
Idioms challenge!

WORKSHEET A

Exercise 1

Read the definitions (1–7) below of some idioms. For each definition, two of the expressions (a–c) have been invented, but one is the correct idiom. Can you identify it?

1. To fail to take an opportunity because you didn't act quickly enough
 - a) Wake up at the end of the film
 - b) Buy yesterday's newspaper
 - c) Miss the boat

2. What people actually do is more important (or a better indication of their true feelings) than what they say
 - a) Doing is above talking
 - b) Actions speak louder than words
 - c) A foot on the stairs beats a word in the air

3. If something bad is being said about someone, or if something seems bad, there is probably a good reason for it
 - a) No smoke without fire
 - b) No mouth without teeth
 - c) No car without wheels

4. To avoid taking responsibility by saying that someone else is responsible
 - a) Pass the chocolate
 - b) Pass the buck
 - c) Pass the wine

5. Something is not going to continue for much longer (e.g., a person is going to lose their job soon, or a product is going to stop being produced soon)
 - a) Their days are numbered
 - b) Their bottle is almost empty
 - c) Their milkshake is finished

6. An activity or situation (especially a job or career) in which there is a lot of competition and people are too busy to relax or enjoy themselves
 - a) Rat hole
 - b) Rat food
 - c) Rat race

7. Don't expect or wait for something (usually something good) to happen, because it probably won't happen
 - a) Don't stand with your mouth open
 - b) Don't hold your breath
 - c) Don't hold your hands out

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WORKSHEET B

Exercise 2

Now choose the correct answer (*a*, *b*, or *c*) for each of the questions below.

1. What is a “wet blanket”?
 - a) Someone who spoils other people’s fun by being negative and complaining
 - b) Something that looks impressive but is really just an illusion
 - c) Something that makes your face or head look very different

2. What does it mean if you “keep someone posted”?
 - a) You make sure they can’t come near you (or at least not often)
 - b) You give them up-to-date information about what is happening
 - c) You make sure they have enough to eat and drink

3. What does it mean if someone has “guts” (or has “the guts” to do something)?
 - a) They are courageous
 - b) They are angry
 - c) They are intelligent

4. What does “sell your soul” mean?
 - a) To sell something that is important to you but not to anyone else
 - b) To mix your personal life with your working life
 - c) To do something that is against your beliefs (e.g., for money)

5. What does it mean if something is “like watching paint dry”?
 - a) It is very difficult
 - b) It is very easy
 - c) It is very boring

6. What does it mean if something is “set in stone”?
 - a) It is extremely old
 - b) It cannot be changed or altered
 - c) It is dirty

7. When might someone say “in a nutshell”?
 - a) If they are about to give you a short summary of some information
 - b) If they are about to tell you about something someone did that they think was very bad
 - c) If they are about to tell you a joke

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WORKSHEET C

Exercise 3

Complete the sentences below with the appropriate idioms from Exercises 1 and 2. You may need to change the verb forms.

1. "I don't know how much longer I can keep working here. Sure, the money's good, but the company does so many unethical things. I feel like I've _____. What I'd really like to do is leave the _____ and just go and live on a beach somewhere; but then how would I pay the bills?"
"Yeah, right, you've been saying that for at least five years. Maybe you like the job more than you think. After all, _____."
2. "I heard that my boss's _____, and that he might be fired by the end of the month. Do you think I'll be asked to replace him?"
"Well, I wouldn't _____. I think they'll probably recruit someone from outside instead."
3. "You were on the phone talking to her for almost an hour, so what did she say?"
"_____, that her vacation was good but very expensive."
4. "What was the basketball game like?"
"It was awful. I was almost falling asleep – it was like _____. And then Jimmy made it even worse by starting to tell me all about his problems. What a _____!"
5. "I really wanted to take that Spanish class, but I _____. I didn't call the college until yesterday, and by then it was full. What about your Spanish class? I guess it's full too?"
"Well, yeah, there are only supposed to be fifteen students, but that's not _____. There's a chance they might decide to let a couple more in. I'll _____, ok?"
6. "I've been hearing some funny things about Peter. Two different people told me he's in some kind of trouble with the police. I'm not sure whether to believe it."
"Well, I wouldn't be surprised. _____."
7. "Sarah, can't you see that none of these problems are my fault?"
"But you're in charge!"
"Yes, but Jo and Mike are running the project. That should be obvious."
"Oh, come on, stop _____! Why don't you have _____ to admit that you have made mistakes?"