

# Idioms

## ***IDIOMS to describe PEOPLE***



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### **Riddle**

When a girl has an accident, why can't her brother help her out?  
He can't be a brother and assist her (a sister).

### **Joke**

My doctor asked me if any of my family suffer from insanity...  
I said no, we all actually enjoy it!

## Some Recommended Books

### Collins Co-build Dictionary of Idioms

Publisher - Harper Collins (1995)

### English Idioms in Use (Advanced)

Felicity O'Dell / Michael McCarthy

Publisher CUP 2010

## Some useful Links

List of 2,000 Useful Idioms

<https://phrases.org.uk>

British National Corpora - great to check idioms and get examples

<https://www.english-corpora.org/bnc/>

Click to get a complete **Mock IELTS** Test.

<https://takeielts.net/the-path-to-success-in-the-ielts-test/>

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## Introducing Idioms

Idioms are **fixed** phrases whose meaning is **different** from the individual words

E.G.

Yesterday, I was talking to Jane and I **let the cat out of the bag** about the surprise party for her.

*(=to reveal a secret, accidentally)*

We use them to **get attention** (especially news, blogs, articles...), for **humour, emphasis** and to add **colour**.

### NEWSPAPER HEADLINES!

Here are two examples that show some humour.

Opticians can't see eye to eye!

*(to see eye to eye = to agree)*

European farmers are sitting on the fence!

*(to sit on the fence = can't decide - indecisive)*

## MY ADVICE

In IELTS Speaking, you can and should use some idioms, but not too many.

You need to be sure that you can use them well, and you need to use them naturally.

So only use those, that you are confident you know how to use well.

It is key to learn idioms in context or within a topic, not via a list.

That is why this lesson focusses more on the topic of PEOPLE.

You will hear them as you listen to podcasts, videos, films and radio, so do make notes of them and focus on how they are used.

Then start to practice using them.

You can find and check idioms here.

<https://phrases.org.uk>

<https://www.english-corpora.org/bnc/>

## Types of Idioms

Idioms may include

### Similes / metaphors

*Expressions comparing two things*

They are **like two peas in a pod**  
= *They are very similar*

He's **as thin as a rake**  
= *very thin*

He **saw red**  
= *he was angry*

I'm still **learning the ropes**  
= *learning how to do something*

### Binomials

*Two words joined by a preposition (usually AND)*

This problem is **black and white**  
= *it's clear*

I do yoga **now and then**  
= *sometimes*

We need to learn idioms **step by step**  
= *slowly, one thing at a time*

## Sayings and Proverbs

It's a small world

When in Rome, (*do as the Romans*)

Once bitten, (*twice shy*)

*NOTE: We often just use the first part of proverbs, as everyone knows the second part by heart.*

*Be careful, overall proverbs tend to have a moral message and so many may not be appropriate for IELTS Speaking.*

## Euphemisms

Used to avoid offending people or saying words you are uncomfortable with

### **Nature calls**

= *I need to go to the toilet*

I am going **to spend a penny**

= *I am going to the toilet*

Did you know Jane **has a bit on the side?**

= *to have a lover/ mistress*

He **passed away**

= *he died*

## Idioms to talk about people

He is **the black sheep** of the family = the naughty one

She is **down to earth** = practical

He is **the apple of my eye** = I really like / love him

He is **cool as a cucumber** = doesn't show emotions

She's a **bosom friend** = a close friend

**Birds of feather**, (flock together) = similar people hang out together

I know him **like the back of my hand** = know sthing /s.o. **very well**

He is a **know—it-all** = knows too much and shows off

We are **as different as chalk and cheese**  
= very different

He is **the spitting image** of his father  
=looks exactly the same

**It runs in the family** = everybody in the family does it

**My own flesh and blood** = my family

He/she is **set in his/her ways** = doesn't like change

We **go back a long way** = have known each other a long time

She is an **old flame** = an ex-girlfriend / lover

To be **highly strung** = to be nervous and easily upset

She **doesn't suffer fools gladly** = She doesn't tolerate stupid people

He's a **loose canon** = says things (often bad) without thinking or realising it

She can **think on her feet** = can think quickly and improvise

## **Binomials about people**

He is **calm and collected** = very calm

He is so helpful **come rain or shine** = at all times

She is so **neat and tidy** = very tidy

She likes to keep her house **spic and span** = in perfect order / tidy

My wife and I are like **chalk and cheese** = very different

We always **see eye to eye** = agree