

List of 100 Idioms and Phrases with Meaning and Example

1. Rags to riches -

Meaning - Becoming very rich while starting very poor.

Example - His innovative ideas in business got him from rags to riches.

2. Chase your tail-

Meaning - Spending a lot of time and energy doing a lot of things but actually achieving too little.

Example - He's been chasing his tail all week collecting data but the report is still not ready

3. Whole bag of tricks

Meaning - Means trying all the clever means to achieve something.

Example - It was really difficult to find the information even after applying the whole bag of tricks.

4. A hot potato

Meaning- Something that is difficult or dangerous to deal with.

Example- Terrorism is a political hot potato in Afghanistan.

5. An arm and a leg

Meaning- A lot of money.

Example- It's the best cruise in the world, but it will cost you an arm and a leg.

6. Fast track something -

Meaning - Rating something higher on your priority list to achieve the desired result.

Example - In view of the seriousness of the crime, the civil society is pressing up on a fast track decision from the court.

7. Get ducks in a row -

Meaning - Getting your things well organized.

Example - To ensure a successful product launch, we must get our ducks in a row.

8. Burn the midnight oil-

Meaning- To stay up working, especially studying, late at night.

Example- She's been burning the midnight oil for the last few months; her hard work will definitely pay off in the coming exams.

9. Think on your feet -

Meaning - Adjusting quickly to changes and making fast decisions.

Example - A good sales man must be able to think on his feet to close the deal

10. Don't judge a book by its cover -

Meaning- Don't judge something primarily by its appearance.

Example- She: He doesn't look intelligent. He: You can't judge a book by its cover.

11. Not let grass grow under feet -

Meaning - Don't delay in getting something done.

Example - As soon as he finished all the registration formalities, he put the house on sale. He doesn't let the grass grow under his feet.

12. Work like a charm -

Meaning - Works very well or has the desired effect.

Example - I had cloves from my sore throat and they worked like a charm.

13. Dead wood -

Meaning - People or things which are no longer useful or necessary.

Example - The Company bought in a lot of new computers. They no longer want the dead woods.

14. Golden handshake -

Meaning - Big sum of money given to a person when they leave a company or retire.

Example - The management of various PSUs wanted to cut down on the man power. They offered a golden hand shake to many of their aged employees.

15. Separate sheep from goats -

Meaning - Examining a group of people and deciding their suitability

Example - Audition test was conducted by the director to separate sheep from goats.

16. Waiting in the wings -

Meaning - Waiting for an opportunity to take action, mostly to replace someone else in their job.

Example - The senior manager is going to retire in next 2 months. Two of his juniors who are waiting in the wings will have a fierce competition.

17. Eat, sleep and breathe something -

Meaning - Being so enthusiastic and passionate about something that you think about it all the time.

Example - My son has recently learnt cycling. He eats, sleeps and breathes it now.

18. Curiosity killed the cat -

Meaning: Being too curious can get you into trouble.

Example: Don't ask about his divorce-curiosity killed the cat!

19. Fever pitch -

Meaning - When a feeling is very intense and exciting, it is said to be at a fever pitch.

Example - His love for music had reached a fever pitch before he became a world known musician.

20. Blood, sweat and tears -

Meaning - Something that requires a lot of effort and hard work.

Example - Being the team of Indian cricket team is not just a matter of luck for him, it is his blood, sweat and tears which has got him here.

21. Have on the brain -

Meaning - Thinking or talking about it all day long.

Example - He has just got engaged. Now, he has his finance on his brain all the time.

22. Fling yourself into -

Meaning - Doing something with a lot of energy and enthusiasm.

Example - Flinging himself into the exercise routine is the reason for his good physique.

23. Raring to go -

Meaning - Being very eager and enthusiastic about the idea of doing something.

Example - My kids wish to see the animals. They are raring to go to zoo.

24. Don't count your chickens before the eggs have hatched-

Meaning- Don't make plans for something that might not happen.

Example- You might not win the prize and you've already spent the money? Don't count your chickens before the eggs have hatched.

25. Get a grip on yourself -

Meaning - Controlling your feelings to deal with a situation.

Example - Reema saw her jewellery and cash missing from the almirah. After the initial shock, she got a grip on herself and called up the police.

26. Hang on by fingernails -

Meaning - Continuing to do something in a very difficult situation.

Example - The market of watches has suffered a big loss after the arrival of mobile phones. The survivors are just hanging on by their fingernails.

27. Don't put all your eggs in one basket-

Meaning: Don't focus all of your attention on one thing or one area.

Example: I know you love Harvard, but don't put all your eggs in one basket. Apply to other colleges too

28. Every cloud has a silver lining-

Meaning- Be optimistic, even difficult times will lead to better days.

Example- I'm sorry your business is going badly, but remember every cloud has a silver lining.

29. Kill two birds with one stone-

Meaning- To solve two problems at a time with just one action

Example- John practiced his words while peeling the potatoes. He was killing two birds with one stone.

30. Oldest trick in the book-

Meaning- A well-known and much used trick/method

Example- Oldest trick in the book to treat cold and cough is drinking turmeric milk.

31. Old habits die hard-

Meaning- People find it difficult to change their accustomed behaviour.

Example- She retired last month, but still gets up at the same time in the morning. Old habits die hard.

32. Once in a blue moon-

Meaning- Very rarely

Example- Tina has a very rocky relationship with her father. She speaks to him once in a blue moon.

33. Punch above one's weight-

Meaning - Performing beyond your ability.

Example - He was not the best swimmer around but he could win the gold medal at the state swimming competition by working hard and punching above his weight in the finals.

34. Sink your teeth into -

Meaning - doing something with a lot of energy and enthusiasm.

Example - Marie joined the badminton coaching classes. She sank her teeth into the practice sessions.

35. Stand one's ground -

Meaning - Maintaining your position.

Example - He stood his ground in support of his friend in spite of several family interferences.

36. Close to home -

Meaning - A comment which is true and makes you uncomfortable is close to home.

Example - Tom's comment about his friend's unethical activities was quite close to home. He looked quite embarrassed.

37. Out of the blue-

Meaning: Happen unexpectedly

Example: He had given up all hope when out of the blue he got a call from IIM.

38. Cork up something -

Meaning - Failing to express your emotions.

Example - She did not let her grief pour out when her father passed away. It's not good for her to cork up his feelings.

39. Cut to the quick -

Meaning - Hurting someone deeply or offending them.

Example - Joe had worked for 10 years with all his loyalty for his company. He was cut to the quick when his boss held him responsible for the theft.

40. Fish out of water -

Meaning - Feeling uncomfortable in unfamiliar surroundings.

Example - Being French, I felt like a fish out of water in the group of Japanese.

41. Bee in one's bonnet -

Meaning - Carrying an idea which constantly occupies your thoughts.

Example - She is not happy in Africa. She has a bee in the bonnet about moving to Dubai.

42. Deep down -

Meaning - Describing what a person really feels deep inside or what is he like.

Example - He appears to be indifferent to the success or failure of his children but deep down he is highly concerned.

43. Have your heart in the right place -

Meaning - Refers to a person with good intentions; even though the results are not that impressive.

Example - The dinner she had cooked wasn't the best but she had her heart in the right place.

44. See eye to eye -

Meaning- To be in agreement with

Example- She was glad her roommate saw eye to eye on the choice of the flat.

45. Beard the lion in his den -

Meaning - Challenge someone in his own area.

Example - If he doesn't come to see me today, I'll have to beard the lion in his den.

46. Shot in the dark -

Meaning- A complete guess (may or may not be close to the truth)

Example- He didn't know too much about programming, so answering the interviewer's question was merely a shot in the dark.

47. Go bananas -

Meaning - Refers to someone who behaves in a crazy way out of emotions.

Example - Your decision to go abroad for a year will make your family go bananas.

48. Lump in your throat -

Meaning - Refers to a tight feeling in your throat because of an emotion like sadness or gratitude.

Example - After all the hardships, I saw my son winning a gold medal today - I had a lump in my throat.

49. Hard as nails -

Meaning - Refers to a person without sentiments and sympathy for anyone.

Example - He has become as hard as a nail after his brother was brutally murdered.

50. Proud as a peacock -

Meaning - Refers to an extremely proud person.

Example - His son is has finally become a doctor. He is as proud as a peacock.

51. Skating on thin ice-

Meaning- Do or say something risky or something that could cause trouble.

Example- Don't say anything that hurts her self-esteem or you could be skating on thin ice.

52. Look on the bright side -

Meaning - View an unpleasant situation in a positive light.

Example - You met with an accident but look on the bright side - you managed to get away just with some bruises.

53. Swallow one's pride -

Meaning - Accepting something humiliating or embarrassing.

Example - When his son was caught cheating in the exam. He had to swallow his pride and meet the principal.

54. Strike while the iron is hot-

Meaning: To act at the right time

Example: The price of gold is at a 10 year low, strike while the iron is hot and invest in it right away

55. Speak volumes -

Meaning - Expresses a reaction without words.

Example - She came to pick me at the station at an odd hour. Her actions spoke volumes about her brevity.

56. Not turn a hair -

Meaning - Refers to not exhibiting any emotion where it is expected.

Example - He didn't turn a hair even after his office was raided by the CBI

57. Reduce to tears -

Meaning - Getting into tears because of some one's behaviour.

Example - Her best friend stopped talking to her. This reduced her to tears.

58. Think the world of -

Meaning: Admire someone very much

Example: Emily is a wonderful teacher – children think the world of her.

59. Blow up in face -

Meaning - Refers to a situation when a plan or project suddenly fails.

Example - It was difficult to get a place in the train to Mumbai. It blew up in the face when a train de-railed and blocked the track.

60. Bottom fell out -

Meaning - Refers to a situation when a plan or project fails.

Example - When the police announced a red alert in the city, the bottom fell out of their plan to hold a rally.

61. Cake not worth the candle -

Meaning - Refers to something in which result vs. efforts are too less.

Example - He worked very hard to organize the party but very few guests walked in. The cake wasn't worth the candle.

62. Chance one's arm -

Meaning - Deciding to do something even though the chances of success are very little.

Example - She knew there was little chance of getting through the audition test but she decided to chance her arm.

63. Come up roses -

Meaning - Successful end results even though there may be some initial hiccups.

Example - After initial hiccups, the project seems to be coming up roses.

64. Cook someone's goose -

Meaning - Spoil other person's chances of success.

Example - When the opponent team saw Indian batsmen taking wicket after wicket, they realized that their goose was cooked.

65. Cut one's own throat -

Meaning - Doing something that will cause your own failure.

Example - Raghav is not sincere in the class since the beginning. He is cutting his own throat.

66. Foot in the door -

Meaning - Small but good start with a possibility for a bright future.

Example - With customers coming in, his new venture has got a foot in the door.

67. Go great guns -

Meaning - Being successful.

Example - Ram's preparation for the final exams is going great guns. He scored 90% marks in the practice test.

68. Dead in the water -

Meaning - Plan or project that has ceased to function and is not expected to be re-activated in future.

Example - Because of the revolt from the civil society, the plan to get the FDI in various sectors is now dead in the water.

69. Flying start -

Meaning - Something that is immediately successful.

Example - The film hit the box office with a flying start and collected the highest revenue on day 1.

70. Make a go of -

Meaning - Succeeding in your enterprise.

Example - With his hard work and dedication, he has made a go of his new venture.

71. Go to the dogs -

Meaning - Getting comparably less successful than before.

Example - With new corruption scams un-veiling every day, the country is going to dogs.

72. Go up in smoke -

Meaning - Something that ends before getting a result.

Example - With a vigilant police force around the town, the plan of antisocial elements to cause chaos went up in smoke.

73. Live on the breadline -

Meaning - Having very little income.

Example - The partition of the country has left many people on the breadline.

74. Make or break -

Meaning - Circumstances causing total success or total ruin.

Example - The huge investments in this big project with make or break him.

75. Wear many hats-

Meaning- Do many different types tasks

Example- We have such a small number of employees that one is often supposed to wear many hats.

76. Wild goose chase -

Meaning- Waste time looking for something that has little chance of being found

Example- She tried to find out who the anonymous caller was, but it turned out to be a wild goose chase.

77. Cut the ground from under feet-

Meaning - When you cut the ground from under someone's feet, you do something which weakens their position.

Example - When team India hit more than 350 runs in the ODI, they cut the ground from under the opponent's feet.

78. On the pig's back -

Meaning - Refers to a person in successful and well situation.

Example - The tourism in the state was on the pig's back before the terror attacks hit the capital.

79. Worth one's salt-

Meaning- Good or competent at the job or profession specified

Example- She deserves respect as she is totally worth her salt.

80. Smash hit -

Meaning - Refers to music, films which are very successful.

Example - His music became a smash hit in a week's time.

81. Murphy's law -

Meaning - Means that if anything can go wrong, it will.

Example - Let's be prepared for the worst but don't forget the Murphy's law.

82. Place in the sun -

Meaning - Finding a place in the sun refers to a position which provides you all the success and happiness you want in your life.

Example - Getting married into the renowned business family in the town, she found a place in the sun.

83. Sink or swim -

Meaning - fails or succeed.

Example - The test will decide if he sinks or swims.

84. Wrap one's brain around-

Meaning- Concentrate on something in an effort to understand

Example- I really need to wrap my brain around this concept before the exam.

85. Top dog -

Meaning - Very successful group, company, person, country etc.

Example - The economic survey proved that they are the top dogs of the IT industry.

86. Keep up appearances -

Meaning - Maintaining an outward show of prosperity or well-being while hiding your difficulties

Example - Keeping up the appearances was important for him to secure the new big projects.

87. Wooden spoon -

Meaning - Imaginary prize for the last person in a race.

Example - We won a wooden spoon at the fashion show.

88. Have the world by its tail -

Meaning - Very successful person who can choose from a lot of opportunities.

Example - Being the pioneers in the pharmaceutical industry, they are now having the world by its tail.

89. Actions speak louder than words

Meaning- What you do is more significant than what you say.

Example- He: I'm sorry. I'll try to be a better person henceforth. She: Actions speak louder than words.

90. Live beyond means -

Meaning - Spending more money than you can afford.

Example - He has a habit of living beyond his means. Most of the times, you will find him borrowing the money from his friends.

91. Zero in on something-

Meaning- Focus all attention onto one thing

Example- The teacher immediately zeroed in on the weaker students of the class

92. Hit the road running -

Meaning - Start performing immediately.

Example - She was our old employee. She hit the road running when she joined us back.

93. Acid Test-

Meaning - Acid test proves the effectiveness of something.

Example - I practiced hard at the dance sessions but the acid test will come when the master will assess our solo performances.

94. Deliver the goods -

Meaning - Do what is expected or promised.

Example - I have given my car to a new mechanic for repair, hope he delivers the goods.

95. Explore all avenues-

Meaning - Trying out every possibility to get a result.

Example - It is a difficult thing to do but if we really want it done, we must explore all avenues.

96. Worm's eye view-

Meaning: A perspective seen from below or from a low or inferior position

Example: The trainees get only a worm's eye view of the corporate structure.

97. Get the show on the road -

Meaning - Putting up a plan or idea into action.

Example - Now that we have completed all the legal formalities, let's get the show on the road.

98. Mean business -

Meaning - Being serious about what you announce.

Example - Now that all our policies about work are put up on intranet, we mean business

99. Wolf in sheep's clothing -

Meaning- Dangerous person pretending to be harmless

Example- I thought she was a good person, but I realized that she was a wolf in a sheep's clothing when she backstabbed me during the selection process.

100. Tricks of the trade:

Meaning - Clever or expert way of doing something.

Example - Being into the construction business for last 10 years, I know all tricks of the trade.