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S P E A K E N G L I S H L I K E A N A M E R I C A N

LEARN THE IDIOMS & EXPRESSIONS THAT
WILL HELP YOU SPEAK LIKE A NATIVE!

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hit the nail on the head going to come to an agreement in that case would a...
of tea make...
the ball rolling...
something by storm...
INTRODUCTION
...could get...
...would take...
...get you... that...

If you already speak some English and now would like to speak more like a native, you've found the right book. One of the keys to speaking like a native is the ability to use and understand casual expressions, or idioms. American English is full of idioms. You won't learn these expressions in a standard textbook. But you will hear them all the time in everyday conversations. You'll also meet them in books, newspapers, magazines, and TV shows. This book will help you understand and use idioms better. It contains over 300 of today's most common idioms.

Idioms add color to the language. Master idioms and your speech will be less awkward, less foreign. You'll also understand more of what you read and hear. Often a student of English tries to translate idioms word-for-word, or literally. If you do this, you can end up asking, "What could this possibly mean?" This is why idioms are difficult: they work as groups of words, not as individual words. If you translate each word on its own, you'll miss the meaning and in many cases end up with nonsense.

As an example, let's take one of the idioms presented in this book: "out of this world." This expression is often used to describe delicious food. If you have a party and you serve a delicious chicken dish, your American friend might tell you, "This chicken is out of this world!" Start translating the expression word-for-word and you'll have to ask yourself: "What world is it in?" and "Why is she even commenting on the chicken being in a world, *any* world?"

Here's another example. Let's say you're on a tennis team. Your team has won every single game for the past six months. You could tell your friend this without using an idiom: "Our team is lucky

because we keep winning game after game.” You can also express this with an idiom: “Our team is on a winning streak.” Sounds better, doesn’t it?

When using idioms, remember that their word order and structure are often *not* flexible. In other words, you will need to get the word order exactly right. Here’s an example of what I mean. Recently, I helped a student with his English homework. He then told me, “You’ve got a golden heart.” He was trying to speak idiomatic English, but the correct expression is: “You’ve got a heart of gold.”

This book includes a CD of all of the dialogues. The CD will help you with pronunciation and will also help you remember the idioms. Play it at home, at work, in the car, while traveling...before you know it, you’ll be speaking English like an American!

Try to “develop an ear” for idioms on your own. Don’t worry, I’m not suggesting you try to grow a third ear! “Develop an ear” is an idiom — it means to learn to listen for something. If you don’t know what an expression means, ask a native speaker of English. Here’s what you can say to your helper: *Excuse me, I ran across this expression and I’m not sure what it means. Can you please help me out?*

Add idioms to your speech and writing just as you add vocabulary. You may find it helpful to write all of the expressions in this book down on notecards and review them whenever you have a free moment.

Good luck adding idioms to your everyday speech. It’s fun, and you’ll enjoy speaking English much more. Like an American!



MAIN CHARACTERS

The author would like to thank the Johnson family for graciously agreeing to appear in this book.

The Johnson Family





LESSON 1

BOB'S DAY AT WORK

Bob works as a manager in a furniture store. Peter, his boss, is not happy about sales. Bob's new advertising campaign hasn't helped. Peter decides to fire him.

Peter: Bob, I hate to **break the news**, but our sales were down again last month.

Bob: Down again, Peter?

Peter: Yeah. These days, everybody's shopping at our competition, Honest Abe's Furniture Store.

Bob: But everything in there **costs an arm and a leg!**

Peter: That's true. They do charge **top dollar**.

Bob: And their salespeople are very strange. They really **give me the creeps!**

Peter: Well, they must be doing something right over there. Meanwhile, we're **about to go belly-up**.

Bob: I'm sorry to hear that. I thought my new advertising campaign would **save the day**.

Peter: **Let's face it:** your advertising campaign was a **real flop**.

Bob: Well then I'll **go back to the drawing board**.

Peter: It's too late for that. You're fired!

Bob: What? You're **giving me the ax**?

Peter: Yes. I've already found a new manager. She's as **sharp as a tack**.

Bob: Can't we even **talk this over**? **After all**, I've been working here for 10 years!

Peter: There's **no point in** arguing, Bob. I've already **made up my mind**.

Bob: Oh well, **at least** I won't have to **put up with** your nonsense anymore! Good-bye to you and good-bye to this **dead-end job**.

Peter: Please leave before I **lose my temper**!



IDIOMS – LESSON 1

about to – ready to; on the verge of

EXAMPLE 1: It's a good thing Bob left the furniture store when he did. Peter was so angry, he was **about to** throw a dining room chair at him.

EXAMPLE 2: I'm glad you're finally home. I was just **about to** have dinner without you.

after all – despite everything; when everything has been considered; the fact is

EXAMPLE 1: You'd better invite Ed to your party. **After all**, he's a good friend.

EXAMPLE 2: It doesn't matter what your boss thinks of you. **After all**, you're going to quit your job anyway.

at least – anyway; the *good* thing is that...

EXAMPLE 1: We've run out of coffee, but **at least** we still have tea.

EXAMPLE 2: Tracy can't afford to buy a car, but **at least** she has a good bicycle.

NOTE: The second definition of this phrase is "no less than": There were **at least** 300 people waiting in line to buy concert tickets.

(to) break the news – to make something known

EXAMPLE 1: Samantha and Michael are getting married, but they haven't yet **broken the news** to their parents.

EXAMPLE 2: You'd better **break the news** to your father carefully. After all, you don't want him to have a heart attack!

(to) cost an arm and a leg – to be very expensive

EXAMPLE 1: A college education in America **costs an arm and a leg**.

EXAMPLE 2: All of the furniture at Honest Abe's **costs an arm and a leg!**

dead-end job – a job that won't lead to anything else

EXAMPLE 1: Diane realized that working as a cashier was a **dead-end job**.

EXAMPLE 2: Jim worked many **dead-end jobs** before finally deciding to start his own business.

(let's) face it – accept a difficult reality

EXAMPLE 1: **Let's face it**, if Ted spent more time studying, he wouldn't be failing so many of his classes!

EXAMPLE 2: **Let's face it**, if you don't have a college degree, it can be difficult to find a high-paying job.

(to) give one the creeps – to create a feeling of disgust or horror

EXAMPLE 1: Ted's friend Matt has seven earrings in each ear and an "I Love Mom" tattoo on his arm. He really **gives Nicole the creeps**.

EXAMPLE 2: There was a strange man following me around the grocery store. He was **giving me the creeps!**

(to) go back to the drawing board – to start a task over because the last try failed; to start again from the beginning

EXAMPLE 1: Frank's new business failed, so he had to **go back to the drawing board**.

EXAMPLE 2: The president didn't agree with our new ideas for the company, so we had to **go back to the drawing board**.

(to) go belly-up – to go bankrupt

EXAMPLE 1: Many people lost their jobs when Enron **went belly-up**.

EXAMPLE 2: My company lost \$3 million last year. We might go **belly-up**.

(to) give someone the ax – to fire someone

EXAMPLE 1: Mary used to talk to her friends on the phone all day at work, until one day her boss finally **gave her the ax**.

EXAMPLE 2: Poor Paul! He was **given the ax** two days before Christmas.

(to) lose one's temper – to become very angry

EXAMPLE 1: Bob always **loses his temper** when his kids start talking on the telephone during dinner.

EXAMPLE 2: When Ted handed in his essay two weeks late, his teacher really **lost her temper**.

(to) make up one's mind – to reach a decision; to decide

EXAMPLE 1: Stephanie couldn't **make up her mind** whether to attend Harvard or Stanford. Finally, she chose Stanford.

EXAMPLE 2: Do you want an omelette or fried eggs? You'll need to **make up your mind** quickly because the waitress is coming.

no point in – no reason to; it's not worth (doing something)

EXAMPLE 1: There's **no point in** worrying about things you can't change.

EXAMPLE 2: There's **no point in** going on a picnic if it's going to rain.

(to) put up with – to endure without complaint

EXAMPLE 1: For many years, Barbara **put up with** her husband's annoying behavior. Finally, she decided to leave him.

EXAMPLE 2: I don't know how Len **puts up with** his mean boss every day.

real flop or flop – a failure

EXAMPLE 1: The Broadway play closed after just 4 days – it was a **real flop!**

EXAMPLE 2: The company was in trouble after its new product **flopped**.

(to) save the day – to prevent a disaster or misfortune

EXAMPLE 1: The Christmas tree was on fire, but Ted threw water on it and **saved the day**.

EXAMPLE 2: We forgot to buy lemonade for our New Year's party, but Sonia brought some and really **saved the day!**

(as) sharp as a tack – very intelligent

EXAMPLE 1: Jay scored 100% on his science test. He's as **sharp as a tack**.

EXAMPLE 2: Anna got a scholarship to Yale. She's as **sharp as a tack**.

(to) talk over – to discuss

EXAMPLE 1: Dave and I spent hours **talking over** the details of the plan.

EXAMPLE 2: Before you make any big decisions, give me a call and we'll **talk things over**.

top dollar – the highest end of a price range; a lot of money

EXAMPLE 1: Nicole paid **top dollar** for a shirt at Banana Republic.

EXAMPLE 2: Wait until those jeans go on sale. Why pay **top dollar?**

 PRACTICE THE IDIOMS**Fill in the blank with the missing word:**

- 1) I can't believe you bought a couch at Honest Abe's. Everything in that store costs an arm and a _____.
a) foot b) leg c) hand
- 2) After Bob found out that his advertising campaign failed, he wanted to go back to the drawing _____.
a) board b) table c) room
- 3) When somebody isn't listening to you, there's no _____ in trying to argue with them.
a) edge b) tip c) point
- 4) José is really smart. He's as sharp as a _____.
a) tack b) nail c) screw
- 5) The salespeople at Honest Abe's always look angry and never speak to anybody. No wonder they _____ Bob the creeps.
a) take b) give c) allow
- 6) Bob got fired. He isn't looking forward to _____ the news to his family.
a) breaking b) cracking c) saying
- 7) Bob thought his new advertisements would bring in lots of customers and save the _____.
a) morning b) night c) day
- 8) Fortunately, Bob no longer has to put _____ with his stupid boss at the furniture store.
a) over b) in c) up

ANSWERS TO LESSON 1, p. 160





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WHAT'S THE SECRET TO SPEAKING ENGLISH FLUENTLY?

It's mastery of those tricky idioms and phrases that are so common in English. And learning these idioms and phrases will not only help you speak better, it'll help you understand Americans better!

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In this deluxe book & CD set, you'll find:

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 - Several usage examples of each idiom
- Dozens of exercises to reinforce the material – complete with answer key so you can correct yourself
 - Crossword puzzles to practice your new expressions
- 25 lively dialogues – the entertaining story of an American family, complete with illustrations

"This book will serve as a great support for those who want to master contemporary conversational English."

– Dr. Vladimir Mylnikov, ESL instructor, Monterey, California

"This book doesn't cost an arm and a leg, so, for heaven's sake, foot the bill, hit the books and have a blast. It's all the rage."

– The Norwalk Hour



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