

Part 2

Selected Idioms by Category

In this part, selected idioms are organized into categories. The idioms were chosen because they are commonly used and understood by native English speakers in the United States. These lists are not meant to be complete; many more idioms could be added to these categories. In addition, some of the idioms below could be put into more than one category. Teachers might use these categories for organizing exercises or focusing discussions. There are sample questions using these categories on pages 105-118.

People

DESCRIPTIONS OF PEOPLE (NOUNS)

- Apple of one's eye
- Big shot
- Big fish in a small pond
- Big wheel
- Bigwig
- Blue-blood
- Blue-collar worker
- Bull in a china shop
- Chip off the old block
- Eager beaver
- Fish out of water
- Good egg
- Head honcho
- Heavyweight
- Jack of all trades
- Lame duck
- Low man on the totem pole
- Old fuddy-duddy
- Salt of the earth
- Stuffed shirt
- White-collar worker

ABOUT PEOPLE (ADJECTIVES)

- All wet
- Filthy rich
- First-rate
- Footloose and fancy free
- Green around the gills
- Keyed up
- Knee-high to a grasshopper
- Too big for one's britches
- Up to snuff
- Upper crust
- Wet behind the ears

Conversation

- All kidding aside
- Beat around the bush
- Bend someone's ear
- Butt in
- Butter someone up
- Clam up
- Clear the air
- Clown around
- Get a word in edgewise

Gift of gab
Give someone a ring
Give someone a song and dance
Heart to heart
Hit the nail on the head
Hold one's tongue
Lend someone an ear
Make a long story short
Make a mountain out of a molehill
On the tip of one's tongue
Pass the buck
Pick someone's brain
Pull rank
Pull strings
Pull the rug out from under someone
Pull the wool over someone's eyes
Put someone on the spot
Say a mouthful
See eye to eye
Shoot the breeze
Spill the beans
Spring something on someone
Stand one's ground
Stick one's nose in
Straight from the horse's mouth
Stretch the truth
String someone along
Talk a blue streak
Talk turkey
Turn a deaf ear
Wing it

Pop the question
Roll out the red carpet
Seventh heaven, in
Sitting pretty
Strike it rich
Sweep someone off his/her feet
Through thick and thin
Tickle someone's fancy
Tickled pink
Tie the knot
Top of the line, the
Upper crust
With flying colors

ANGER/BEING UPSET

At the end of one's rope
At loggerheads
Ax to grind
Blow off steam
Boiling point
Chew someone out
Fly off the handle
Get up on the wrong side of the bed
Get someone's dander/hackles up
Give someone a hard time
Give someone a piece of one's mind
Give someone a taste of his own medicine
Go bananas
Hopping mad
Hot under the collar
Lose one's cool
On the warpath
Put one's foot down
Put the squeeze/screws on/to
Speak one's mind

Emotions/Feelings

SUCCESS AND HAPPINESS

Blue-blood
Blue ribbon
Carry a torch for someone
Charmed life, lead a
Cream of the crop
Dressed to kill
Footloose and fancy-free
Go to town
Gravy train
Happy-go-lucky
Have/got it made
Head over heels in love
In the chips/money
In the pink
Keep up with the Joneses
Lap of luxury, live in the
Life of Riley
Midas touch
On cloud nine

ILL HEALTH

Black and blue
Blue
Burned out
Down and out
Fall off the wagon
Go to pot
Go to seed
Go to the dogs
Know if one is coming or going, not
Look/feel like death warmed over
Off one's rocker
On one's last legs
Under the weather

NEGATIVE SITUATIONS

In a bind
In a jam
In a rut

In Dutch
In hot water
In over one's head
In the doghouse

Pinch pennies
Put one's money where one's mouth is
Sales pitch
Save (something) for a rainy day
Sell like hotcakes
Strike it rich
Take someone to the cleaners
Tighten one's belt
Wait for one's ship to come in

Time

At the drop of a hat
Burn the midnight oil
Days are numbered,
(someone's/something's)
Down to the wire
Eleventh hour
From the word go
In the long run
In the nick of time
Jump the gun
Mark time
On hold, put something
On ice, put something
Once in a blue moon
Shake a leg
Slow/quick off the mark
Spur of the moment, on the
Step on it
Time on one's hands, have some
Time to kill, have some
Under the wire
Until the cows come home

Job/Work

Back to the drawing board
Burn the candle at both ends
Get down to business
Keep one's nose to the grindstone
Old-boy network
Pencil/paper pusher
Pink slip
Pull rank
Rank and file

Money

Black market
Bottom line, the
Bring home the bacon
Buy (something) for a song
Cost (someone) a mint/an arm and a leg
Cut corners
Drop in the bucket
Dutch treat (Go Dutch)
Feather one's nest
Feel the pinch
Flat broke
Go broke
Hit pay dirt
Hit the jackpot
In the black
In the chips/money
In the red
Make ends meet
Midas touch
Money to burn
Pay through the nose
Penny pincher