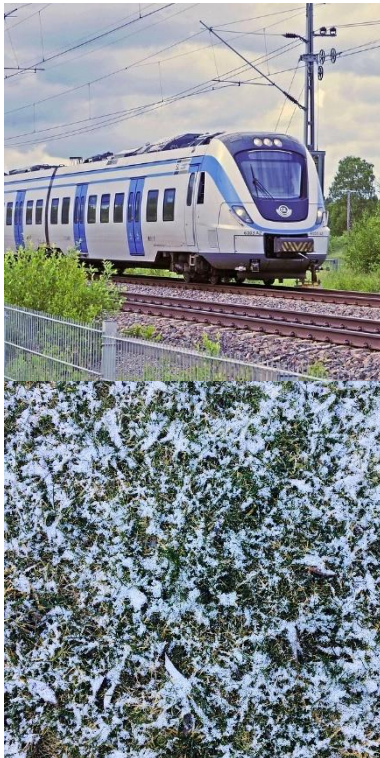


21 English Idioms



This pack contains all the posts from the 'Idiom of the Day' series on <https://purlandtraining.com>, written between December 2016 and May 2018.

Contents:

Page:

- 3
 - 1. A little of what you fancy does you good
 - 2. Be careful
 - 3. Better late than never
 - 4. It's no skin off my nose!
 - 5. It's the thought that counts
- 4
 - 6. The best thing since sliced bread
 - 7. There's snow time like the present!
 - 8. The road to nowhere
 - 9. They broke the mould when they made you!
- 5
 - 10. To be a match made in heaven
 - 11. To be in the doghouse
 - 12. To be just one of those things
- 6
 - 13. To bite off more than you can chew
 - 14. To get that Friday feeling
 - 15. To have a sweet tooth
 - 16. To make an effort
- 7
 - 17. To push somebody's buttons
 - 18. To receive a frosty reception
 - 19. To recharge my batteries
 - 20. To stick your oar in
 - 21. To swan about

1. A little of what you fancy does you good

This idiom means that it is good to indulge in your favourite food, drink, or pastime – sometimes. It can be healthy even. But keep in mind the 'little' part. A doctor might recommend that if you love chocolate or a certain kind of expensive cheese you should allow yourself to have some – from time to time – but certainly not every day! Go easy on the treats!

2. Be careful

If somebody tells you to be careful they are giving you a warning that something dangerous could be just around the corner. The plastic warning post (in the picture on p.8) was placed on the road to warn drivers that there was a large unwieldy tree close to the road that could potentially cause an accident. A reckless passer-by chose to rip the post from its stand and throw it down on the other side of the road. This person clearly did not see the value in this post, which was warning drivers to be careful – to take care.

3. Better late than never

We use this idiom to show that we are relieved that somebody or something is coming, while at the same time expressing annoyance that they or it will be late.

On the phone:

Peter: Will you be able to bring my laptop back tonight? I really need it to finish my assignment.

Greta: Sure. I'll be round at about ten. Will that be alright?

Peter: I'll probably be asleep by then, Greta!

Greta: Sorry! I won't be there till at least ten, because I'm working at the club till nine-thirty.

Peter: OK. Don't worry. Better late than never.

4. It's no skin off my nose!

This idiom means 'It doesn't affect me' or 'It doesn't bother me'.

John: So you didn't get an invitation to the party then?

Peter: No. Did you?

John: Yes, of course! I bet you feel really disappointed, don't you?

Peter: No! It's no skin off my nose. I didn't want to go anyway.

5. It's the thought that counts

Today my friend came home with a cake-making kit and proceeded to make fairy cakes to celebrate my birthday. The picture on p.9 is representative of how they turned out. Although the cake wasn't round, and it was a little bit burned, and the icing was just kind of splodged on top – and the decorations appeared to be randomly scattered around – it was the thought that counted!

We use this phrase when somebody does something nice for us, but it doesn't really work out very well. 'Never mind – it's the thought that counts!' It's saying: at least you were thinking of me; it doesn't matter about the result.

By the way, the cakes tasted delicious, so it was alright in the end.

6. The best thing since sliced bread

We use this English idiom to describe something that we think is fantastic or wonderful.

Peter: Can you show me your new phone?

Greta: Here it is.

Peter: Oh, it's a new iPhone X. These are really amazing. Look at that screen!

Greta: I know. It can do everything – and more! It's the best thing since sliced bread.

The only question is – what was the best thing before sliced bread was invented?

7. There's snow time like the present!

We can use the word snow to make a pun. The words 'there is no...' are replaced by the similar-sounding word snow. There's no time like the present means to get on and do something now, rather than waiting. If the context is snowy, we could use snow and make a pun as well as an idiom. It also works with other phrases, e.g. Snow joke! = it is no joke.

8. The road to nowhere

If you are on the road to nowhere it means that the activity you are doing is pointless; there is no use in completing it, and it would be wise to turn back without delay.

9. They broke the mould when they made you!

When somebody says this idiom to you they usually mean that you are one of a kind, unique, and an incredibly special type of person. There is nobody else like you, because after you were created the mould that you came out of was broken to make sure that no more you could be made. (Think moulds in a factory mass-producing something. In American English the word is spelled mold.)

So the meaning is often positive and may be used in a romantic situation or to flatter somebody by telling them how great they are. However, it can also have a negative meaning due to the ambiguity of the word when. If when means 'while' or 'at the time of' making you, then the meaning is positive, but if when means 'after' making you, the meaning is negative, e.g. 'they broke the mould deliberately so that no more you could be created – because I/we don't like you.'

We can also use this idiom sarcastically, when somebody makes a trivial mistake or says something a bit silly, to point out that we think they are original or unusual – not run-of-the-mill. Not normal.

It's rather an old-fashioned idiom, so we might expect an older person to use it. It may be used as a quite corny chat-up line. A bit like this line: 'Are you sure you aren't tired?' 'Why?' 'Because you've been running through my mind all day!'

Positive meaning:

On a first date:

Jemima: I'm so glad you invited me to this party.

Alan: I'm so happy you said yes! You know, Jemima – they broke the mould when they made you!

Jemima: Oh don't be silly. (Pause) Really?

Negative meaning:

Frida: My boss has been on my back all morning about the Jensen account. What a dork!

Olga: He's always on your case! What an odd guy he is. Sad, really. You know, they really broke the mould when they made him.

Frida: I hope they did!

Sarcastic meaning:

Tom: Ow!

Ida: What?

Tom: I've just realised that today is Wednesday, not Tuesday! I've spent all day thinking it was Tuesday! What an idiot!

Ida: What are you like! You know, they really broke the mould when they made you!

10. To be a match made in heaven

This idiom is used to describe a couple who seem absolutely perfect together. They are so suitable for each other that it seems as though their relationship was preordained (arranged in advance) 'in heaven'.

Olivia: Did you hear that Gerry and Eve have got engaged?

Greta: Yes! Isn't it cute? I'm so happy for them. They're so well suited.

Olivia: Yes, they're such a perfect couple – and on Valentine's Day too!

Greta: Aah. They're a match made in heaven, I'd say.

11. To be in the doghouse

If you are in the doghouse, you have done something wrong and somebody is angry with you. Your status at home or at work or at school is reduced to a low level – like when your dog misbehaves and you send him to his kennel or doghouse to think about his mistakes. To exit this unfortunate state you may well need to apologize to the person you upset and in exceptional circumstances this may even involve the buying of flowers and/or chocolates.

12. To be just one of those things

We say 'It's just one of those things' about a situation that we don't like but that we can neither explain nor change. It often refers to something trivial, rather than life-or-death situations. We often accompany this sentiment with a slightly confused shrug of the shoulders:

'Why did the train have to be late? Today of all days! I really needed to get to work on time.'

'I don't know. It was just one of those things, I suppose.'

*

'Why is our broadband reception so poor?'

'Don't ask me. I guess it's just one of those things.'

'No! I'm going to change our supplier!'

*

'Why does the toilet paper always tend to run out just at the worst possible moment?'

'I haven't got a clue. It's probably just one of those things.'

13. To bite off more than you can chew

This idiom means to try to do more than you know you are capable of doing. It's a good idea not to take on too much. Don't try to do too much on your own. If you do, it may well end in tears!

14. To get that Friday feeling

If you've got 'that Friday feeling' you are ready for the weekend and in the mood for fun and relaxation. This is the kind of thing you could say when you get in to work on a Friday morning – it means you are happy because work will soon be finished and it's time to celebrate the fact that two days of holiday (i.e. the weekend) is on the horizon. However, not everybody might share or appreciate your cheery demeanour:

Jeremy: Morning, Carol.

Carol: Morning, Jeremy. What are you so happy about?

Jeremy: It's Friday! I've got that Friday feeling, Carol! It's nearly the weekend! Come on! Oh – I can't wait. I'm going to a massive party with my mates in Cornwall! What about you, Carol? Have you got anything planned for the weekend?

Carol: Not really. I'll probably do my big shop at ALDI tomorrow morning.

Jeremy: Oh, cheer up, Carol! It's Friday!

Carol: So you keep saying. I've got to get all these accounts finished by four.

15. To have a sweet tooth

Do you have a sweet tooth? Do you love sweets, cakes, and biscuits? Do you turn your nose up at carrots and laugh in the face of asparagus? If you have a sweet tooth it means that you love to eat sugary food. The irony is that if you eat enough sweet things, you may end up without any teeth at all! So go easy on those jellies and cakes!

16. To make an effort

To make an effort means to try hard – maybe harder than we usually do. If Joanne made a big effort to improve her grades, it means she tried extra hard – she studied for longer – to achieve her goal. This

year the local town council have really made a big effort with the Christmas decorations, as you can see from this beautiful illuminated bauble on the pier (p.8).

17. To push somebody's buttons

This means to make a person behave in a particular manner, especially in an angry way, usually for your own amusement. You might complain about a person who does this to you: 'Bob really knows how to push my buttons!' It's like somebody is able to control your emotions and behaviour.

18. To receive a frosty reception

In winter it is normal to go outside and find that the ground is hard and frosty. But it is possible to get a frosty reception at any time of the year. It happens when you arrive somewhere, e.g. a party, and the host is not pleased to see you – perhaps because of something unkind you have previously said or done. Maybe after a few drinks and a nice slice of birthday cake the atmosphere between you will begin to thaw and you can kiss and make up.

19. To recharge my batteries

'I really need to recharge my batteries': it means I have to rest and gain new energy before continuing my work. I need some 'down time' – some 'me time'. Some time just to chill out and relax – or chillax! We all need to recharge our batteries from time to time, so why not now? Let's take a break!

20. To stick your oar in

'To stick (or put) your oar in' means to interfere or try to have your say in somebody else's life. It means to offer unwanted help or opinions to somebody who really wishes you would 'keep your nose out'.

Imagine if you were happily rowing along in a rowing boat, pulling both oars yourself, but then your passenger produced their own oar and stuck it into the water to try to help take the boat in a different direction.

For example:

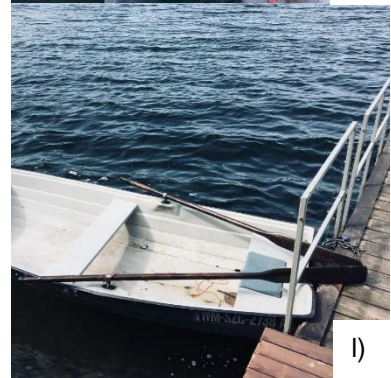
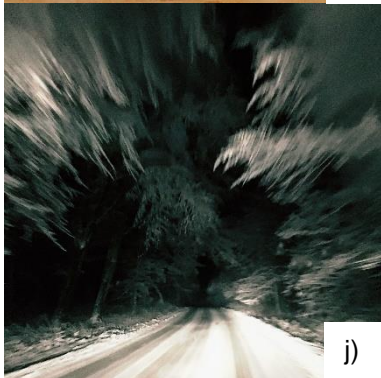
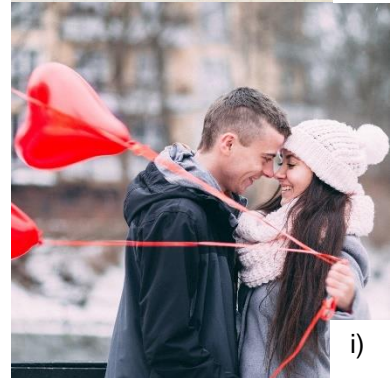
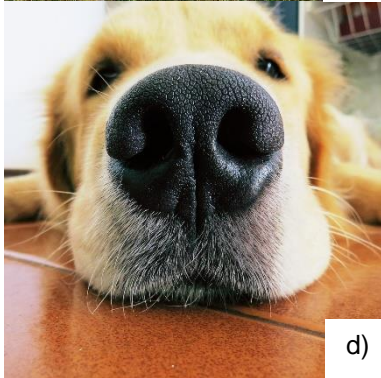
Rob: My Uncle Mark keeps trying to tell me which universities to apply for. It's so annoying! I wish he wouldn't keep sticking his oar in.

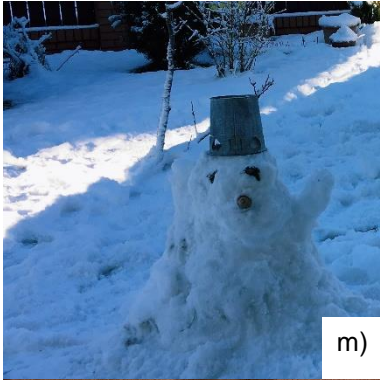
21. To swan about

To swan about means to walk around in a public place in a particularly ostentatious manner – hoping that everybody notices you and in particular the fabulous – and maybe expensive – clothes and hairstyle that you are sporting. It could be said that swans do not swan about, but rather glide effortlessly on silken waters. This idiom is, therefore, a bit of a slur against swans, which are naturally elegant and beautiful creatures, and do not need to try to be noticed – unlike those who must swan about.

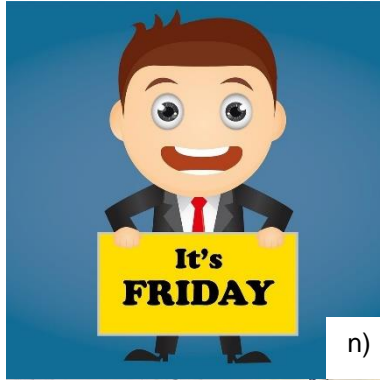
21 English Idioms – Picture Quiz

Match the idioms with the pictures below:





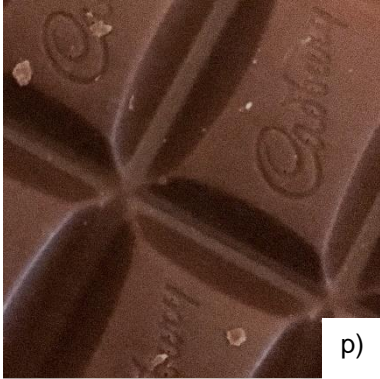
m)



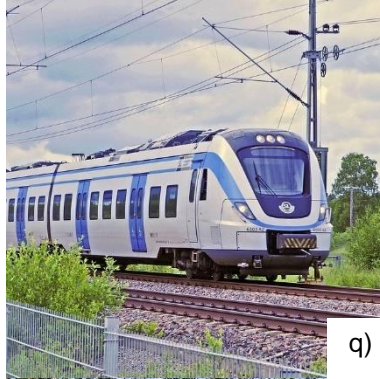
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o)



p)



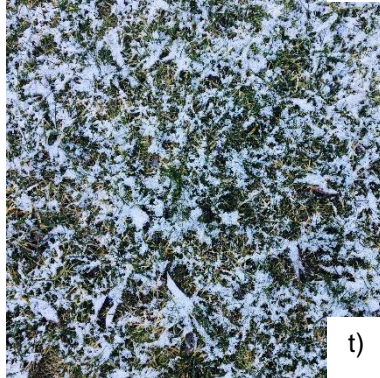
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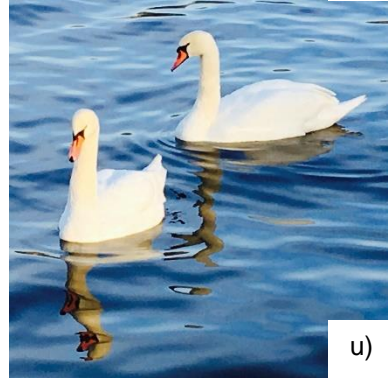
r)



s)



t)



u)

Answers:

- a) 2
- b) 10
- c) 3
- d) 4
- e) 6
- f) 17
- g) 13
- h) 19
- i) 9
- j) 8
- k) 16
- l) 20
- m) 7
- n) 14
- o) 11
- p) 1
- q) 12
- r) 15
- s) 5
- t) 18
- u) 21

Images by <https://purlandtraining.com> and <https://pixabay.com> (b, c, d, e, i, n, q)