

B2.10 Idioms in Conversation

You can learn:

- How to use idioms in every day conversation.
- How to deduce meaning from context.

1



English can be a very idiomatic language, which sometimes makes it difficult to understand what native speakers are saying. Idioms consist of two or more words. But it is usually difficult to guess the meaning of an idiom from the individual words it contains. So they need to be learned together, as a unit, when you are learning a foreign language. Look at the example below:



Image Attribution to Chuck Bruner

I was over the moon when I got my exam results. I went out for a drink with my friends and rang my family straight away. I couldn't believe I had managed to get an 'A' in every subject!

1

Is it easy to guess what the underlined idiom means? You may know what "over" and "moon" is, but not be able to guess that "over the moon" means "happy". However, the context can help you to guess. Also, idioms can often be grouped e.g. 'animal' idioms, 'colour' idioms, 'fire' idioms, or 'food' idioms. Or some can be seen as representing a central metaphorical idea e.g. argument = war, life = a journey. This can help you to remember them.

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2



Read how the people below are using idioms in every day conversation. Can you work out what they mean from the contexts.

1



Image Attribution to JF Sebastian

If you go through to the office, be careful! Tony and Jill have been arguing. I've been keeping my head down - just trying to get on with my work. I really don't want to get caught in the crossfire.

2



Image Attribution to Calotype46

We got on like a house on fire immediately. And now we have been together for thirty years. We had a couple of blazing rows in the early days of our relationship. But overall, our marriage has been a great success.

3

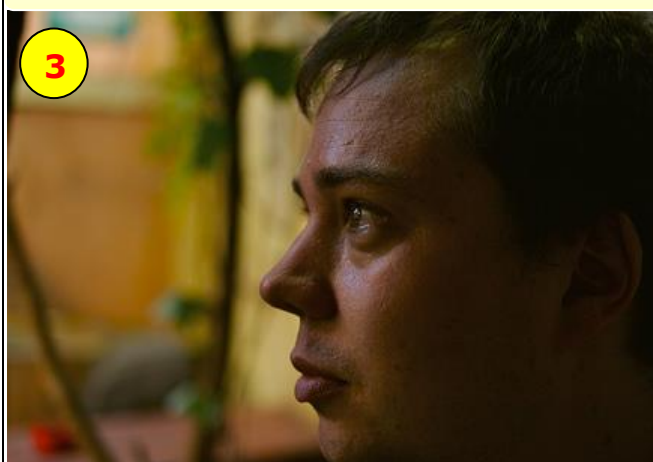


Image Attribution to chuckbiscuito

I feel that this job offer has left me with a difficult decision. I feel like I'm at a crossroads. It means relocating to a new city, but I don't want to be stuck in a dead-end job all my life.

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4



Image Attribution to tuxwurf

When my girlfriend left me, I was told there were plenty more fish in the sea. But I think I may go on looking for a new girlfriend until the cows come home, and I'll never find one.

5



Image Attribution to fikirbaz

I saw red basically. I shouted that I was no longer friends with him. You would have done too; if your best friend won't even tell one little white lie for you. All he had to do was to tell my wife I was with him when she called.

6



Attribution to Jerry Bunkers

This product is going to sell like hot cakes, I can assure you. Every customer will want to buy this policy. The rate of interest is so low, it's going to be popular. Everyone will agree that this is the best thing since sliced bread.

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3



Now discuss the questions below which use many of the same idioms. This will help you check you really understand them and should help you to remember them.

- When was the last time you had to keep your head down because two people were arguing?
- Have you ever been caught in the crossfire when friends have been fighting? What happened?
- Who do you get on with like a house on fire? Why?
- What would you say and do if two people you loved were having a blazing row?
- When did you last feel you were at a crossroads in your life? What did you decide to do?
- What do you consider to be dead-end jobs?
- Is there anything you can happily do until the cows come home? Is it a hobby? Does it annoy others?
- When and why was the last time you saw red?
- When was the last time you told a little white lie?
- Which products in your country sell like hot cakes?

4



Now write a dialogue between two people.

One of them should use, "plenty more fish in the sea", and the other should say at some point, "the best thing since sliced bread".

