

Level : 3 LMD Student's

Unit : Traduction et interprétariat

Teacher : Kahina Hafir Chekroune.

Translating Idioms – Idioms lists to learn by heart

Dear students, here are some idioms to learn by heart in order to enrich your vocabulary and become more fluent in English, they are listed by category :

Making an effort

idiom	meaning	example
give something your all	use all your energy and effort to do something	I gave it my all, but only managed to come second in the race.
go all out	use a lot of energy and effort to do something	Jack is going all out to win the contract – I hope he'll succeed.
go out of your way to do something	try very hard to do something, usually something nice	Tara always goes out of her way to put new employees at their ease.
pull your weight	work as hard as other people in a group	If Sarah pulled her weight, we would easily be able to complete the project on time.
by hook or by crook	using whatever methods are necessary	Our football team is determined to win the championship, by hook or by crook.
pull your finger out	make more of an effort (very informal)	If you don't pull your finger out, you'll get the sack.
at a push	probably possible, but it will be difficult	I could finish the report by Wednesday – at a push, Tuesday.

Social status and how people see it

example	meaning
He's very nice and friendly, but his brother is very toffee-nosed .	thinks he is of a high social class and looks down on people of lower class (negative)
Don't try putting on / giving yourself airs and graces . Remember, I know that you come from a very ordinary family.	acting as if you were someone of a higher social class than you really are
Everyone was shocked to hear he was involved in crime. He was such a pillar of society .	a solid, respectable and respected member of society
Her new boyfriend's a bit of a rough diamond , but he's very nice really.	a person who seems impolite / of low education at first, but who is usually of good character
She's always giving money to down-and-outs and anyone who begs in the street.	people who have no home, no money and no job, who live on the streets
We can't really afford new furniture, but we have to keep up appearances , so we'll buy some.	continue to live at the same social standard we have lived at, even though we have money problems

Good relationships

idiom	meaning	example
be in someone's good books	that person is pleased with you – possibly only temporarily	I'm in the teacher's good books – I helped her tidy the classroom.
get on like a house on fire	get on extremely well with someone	Fortunately, we got on like a house on fire from the start.
keep/get/be/stay in touch with someone	keep/get/be/stay in contact with someone	We must all keep in touch after our course is over.
make it up to someone	do something good for someone you have done something bad to in the past	I'm sorry I forgot your birthday. I promise I'll make it up to you.
take a shine to someone	like someone immediately (informal)	I could see from her smile that she had taken a shine to him.
have a soft spot for someone	feel a lot of affection for one particular person, often without knowing why	Nick was a naughty little boy, but I couldn't help having a soft spot for him.

Difficult relationships

idiom	meaning	example
be at loggerheads (of two people or groups)	disagree strongly with each other	The council and local residents are at loggerheads over the plans for a new car park.
be (talking) at cross-purposes (of two people or groups)	not understand each other because they are trying to do or say different things	We're talking at cross-purposes. I was referring to my brother and you're talking about my father.
have it in for someone	be determined to criticise or harm someone	I can't understand why he has it in for me – I've never done anything to harm him.
have it out with someone	talk to someone about something they have done in order to solve the problem	I can't take Ben's selfishness any longer – I'm going to have it out with him this evening.
rub someone up the wrong way	irritate someone	She seems to always rub her boss up the wrong way.
two-time someone	have a romantic or sexual relationship with two people at the same time	She refused to believe he was two-timing her until she saw him with another girl.
keep someone/something at bay	prevent someone/something from coming near or harming you	So far this year, I've managed to keep the flu at bay.
keep yourself to yourself	prefer to be on your own and avoid talking with or doing things with other people	Julia seems nice. But she keeps herself to herself, so I don't know much about her.

People's financial circumstances

idiom	meaning	example
be on the breadline	be very poor	More people in Britain are on the breadline now than thirty years ago.
live in the lap of luxury	live an extremely comfortable life, because you have a lot of money	We live simply during the year, but enjoy living in the lap of luxury in a nice hotel for our summer holiday.
well off / well-to-do / well-heeled	having plenty of money	Most of the people living here are clearly very well-to-do, but there are a few poorer families.
spend money like water	spend too much, often without thinking about it	He spends money like water – I wonder where he gets it all from.
tighten your belt	spend less than you did before, because you have less money	I'm afraid we'll have to tighten our belts now there's another mouth to feed.
make a killing	earn a lot of money very easily	The new Internet companies have made an instant killing.
be a money spinner	be a successful way of making money	My dog-walking business was quite a money spinner when I was at college.

Speed

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idiom	meaning	example
by/in leaps and bounds	very quickly	Club membership has grown by leaps and bounds this year.
get a move on	hurry (often used as an order)	Get a move on! You'll be late for school.
be on the run	try to avoid being caught (especially by the police)	The bank robbers are still on the run ten years after the crime.
fast and furious	full of speed and excitement	The car chase at the end of the film was fast and furious.
step by step (step-by-step) when used as an adjective before a noun)	slowly; gradually	Changes need to be introduced step by step, not all at once.
drag your feet/heels	deal with something slowly because you don't really want to do it	We mustn't drag our heels over implementing the new legislation.

Joking and being serious

joking	meaning	serious	meaning
People are always taking the mick/ mickey out of him.	laughing at him, by copying funny things he does or says	Hiccups are funny when other people have them, but they're no laughing matter when you get them yourself.	not something to laugh at, quite serious
We shouldn't make light of her troubles; she's very upset.	treat as a joke something that is serious	I have to do the work of three people. It's no joke.	used about serious or difficult situations

Distance and intensity

idiom	meaning	example
the word spread	the news went from one person to the next	I told only Rosie about it, but the word quickly spread and soon everyone seemed to know.
keep track	continue to know what is happening to someone or something	The college likes to keep track of its former students.
get off to a flying start	start well	The evening got off to a flying start as everyone was very impressed by the restaurant.
on the spot (on-the-spot when used as an adjective before a noun)	immediately or in the place where something is happening or has just happened	The police can impose on-the-spot fines on people found drunk in the street.
all over the place	in or to many places	I looked for you all over the place.
left, right and centre	happening in a lot of places or to a lot of people	People have been coming down with flu left, right and centre.
reach / be at fever pitch	(used of emotions) to get so strong that people can't control them	By the end of the match, feelings had reached fever pitch.
be in full swing	to have been happening for a long time and there is a lot of activity	The party was in full swing by the time we arrived.
get/go beyond a joke	be/become extremely serious and worrying	The children's behaviour has gone beyond a joke this time.

Try to collect more idioms connected with speaking, writing and communicating in general. Look up keywords connected with these topics in a good general dictionary or in an idiom dictionary and see what idioms you find, for example, words like talk, speak, hear, word, etc.

Source :

- Michael, McCarthy. "O'Dell Felicity. English idioms in Use." (2003).