

# IDIOMS AND PHRASES AND CLAUSES

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## 5. IDIOMS, PHRASES and CLAUSES

### 5.1 Idioms

**Idioms:** The word 'Idiom' is derived from, French word "idiome" or Latin word "idioma" meaning private property. In English grammar, Idioms are groups of words or phrasal verbs that convey a specific meaning by virtue of usage. Some are grammatically correct: some seem funny, strange, or illogical, but you should not seek to derive literal meaning from their individual elements.

Mastery over idioms is attained after sustained reading and careful listening. Though you may find similarities in the idioms used in English and some other language, it is because many human experiences and observations are similar across the globe.

Idioms are a group of words whose meanings are different from the meanings of the individual words that make up the idioms. The words are always in a particular order.

It is necessary for you to get familiar with them because sometimes you will get exercises of sentence improvement based on them where you have to correct the idiom used in the sentence. Knowledge of idioms can also be used in the questions of English usage errors.

#### Examples of some commonly used idioms:

##### 1) Bet on the wrong horse

**Meaning:** misread the future

**Example:** He is betting on the wrong horse if he keeps supporting the other city in their bid for the games.

##### 2) Across the board

**Meaning:** including everyone or everything.

**Example:** The computer company decided to give the workers an across-the-board increase in their salary.

##### 3) Throw money at something

**Meaning:** try to solve a problem by spending money on it

**Example:** The president of our company is willing to throw a lot of money at the problem in the hope of solving it.

##### 4) A bolt from the blue

**Meaning:** some unexpected bad news.

**Example:** "It came like a bolt from the blue that they are getting divorced."

##### 5) To be shown the red card

**Meaning:** to be dismissed from your job.

**Example:** "The accountant was shown the red card for hiding company money."

##### 6) Equal to the occasion

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**Meaning:** able to cope with circumstances

**Example:** When people came to attack him he rose to the occasion and repulsed the attack.

### 7) From pillar to post

**Meaning:** from one place to another

**Example:** He had to roam from pillar to post to get his work done.

### 8) To grease the palm

**Meaning:** to bribe

**Example:** One must grease the palm of the peon to get the work done.

### 9) To get on one's nerves

**Meaning:** to become a nuisance

**Example:** He is getting on my nerves and so has become troublesome.

### 10) On the horns of dilemma

**Meaning:** in a fix

**Example:** He has two offers and is on the horns of dilemma which to accept.

### 11) To leave no stone unturned

**Meaning:** to do one's utmost

**Example:** He will leave no stone unturned for getting this job.

### 12) Pour oil on troubled waters

**Meaning:** calm down

**Example:** Agitation's must be stopped; pour oil on troubled waters.

### 13) Stick to one's guns

**Meaning:** to stick to one's opinions.

**Example:** He will stick to his guns under all circumstances.

### 14) Strike while the iron is hot

**Meaning:** to do a work at a proper time

**Example:** Do not think too much; strike while the iron is hot.

### 15) The crux of the problem

**Meaning:** The most important aspect of the issue

**Example:** The crux of the problem is that he should remain your subordinate.

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## 5.2 Phrases

**Phrases:** A phrase is a group of words that does not contain a subject-verb combination. Phrases also function as units, as single parts of speech. There are noun phrases, adjective phrases, adverb phrases.

**Noun phrase:** A Noun Phrase is a group of words that does the work of a Noun.

**Example:** **Early to bed** is a good maxim.

**Adjective phrase:** An Adjective Phrase is a group of words that does the work of an adjective.

**Example:** A crown **made of gold**.

**Adverb Phrase:** An Adverb Phrase is a group of words that does the work of an adverb.

**Example:** He fell **to the ground**.

## 5.3 Clauses

**Clauses:** Groups of words that contain a subject-verb combination are clauses. Thus a clause may be a whole sentence. If a clause can stand by itself as a sentence, it is an **independent clause**. If the clause is acting as a noun, adjective or adverb and cannot stand by itself, it is a **dependent or subordinate clause**.

**Noun Clause:** A Noun Clause is a group of words which contains a Subject and a predicate of its own and does the work of a Noun.

**Example:** No one could read **what he wrote**.

**Adjective Clause:** An Adjective Clause is a group of words which contains a Subject and a predicate of its own and does the work of an adjective.

**Example:** The umbrella **which has a broken handle** is mine.

**Adverb Clause:** An Adverb Clause is a group of words which contains a subject and a predicate of its own and does the work of an adverb.

**Example:** They rested **when evening came**.

### Exercise for practice

**Please go through the following and answer question no. 1 to 10.**

Each of the following idioms is followed by alternative meanings of which only one is correct. Choose the appropriate option.

1. An axe to grind.
    - (a) To put an axe in the enemy's territory.
    - (b) To put an axe in the ground.
    - (c) Not to have any selfish motive.
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- (d) To have a strong motive
2. Once in a blue moon.
    - (a) Frequently
    - (b) rarely
    - (c) Never
    - (d) Once a year.
  3. To have the gift of the gab.
    - (a) A talent for speaking.
    - (b) To do exactly the right thing.
    - (c) To be cheerful
    - (d) To get lots of gifts.
  4. To catch a tartar.
    - (a) To deal with a person who is more than one's match.
    - (b) To catch a dangerous person.
    - (c) To trap a wanted criminal with great difficulty.
    - (d) To meet with disaster.
  5. Hook, line and sinker.
    - (a) Elaborately.
    - (b) Judiciously.
    - (c) With full preparation
    - (d) completely.
  6. They **made no bones about** acknowledging their debt to his genius.
    - (a) Did not have any hesitation in.
    - (b) Did not have any faith in.
    - (c) Demanded compensation for.
    - (d) Had problems in.
  7. MRF was retrenching and marry **got the sack**.
    - (a) Was retained
    - (b) Was dismissed from her job.
    - (c) Got a promotion.
    - (d) Got an increase in pay.
  8. In the winter, my knee **acts up**. I must see a doctor soon.
    - (a) Gives trouble
    - (b) Works better
    - (c) Becomes rigid
    - (d) Dislocates.
  9. We should give a **wide berth** to bad characters.
    - (a) Give publicity to
    - (b) publicly condemn
    - (c) Keep away from
    - (d) not sympathies with
  10. The sight of the accident **made my flesh creep**.
    - (a) Drew my attention.
    - (b) Confused me.
    - (c) Frightened me.
    - (d) Worried me.

**ANSWERS: -**

1. (d)    2. (b)    3. (a)    4. (a)    5. (d)    6. (a)    7. (b)    8. (a)    9. (a)  
10. (a)
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