

**What Is An Idiom?** An expression that has a meaning other than the literal translation of the individual words. Often, you can determine the meaning of an idiom by context or tone. Take a look at some examples, and then practice identifying & defining idioms in dialogue.



**EXAMPLES: Common Idioms You May Encounter**

	Idiom	Meaning	Idiom	Meaning
Academic	(To) play hooky	(To) skip a class in order to have fun	(To) pass with flying colors	(To) complete an assignment, an exam, or a course with a high grade
	Book smart	Having strong academic knowledge, but lacking “real world” experience (i.e. social, professional, or personal outside of academia)	(To) hit the books	(To) focus all your attention on studying (with or without books)
Social	A piece of cake	Something that is easy to do	(To) hit the sack	(To) go to sleep
	(To) lose your touch	(To) lose an ability/talent for interacting with people or handling situations; implies that you could do it in the past and now you can’t (there may or may not be a reason)	(To) look like a million bucks	To look extraordinarily attractive or amazing; often used when that someone has made an extra effort to do so for a special occasion
	(To be) up in the air	(To be) unsure about doing something; normally, the reference is made to plans that have not been finalized yet	(To) face the music	(To) deal with the reality of a situation and accept the consequences, particularly if they are bad (suggests there might be a punishment)
	(To) get over it	(To) feel better after a relationship break-up, or feel recovered from an illness	(To be) on the ball	(To be) quick to react because you understand, and you are well-prepared
	(To) know it by heart	(To) memorize something, and be able to recreate/remember it without difficulty	(To be) under the weather	(To) not feel well
	Speak of the devil	A situation where the person you’ve been talking about actually shows up in person at that moment	(To) blow off steam	(To) feel angry or upset and to do something positive (like exercise, for example) get rid of those feelings
	Best of both worlds	When you enjoy/experience two different opportunities at the same time	(To) go out on the town	(To) go to bars, restaurants, clubs, etc. with friends (a typical college weekend)
	(To) sit tight	(To) wait patiently and not take any type of action, even if you may want to	(To) cut to the chase	(To) hurry up and get to the point in a conversation or story
	(To) pitch in	(To) help someone finish a specific task, or help someone financially by giving him/her money	(To) find your feet	(To) adjust to your new environment
	(To) ride shotgun	(To) ride in the passenger seat of someone’s car (suggests that riding in front is a privilege)	(To) twist someone’s arm	(To) convince or beg someone to do something that they do not want to do
(To) break a leg	(To) wish someone good luck	(To) draw a blank	(To be) unable to remember something	
Add Your Own				

Adapted from:

- English Gateway’s ESL Worksheet for Higher Education Idioms (<http://www.englishgateway.com/>)
- FluentU (<http://www.fluentu.com/english/blog/essential-english-idioms/>)

**Further Examples:** <http://esl-bits.net/idioms/>  
<http://www.learnenglishfeelgood.com/americanidioms/>

**PRACTICE: Can You Spot the Idiom?**



Oftentimes, the best way to learn idioms, and to learn how to approach figuring out what an idiom might mean, is through conversations. Below, you will find a conversation between two people. There is one idiom in each line of dialogue.

**“Cutting Class”**

Conversation:		Meaning:
Identify each <i>idiom</i> (or <i>idiomatic expression</i> ) by underlining it in the dialogue below.		Write down what you think the <i>idiom</i> means (use the context of the dialogue to help you).
Person #1	I’m sorry I missed class today. I got tied up. How was it?	
Person #2	It was crazy. One minute the professor was lecturing and then she shifted gears and decided to make us do group work.	
Person #1	I like group work. Whenever the professor just lectures, I have the bad habit of tuning her out. Then, I miss stuff and don’t do well on the tests.	
Person #2	Speaking of tests, we have one tomorrow. I didn’t do well on the last two tests, so I guess I need to step up my game.	
Person #1	Then we should start studying, but can we get something to eat first? I’m running on fumes.	
Person #2	Sure. Whatever.	

**More Ways to Practice and Learn**

Get involved! Join an ISRC program, an on-campus student organization, or an intramural sports team. Attend campus events. When you are home, you can also:

- Watch a T.V. show, such as: [Friends](#), [Big Bang Theory](#), or [How I Met Your Mother](#)
- Watch a movie, such as: [Toy Story](#), [The Social Network](#), [Pitch Perfect](#), or [Monsters University](#)
- Subscribe to a podcast: [Podcasts in English](#) or [All Ears English](#)

**What is slang?** A word (or phrase) used in informal settings, and more common in speech than in writing. Slang differs from idioms, because the meaning is determined by a specific, limited context or is likely used/created by a smaller group of people. Slang can be region-specific, age-specific, and even school-specific.



**EXAMPLES: Common College Slang Words You May Encounter**

	Slang Word	Meaning	Slang Word	Meaning
<b>Academic</b>	All ears (adj.)	Listening with complete attention to whatever is being said	All-nighter (n.)	Studying or working all night on something for a class/professor/exam
	Pop quiz (n.)	A quiz or exam that is not announced	Brush up on (v.)	To review or become more familiar (about a particular subject)
	Are we on the same page?	“Do you understand what I mean?” OR “Do you agree with my explanation?”	(To) ace an exam	(To) pass an exam with a near perfect (or perfect) score without difficulty
	Show up (v.)	To arrive or come (to a class, meeting, etc.)	Draw a blank (v.)	To suddenly forget something
	Blow / Bomb (v.) OR Epic fail (n.)	To lose at or fail something (usually tests, but could be social) with immediate, and often big (negative) consequences	Hand-out / Hand-in (n. or v.)	Work/study paper(s), either given to students by the teacher (hand-out) or turned in by the students (hand-in)
<b>Social</b>	Buck / dough (n.)	Dollar / money (respectively)	Cash (n.)	Money (in the form of hard currency)
	Crash (v.)	To go to sleep (because you are exhausted); or to show up to a party/event when you have not been invited	Over (v.), as in “I’m over it”	Loss of interest, or the act of moving on after a negative event so that the event is no longer bothersome
	Dead (adj.)	Empty, quiet (often refers to a place that is normally crowded, but has few/no people)	Hyped (adj.)	Very excited (about an upcoming event, or something good that has happened)
	Screw up / mess up (v.)	To make a mistake or do something wrong	Sick / awesome (adj.)	Excellent/the best, or extremely impressive and admirable
	Cheesy (adj.)	Cheap or tacky	Cool (adj.)	Nice, trendy, impressive
	What’s up?	Common greeting that combines “How are you?” and “What are you doing?”	Sweet (adj.)	Very nice; sometimes means “that’s great!” in response to good news
	Rock / rule (v.), as in “That rocks!”	To be great/the best, can also be applied to people as well as things	Chill out / mellow out / kick back / goof off (v.)	To relax; depending on context, it could mean wasting time or not applying oneself to get something done
	No sweat / no problem	Casual phrase meaning “you’re welcome”	24/7 / Twenty four seven (adj.)	Non-stop, or around the clock
	Totally	Really, completely; can be used as a single word answer to agree with someone	Hang out (v.)	To spend time with a friend in a casual setting; may or may not include activity
	Rip-off (n.)	Something that costs more than it should, or the act of stealing from someone	No way	Phrase used to mean an emphatic “No” (something will definitely not happen)
Homie (n.)	A friend	I’m lost	I don’t understand	
<b>Add Your Own</b>				

Adapted from:

- Infosquares: American Slang (<http://www.infosquares.com/americanslang/>)
- Eflnet (<http://www.eflnet.com/vocab/schoolslanglist.php>)

**Have you heard a word or phrase and you aren’t sure what it means?**

Try searching [Urban Dictionary.com](http://UrbanDictionary.com), which is a compilation of teenage/college student slang that is currently popular in the U.S. However, please use with caution. Entries are created by the public, and are not restricted or verified for accuracy. You may encounter offensive or crude language. We encourage you to use this site as a reference tool only.

**Further Examples:** <http://www.noslang.com/> <http://onlineslangdictionary.com>

**PRACTICE: Huh? What Does That Mean?**

Slang and idioms have many similarities, but slang relies much more on tone. As with idioms, the best way to learn slang is through conversations. Below, you will find a conversation between two people. There is at least one slang word (or saying) in each line of dialogue.



**“American Slang? No Sweat!”**

Sentence:	Definition:
Read the sentence and try to determine the meaning of the slang word from the context.	Circle the choice that reflects the best definition for the slang word.
Amy said she couldn't go to the beach with me because she had to wash her car. I know it's brand new, but what a <u>lame</u> excuse!	Lame (adjective) means: A. False B. Weak and ineffective C. Mean
As soon as Jake's best friend arrived, he <u>ditched</u> his class to meet her at the movies. Hopefully, he didn't miss anything important.	Ditched (verb) means: A. Failed B. Called C. Abandoned
After the test, we decided not to go to the concert. There were too many people. Instead, we went back to my apartment to watch a movie and <u>chill out</u> .	Chill out (verb) means: A. Relax B. Feel cold C. Sleep
I think I'm going to bring my coat to the park. Even though it was sunny this morning, now the weather looks a little <u>iffy</u> .	Iffy (adjective) means: A. Angry B. Uncertain C. Dangerous
Do you know what they got paid for all the work they did on that project? <u>Zilch</u> ! Can you believe it?	Zilch (noun) means: A. Zero or nothing B. Trouble C. Enough
That vocabulary test was a <u>breeze</u> . Studying the review materials that the T.A. gave us really helped.	Breeze (adjective) means: A. A good idea B. Lot of fun C. Very easy

**More Ways to Practice and Learn**

Get involved! Join an ISRC program, an on-campus student organization, or an intramural sports team. Attend campus events. When you are home, you can also:

- Watch a T.V. show, such as: [The Office](#), [Glee](#) or [Grey's Anatomy](#)
- Watch a movie, such as: [Office Space](#) or [Ferris Bueller's Day Off](#)
- Watch/listen to a YouTube video: [American Slang Lesson Series by JenniferESL](#)

**What is an acronym?** A pronounceable name or word that is formed from the initial letters of a group of words. Acronyms can be found in many academic, professional and government settings, including, but not limited to:

- Military, government or nonprofit organizations/offices, e.g. NASA (government) = National Aeronautics and Space Administration
- Higher education, e.g. MBA (degree) = Masters in Business Administration
- Large companies, e.g. NBC (T.V. station) = National Broadcasting Company
- Industry-specific terminology, e.g. B2B (business term) = Business-to-Business



Acronyms may also be used as a substitute for a commonly used term in an informal setting, but is also acceptable to use in formal (i.e. academic or professional) settings. See chart for examples.

**What is textspeak?** Some common informal acronyms may appear, but this “language” is largely used in texting and social media. Textspeak differs from acronyms because it is used to shorten **any** word or phrase, using abbreviations formed by letters and/or numbers. Textspeak should never be used in an academic or professional setting or discourse.

Acro-nym	Meaning	Acro-nym	Meaning	Text-speak	Meaning	Text-speak	Meaning
ASAP	As soon as possible	EOD	End of day	2nite	Tonight	2day	Today
PIN	Personal identification number (used at ATMs)	ISBN	International Standard Book No.	GTG	Got to go (or “I have to leave”)	2moro or 2mrw	Tomorrow
TGIF	Thank goodness it’s Friday	VIP	Very important person	BF / GF	Boy- / Girlfriend	Sis / Bro	Sister / Brother
ETA	Estimated time of arrival	HR	Human resources	bt	But	2	Two, To or Too
CC	Credit card	DND	Do not disturb	Info	information	LOL	Laughing out loud
PC	Politically correct	AKA	Also known as	pls	Please	thx	Thanks
SOP	Standard operating procedure	FAQ	Frequently asked questions	ur / u B / C	Your / You Be / See	w/ p/u	with pick up
DBA	Doing business as	Q&A	Question & answer	J/K or jk	Just kidding	NP	No problem
ID	Identification	R&R	Rest & relaxation	R U...	Are you...	WBU	What about you?
A/C	Air conditioning	PS	Postscript	IDK	I don’t know	BTW	By the way
STET	“Let it stand” (editing)	TBA	To be announced	HAND	Have a nice day	HAGN	Have a good night
TBD	To be determined	YTD	Year to date	OMG	Oh my God	IMO	In my opinion
BLT	Bacon, lettuce & tomato (sandwich)	BYOB	Bring your own beverage	BBS BRB	Be back soon Be right back	KIT TTYL	Keep in touch Talk to you later
PR	Public relations	TLC	Tender loving care	cxl	Cancel	B4N	Bye for now
ATM	Automated teller machine	ATM	At the moment	b4 L8	Before Late	Bae	“Babe” (lover/ friend)
TMI	Too much information	FYI	For your information	IKR	I know, right?	SMH	Shaking my head
DM	Direct message	PM	Private message	LMK	Let me know	FTW	For the win
PST	Pacific Standard Time	EST	Eastern Standard Time	PSM	Please see me	ILY	I love you
<b>Add Your Own</b>							

**EXAMPLES: Common Acronyms & Textspeak That You May Encounter**

Adapted from:

- Your Dictionary: Common Acronyms (<http://abbreviations.yourdictionary.com/articles/common-acronyms.html>)
- Everyday Acronyms (<http://www.acronym-guide.com/general-acronyms.php>)

**Further Examples:** <http://www.acronymfinder.com/> (acronyms) / <http://www.webopedia.com> (acronyms & text) / <http://www.netlingo.com/> (textspeak) / <http://www.lingo2word.com/> (textspeak)

**PRACTICE: “The Acronyms of UCR”**

Acronyms are frequently used on university campuses. Using the Internet and/or working with a friend, try to fill in the blanks to complete the chart of common UCR acronyms.

UCR Colleges/Schools		Majors/Subjects		Buildings/Centers/Programs	
Acronym	Name	Acronym	Name	Acronym	Name
CHASS			Media and Cultural Studies	INTS	
	College of Natural and Agricultural Sciences	CMDB		SRC	
BCOE		MSE			Center for Environmental Research and Technology
AGSM			Master of Professional Accountancy	HUB	
	School of Business Administration	PSYC		TADP	
GSOE			Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages	SCAIP	
SoM		GGB			Health Professions Advising Center
	School of Public Policy	MPP		GWRC	



**PRACTICE: “Transl8 Textspeak”**

Practice creating and interpreting “textspeak” by filling in the blank boxes.

Textspeak	Grammatically Correct (“Good”) English
If the message is in this column, write out the message in “good” English on the right.	If you are given a message in “good” English, try to shorten it as much as possible and write the textspeak version of the message on the left.
Are u coming 2nite? Booked a table at McDs, but I’ll cxl it if ur not coming. Pls let me no.	
	By the way, it’s now 8:30 and I’ve been waiting for an hour. If you’re not here in ten minutes, I have to go home.
bro I had fab nite can’t believe u won all that \$\$ LOL c u l8r.	
	Call me as soon as possible. I can’t be at the meeting. Don’t fall asleep! Just kidding. I’ll be in later.