
Fun with idioms

WORKSHEET A

Exercise 1

For each definition below, two of the idioms (a–c) have been invented, but one is correct. Can you identify the correct idiom in each case?

1. If someone looks very angry, we can say they have:
 - a) a face like thunder.
 - b) a face like the moon.
 - c) a face like a camel.
2. If someone hears something that sounds very interesting and therefore begins to listen carefully, we say their:
 - a) ears prick up.
 - b) ears turn on.
 - c) ears start growing.
3. Work that we do because we enjoy it or because we think it is worthwhile, not because it gives us a financial reward, can be described as:
 - a) a job from the stars.
 - b) work of the heart.
 - c) a labour of love.
4. If we think something will certainly happen but we don't know when, we can say it is:
 - a) a decision by time.
 - b) a question of time.
 - c) a present from time.
5. Another way of saying that something happens very quickly is that it happens:
 - a) as fast as a mouse.
 - b) as rapid as a rabbit.
 - c) as quick as a flash.
6. A person who can be trusted to do something in a way that won't cause any harm or trouble can be described as:
 - a) a good pair of feet.
 - b) a safe pair of hands.
 - c) a warm pair of gloves.
7. If you get an opportunity to start working in an organisation or business, especially when this will give you more opportunities in the future, it can be said that you:
 - a) get your foot in the door.
 - b) get your elbows on the table.
 - c) get your feet on the stairs.

Fun with idioms

WORKSHEET B

Exercise 2

For each idiom below, two of the definitions (a–c) are wrong, and one is right. Can you identify the correct definition in each case?

1. What does it mean if you ‘lose face’?
 - a) You no longer impress people or are respected by them, usually because you show you are not in control of a situation or have failed in some way.
 - b) You start showing physical signs of getting older.
 - c) Your relationship with a very close friend starts to become more distant.
2. What does it mean if you ‘lose your head’?
 - a) You start becoming less anxious.
 - b) You start becoming less powerful.
 - c) You become so upset or anxious that you stop thinking clearly or behaving in a sensible way.
3. After someone has been successful in something, what does it mean if the success ‘goes to their head’?
 - a) They start behaving more intelligently.
 - b) They start thinking they are better or more important than they really are.
 - c) They become determined to continue their success.
4. If you ‘bury your head in the sand’, you:
 - a) work hard to try to solve a very difficult problem.
 - b) try to do something that will be impossible to achieve.
 - c) ignore a problem or an unpleasant situation and hope that it will disappear.
5. What does ‘get cracking’ mean?
 - a) To start doing something or going somewhere immediately.
 - b) To panic.
 - c) To start behaving aggressively towards other people.
6. What is a ‘yes man’?
 - a) Someone who will usually lend money to people if they ask for it.
 - b) Someone with a positive attitude who generally believes they can achieve their goals.
 - c) Someone who always agrees with people in authority, usually because they want those people to like them.
7. If you are ‘under someone’s thumb’, it means that:
 - a) you are always making that person angry.
 - b) you are completely controlled by that person.
 - c) you are always competing with that person.

Fun with idioms

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. 'Your garden's beautiful. It must have been a lot of work to get it looking like this.'
'Well, it's a _____ of _____. And it's great being outside at the weekend.'
'But you're not going to cut the lawn this afternoon, are you? In this heat?'
'Oh, I don't mind. And I told Sarah I'd be finished by four o'clock, so I need to _____.'
2. 'I've been there four years and not been promoted yet. I'm starting to think they don't like me. What they want is a _____ like John Spencer – someone who never questions anything and always does what he's told.'
'Has he been promoted?'
'Not yet, but it's only a _____ of _____.'
3. 'Poor Bill! He has to cut that huge lawn of his on a day like this. Just because his wife told him to. He's _____ her _____, you know.'
'No, he's not. He loves gardening. I'm sure he only does it because he wants to.'
4. 'I was in the corridor and I heard Liz Hawking, the area manager, talking to someone in one of the meeting rooms. She mentioned promotions, so obviously my ears _____.'
5. 'When Jim finished university he worked as an intern in one of the country's most successful companies. He wasn't getting paid but it was a way of _____ his _____ in the _____.'
6. 'These CCTV images show what happened. The thieves work in pairs. One of them goes to ask the woman a question, she turns towards him to answer, and as _____ as a _____, the other man grabs her bag.'
7. 'I can't stand listening to him now. He's an assistant manager, but he talks like he's the chairman! That promotion's really _____ to his _____.'
8. 'His business is losing money every month, but whenever he talks about it he says it's doing as well as before. It's as if he's scared of _____. If he doesn't come to some kind of agreement with the bank he's going to be in serious trouble, but I don't think he's even spoken to them yet – it seems he's just _____ his _____ in the _____.'
9. 'Jo, just to warn you, Mary's got a _____ like _____ and she's coming this way.'
'Well, whatever she's upset about, it's not my fault.'
10. 'She was given the job because she's the kind of person who can keep calm under pressure. She won't _____ her _____ in a crisis.'