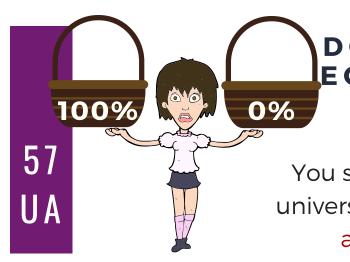
don't waste time, tell me the important points

OK I'm going to cut to the chase

Bill. You're fired.

Tidiom origin:

In old Hollywood films, the climax of the film would be a 'chase scene'. If film executives thought a film was too long and boring, they would say 'cut to the chase'. (Stop with the unnecessary stuff and get to the interesting stuff.)



DON'T PUT ALL YOUR EGGS IN ONE BASKET

don't depend on only one thing for your success

You should apply to more than one university. You really don't want to put all your eggs in one basket.



SIT ON THE FENCE

you cannot make a decision

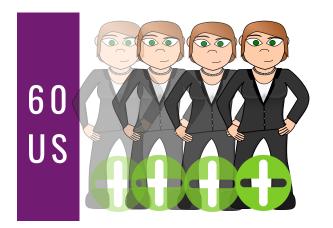
I'm not sure if I want to marry Georgia. I'm still sitting on the fence.



JUMP ON THE BANDWAGON

you like something because other people like it

Nina has no personality. Whatever someone else does, she just jumps on the bandwagon.



FIND YOUR FEET

to become familiar in a new situation

My new job is so confusing but I'm slowly finding my feet.

You've reached 60 idioms! Wow!







60 is an important number. It's often referred to as Diamond.

If you have been married for 60 years, you can celebrate your Diamond Anniversary.

In 2012, Queen Elizabeth II celebrated her Diamond Jubilee.



EVERY CLOUD HAS A SILVER LINING

all bad situations have something good about them

Don't worry about losing your job man.

Every cloud has a silver lining. Now
you have time to write your book!

62 US



THE CALM BEFORE THE STORM

the quiet and relaxing time before a very difficult time

One more beer. It's the calm before the storm. My girlfriend is going to kill me for being so late.

63 US



COME RAIN OR SHINE

In all situations (good or bad), I will do it/ I will be there.

Come rain or shine, I will attend your wedding! Nothing can stop me!

64 US



GET YOUR FOOT IN THE DOOR

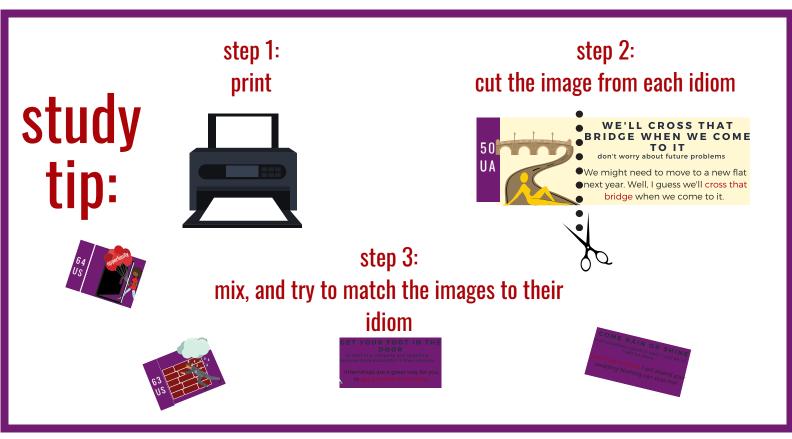
to start in a company and hopefully become more successful in the company

Internships are a great way for you to get your foot in the door.

ON A WILD GOOSE CHASE

to search for something that doesn't exist/is not there

Police in London were on a wild goose chase for months. The criminal was actually in Berlin this whole time!





HAVE A SWEET TOOTH

to love sugary and sweet food

I have the world's biggest sweet tooth. I can eat Nutella three times a day!



KEEP AN EYE OUT FOR SOMETHING

try to search for something I need

Oh man, I really need to pee. Keep an eye out for a toilet okay.

68 U A



GOOD THINGS COME TO THOSE WHO WAIT

If you are patient, good things will happen.

So many young people want everything quickly, but good things come to those who wait.

69 UA



IT'S A PIECE OF CAKE

It's easy.

Are you new to London? The underground is a piece of cake.

Don't worry.

70 US



KILL TWO BIRDS WITH ONE STONE

to accomplish two things at the same time

I don't really like gyms. I usually jog to work every morning. That way I can kill two birds with one stone.





THE EARLY BIRD GETS THE WORM

If you do something first, you will be successful.

I managed to buy 4 Adele concert tickets last night. Now the concert is sold out. The early bird gets the worm!

mini grammar note:

1st Conditional

IF + present simple / will + infinitive

If it starts to rain, I'll stay home.

We use the 1st C when we are speaking about a real future possibility.



LET THE CAT OUT OF THE BAG

to tell people a secret by mistake

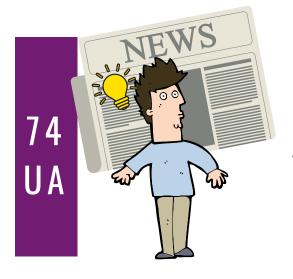
Ralf planned to ask Iris to marry him as a surprise, but his mom let the cat out of the bag and told her!

73 US

BURN YOUR BRIDGES

to act in a bad way so you cannot return

Claudia, I know you hate your boss, but leave your job respectfully. You don't want to burn your bridges.



LIVE AND LEARN

We say this when we learn something new (usually by surprise).

What? You can't travel if your passport expires in 6 months! Well, live and learn.



ONCE IN A BLUE MOON

not often

Once in a blue moon I eat a big steak.

You're three quarters through this book!





GREASE SOMEONE'S PALM

to give someone money so they will do something for you (illegally)

The gangster greased the policeman's hand to keep quiet.

77 US



PLAY DEVIL'S ADVOCATE

to pretend to disagree so you can get more information and details
Okay, I think it's a great idea for you to live in Australia. But, I'm going to play Devil's advocate. How can you get a visa if you don't speak English?

78 US

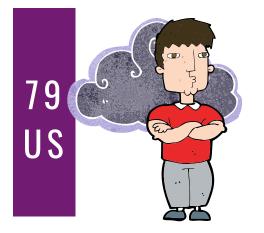


SAVE FOR A RAINY DAY

save money for an emergency

I had to pay a £300 dental bill.

Thank goodness I saved for a rainy day.



HAVE A CHIP ON YOUR SHOULDER

to feel angry all the time because you think your life is unfair

Timothy has a real chip on his shoulder because he didn't get accepted to Bristol University.

interesting interesting origin:

A chip is a small piece of wood from a bigger piece of wood. In the past, some people would literally put a chip on their shoulder as a sign. Does anyone want to fight me? I'm ready.

80 US



TAKE IT WITH A PINCH OF SALT

to not believe something completely

Whatever Ursula tells you, take it with a pinch of salt. She's such a gossip.

81 U A

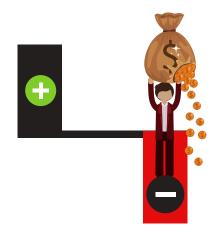


IT'S THE BEST THING SINCE SLICED BREAD

something is excellent (usually something new)

I love my new phone. It's the best thing since sliced bread.

82 US



IN THE RED

to be in debt (to have negative money in your bank account)

I've been in the red for 3 months now. I need to find a 2nd job.



AN ELEPHANT IN THE ROOM

there is an obvious bad situation or problem, but nobody wants to talk about it

Nobody wants to talk about parents being responsible for their children's health. It's just an elephant in the room.

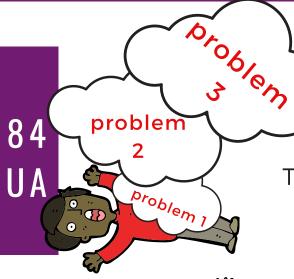
study tip:

step 1: choose an idiom that you like

step 2: send a friend who also speaks English a message using this idiom





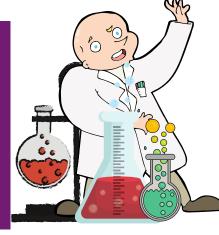


WHEN IT RAINS, IT POURS

when something bad happens, many bad things happen

This morning I lost my keys, then my phone, then my wallet! When it rains, it pours.

85 U A



THERE'S A METHOD TO THIS MADNESS

this is a crazy idea, but there is a logical explanation

Okay, I'm not going to use the internet for 1 month. Trust me, there's a method to this madness.

86 UA

YOU CAN'T JUDGE A BOOK
BY ITS COVER

you can't have an opinion about someone/something by the appearance My dad always looks angry, but you can't judge a book by its cover. He's the happiest man I know!



AS RIGHT AS RAIN

to feel healthy again after being sick

Maria: How are you feeling today? Chloe: As right as rain, thank you!



BETTER LUCK NEXT TIME

this time was not successful, but hopefully next time will be

It's too bad you didn't get the job. Better luck next time.

89 US



HIT THE NAIL ON THE HEAD

to describe a problem or situation
perfectly correctly
Gary: Children spend too much time on
phones because their parents do as well.

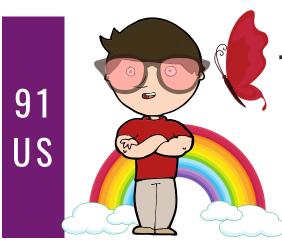
Hal: I think you've hit the nail on the head.



SEE EYE TO EYE

to agree with someone about a problem or job (usually used in the negative)

My parents and I don't see eye to eye about my future.



LOOK AT SOMETHING THROUGH ROSE-TINTED GLASSES

to only see the positive things

Jerry always looks at life through

rose-tinted glasses. I wish I could be
that positive.



wish + past simple

We use this structure to speak about present desires.

- I wish I had more money. (now)
- I wish I knew how to speak Spanish. (now)

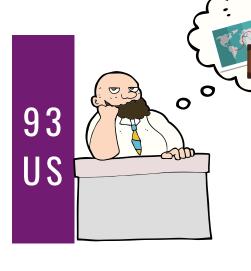
92 US



HIT THE SACK

to go to bed because you want to sleep

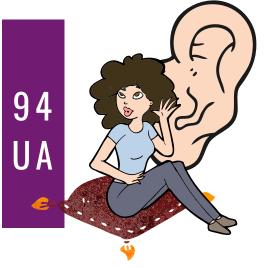
Goodnight everyone. I'm going to hit the sack. See you in the morning.



GET ITCHY FEET

to want to change your life situation and travel or move house

I'm getting itchy feet. After 5 years in London I want to live somewhere else.



I'M ALL EARS

I'm very interested in what you have to say. Please tell me.

Gordon: I met this girl last night... Brian: I'm all ears.





MAKE ENDS MEET

to have enough money for your basic life necessities (rent, food, clothes etc.)

London is so expensive. It's really difficult to make ends meet.

96 US

BE ON THE SAME PAGE

for two or more people to have the same opinions and ideas

Teresa and I are on the same page when it comes to politics.



PULL THE PLUG

to stop doing something because it is too difficult to manage

After 8 years of marriage, Dean and Angela decided to pull the plug.

98 UA



THE BALL'S IN YOUR COURT

you need to make the decision

What should we do next? The ball's in your court.

idiom origin:

The place where you play tennis is called a court. In tennis, it is your turn to serve, when the ball is in your side of the court. You need to make the next move.

99 UA



IT GOES WITHOUT SAYING (THAT)...

it's obvious

It's wonderful that you're coming to visit Bristol! It goes without saying that you can stay with me.

Why are you late for work again Bob?



PUT SOMEONE ON THE SPOT

to ask someone a difficult question which embarrasses them

My teacher put me on the spot when she asked me why I didn't do my homework.



Did you know?

If you are a British national, you can get a letter from the Queen when you turn 100!



THE SKY'S THE LIMIT

everything is possible

Dream big.
The sky's the limit.

101 idioms, and 101 steps closer to speaking English fluently.

WELL DONE!

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