

22 Common Idioms & Their Proper Usages in IELTS Speaking Section (Part 1/5)

Use Idiomatic Language naturally and accurately in the IELTS Speaking Test

The correct use of idioms in English conversations is the way to separate native English speakers from those that learn English as a foreign language. In the IELTS speaking test, using **idioms can really help boost your score, if used properly**. Nevertheless, it can also lower your score, if you can't use them correctly.

Idiom – A group of words (or a single word) which have a meaning that is not understood by combining the standard definitions of the individual words (though that meaning may sometimes be inferred).

Idioms are a style or form of (often artistic) expression, characteristic of a particular language, group, subculture, school of thought, generation, or medium (for example, movies and television).

To master idioms really requires to understand them intellectually (perhaps by first reading) and also to hear them used properly by native speakers (or near native speakers) of English.

Learning some key idioms and their usages can help your score in IELTS writing and speaking tasks. Do not try to use an idiom in an IELTS task unless you understand it and can use it properly. This is easier when writing an idiom than when speaking it. If using it in the IELTS speaking test, you should be able to use it with the proper inflection (pitch, tone, modulation, emphasis). It is important to think of the context of to whom or what the idiom is directed towards.

1. **on the dot** – happens at a particular time, precise time, exactly time.
 - The class will start at 8:00 a.m. on the dot, so don't be late!
2. **and then some** – and even more; and more than has been mentioned.
 - It looked like 20,000 people and then some were crowded into the stadium. Investors in the business got their money back and then some.
3. **Find my feet** – to become comfortable doing something.
 - Moving to a new city was difficult as first, but I soon found my feet.
4. **read my/your/his mind** – W – refers to the idea that thoughts are known by another.
 - I was surprised he knew what I was planning, like he could read my mind.

5. **before long** – a rather short amount of time.
 - I will be gone before long, but I hope you learn a lot
6. **Cost an arm and a leg** – really expensive.
 - This dress is really nice, but it cost me an arm and a leg.
7. **Set in their ways** – not wanting to change
 - My parents are quite traditional and set in their ways
8. **(the) bottom line** – most important number or information.
 - My bottom line to do this job is freedom from meddling!
 - Don't give me the details of what the client said about the bid, just tell me his bottom line.
9. **burn the midnight oil** – stay up late, esp work late
 - We're gonna have to burn the midnight oil to get this job done by tomorrow.
10. **call it a day** – end the job (or task) for the day, (or night)
 - Well, it was nice chatting with you, but it's time for me to call it a day.
11. **change one's mind** – to change a decision or opinion.
 - Nothing you have told me motivates me to change my mind.
12. **Over the moon** – to be extremely pleased or happy.
 - I was over the moon when I passed my speaking test.
13. **(Right) off the top of my head** – saying something without giving it too much thought or without precise knowledge.
 - You are familiar enough with the data. Give us the information off the top of your head.
14. **catch your/my/his eye** – something or someone that has a visual attraction for you, can be a written description as well. Really is often used to introduce this idiom.
 - That pretty girl really caught my eye. Do any of these watches catch your eye? The price on that advertised special really caught my eye.
15. **down in the dumps** – unhappy, sad
 - She's a bit down in the dumps because she failed one of her exams.
16. **(on the) cutting edge** – the most modern, up to date process or product/equipment
 - His teaching process is on the cutting edge. This new computer is cutting edge technology.

17. **Put all your eggs in one basket** – put all your money or effort into one thing.
- Don't put all your eggs in one basket. You should apply to lots of different universities
18. **chill out** – relax, calm down
- Despite terrorism, Obama still kept calm, and told his staff to chill out, and got back to work.
19. **Miss the boat** – miss an opportunity.
- I sent my application in late and I think I missed the boat.
20. **(to be) fed up with** – tired of, disgusted with
- Be careful, I think the boss is fed up with us today
21. **Once in a blue moon** – happens very rarely.
- A student will get a 9 in the IELTS writing test once in a blue moon.
22. **white elephant** – an unprofitable investment, something that is large and unwieldy and is a nuisance and/or expensive to maintain.
- That new motorbike I bought is really a white elephant, it is expensive and too big for these streets.

22 Common Idioms in IELTS Speaking (Part 2/5)

1. **bump into** – to meet someone by chance
- I bumped into my old friends at the seminar for education officials
2. **A drop in the ocean** – every small part of something much bigger.
- ==>Just learning idioms is a drop in the ocean when it comes to preparing for the speaking test.
3. **work flat out** – work very hard
- The employees have been working flat out to get the job finished ahead of the deadline.
4. **The in thing** – something fashionable.
- The new iPhone is really the in thing at the moment.
5. **make a fuss over** – overly care for someone/something
- Whenever they visit Grandma she makes a fuss over the children.

6. **Run of the mill** – average, ordinary

- Apple phones are very run of the mill these days.

7. **far-fetched** – usually refers to an idea, choice, decision, plan that may be unusual, probably not a good choice.

- The government's choice for the new Defense Secretary seemed pretty far fetched to the opposition party.

8. **ace** – to do well. Usually used relating to a test, competition, something with a score, or a clear winner or loser.

- He aced the history test. He is an ace pitcher/batter/tennis player.

9. **A hot potato** – a controversial topic.

- Abortion and capital punishment are hot potatoes in my country at the moment.

10. **Get a kick out of (something)** – to get excitement or pleasure from an event or thought.

- I really get a kick out of seeing the crazy things carried on motorbikes sometimes.

11. **bent out of shape** – often used to admonish others not to be too upset.

- Don't get all bent out of shape about the way they drive over here!

12. **Give (lend) somebody a hand** – to give some forms of assistance with a task

- Could you give me a hand with this shipment?

13. **Sit on the fence** – to be undecided.

- I haven't made my mind up about that issue, I'll have to sit on the fence.

14. **A piece of cake** – very easy.

- Getting a band 6 in the speaking test will be a piece of cake.

15. **hit the books** – to study, usually intensively

- I will sit the IELTS test next week. That's why I have been hitting the books all day long.

16. **Soul mate** – someone you trust very deeply

- My husband is not just my lover, he's my soul mate.

17. **broke** – usually financial related, have no money, can also generally reference a state

- I can't afford to go on holiday – I'm (flat) broke.

18. **(Go) back to the drawing board** – to start planning something again because the first plan failed

- Our plan didn't work out, so it's back to the drawing board.

19. **Go the extra mile** – To make an extra effort; do more than usual

- You had better not forget 8 leadership attributes that make you go the extra mile.

20. **crash course** – a quick lesson

- We need a crash course in idioms for this IELTS program.

21. **up-to-the-minute** – the very latest or most recent

- Now we're going live to our reporter in Washington for up-to-the-minute news on the crisis.

22. **On the go** – busy

- I feel as though we always need to be on the go because life's too short to be idle!

25 Common Idioms in IELTS Speaking (Part 3/5)

1. **up-market** – Relatively expensive and designed to appeal to wealthy consumers

- an up-market restaurant that is quite pricey but also quite good

2. **cram** – to try to accomplish a lot quickly, also can mean to try to put a lot of items in a tight fit

- The students are all cramming to get ready for the exams.

3. **in high spirits** – extremely happy

- They'd had a couple of drinks and were in high spirits.

4. **keep one's chin up** – remain brave and keep on trying ; remain cheerful in difficult circumstances.

- Keep your chin up. Don't take your troubles to bed with you
- Keep your chin up. Things will get better sooner or later

5. **read my/your/his mind** – guess what somebody is thinking

- I was surprised he knew what I was planning, like he could read my mind.

6. **get the ball rolling** – start doing something, especially something big
 - I decided to set the ball rolling and got up to dance.
 - You should get the ball rolling as soon as possible to be well-prepared for the IELTS test.
7. **for ages** – for a very long time
 - I waited for ages but he never showed up
8. **fill in for someone** – do someone’s work while he is away; substitute for
 - Bill is going to be filling in for me while I’m out on maternity leave.
9. **antsy** – getting restless.
 - The guys are getting antsy, we need to go somewhere else before they get too noisy.
10. **(as) easy as pie** – very easy
 - For Tom, getting a graphic design certificate was easy as pie –he seemed to have a natural talent for it.
11. **under the weather** – sick; not completely well
 - I noticed that the cat was looking a little under the weather.
12. **fingers-crossed** = keep one’s fingers crossed (for someone or something) – to wish for luck for someone or something
 - fingers crossed for your driving test
 - We’re keeping our fingers crossed that he’ll be healthy again very soon
13. **have a chin-wag** – have a long conversation between friends; have a chat
 - We had a good chin-wag over a bottle of wine.
14. **chicken scratch (n)** – the handwriting that is cramped or illegible
 - His signature—an unforgeably idiosyncratic chicken scratch
15. **the wee hours** – after midnight
 - He was up until the wee hours trying to finish his work.
16. **a blessing in a disguise** – something that seems bad or unlucky at first, but results in something good happening later
 - Losing that job was a blessing in disguise really.
17. **all in the same boat** – in the same difficult situation as someone else
 - None of us has any money, so we’re all in the same boat.
18. **beating around the bush** – avoid the main topic and not speaking directly about it
 - Let’s stop beating about the bush and discuss this matter

19. **early bird (someone who gets up early)**

- I never miss sunrise. I'm an early bird.

20. **a breath of fresh air** – something that is new & refreshing

- Selena was a talented and beautiful entertainer, a breath of fresh air in an industry full of people all trying to copy each other.

21. **keep an eye on**– to monitor a situation, not forget about it.

- Keep an eye on the noodles, there almost done.

22. **keep your nose to the grindstone** – continue to put forward a good effort

- If you keep your nose to the grindstone, you will finish this job tonight.

23. **know something [it, this] inside out** – to be totally familiar with

- He knows that subject backwards and forwards.

24. **leave well enough alone** – to not try to change something that is good enough

- This repair is not perfect, but let's leave well enough alone.

25. **now and then**– on an occasional basis, often "every" is used as the first word of this idiomatic phrase.

- Every now and then I have a good idea.

25 Useful Idioms to Help You Score Band 8.0+ for IELTS Speaking (Part 4/5)

1. **A Penny for Your Thoughts** – ask someone who is being very quiet what they are thinking about

- For several minutes they sat silently, then finally she looked at him and said, “A penny for your thoughts, Walter.”

2. **Against the clock** – do something as fast as possible and try to finish it before a certain time.

- With her term paper due on Monday, she was racing against the clock to finish it

3. **Lend an ear** – to listen carefully and in a friendly way to someone

- If you have any problems, go to Claire. She'll always lend a sympathetic ear.

4. **on cloud nine** – very happy; deliriously happy

- She just bought her first new car and she's on cloud nine.

5. **bushed** – tired.

- I am totally bushed after staying up so late.

6. **hard feelings** – the emotion of being upset or offended.

- I am sorry I have to fire you. No hard feelings, okay?

7. **hit the hay** – go to bed

- It's after 12 o'clock. I think it's time to hit the hay.

8. **be sick to death of something/doing something** – to be angry and bored because something unpleasant has been happening for too long

- I'm sick to death of doing nothing but work. Let's go out tonight and have fun.

9. **(come) rain or shine** – means something will happen regardless of weather or other difficulties.

- I will be on time for the class, rain or shine. Come rain or shine, she is always smiling.

10. **be all ears** – eager and ready to listen

- I'm all ears, waiting to hear your latest excuse for not getting this job done!

11. **in the nick of time** – not too late, but very close

- I got to the drugstore just in the nick of time. It's a good thing, because I really need this medicine!

12. **fresh/clean out of something** – have sold or used up the last of something

- I have to go buy some more milk. It seems we're fresh out now.

13. **have/get mixed feelings about something** – to be uncertain about something

- I have mixed feelings about my trip to England. I love the people, but the climate upsets me.

14. **Give it one's best shot** – do the best that one can

- This test question is really tough! I'll give it my best shot, and I'll get some marks for doing my best.

15. **In deep water** – in difficulty; in trouble or in a dangerous situation

- He has not submitted his dissertation so he's in deep water.

16. **next to nothing** – to cost very little

- I went to the new discount store and bought these new shoes for only five dollars. That's next to nothing!

17. **To be up in arms about something** – upset or angry about something.

- She has been up in arms about the rent increase.

18. **Put yourself in somebody's shoes** – imagine that you are in somebody's position in order to understand his/her feelings

- If you put yourself in my shoes, you would understand why I made that decision

19. **At all costs** – do everything you can to achieve/succeed something

- My dream is to become a successful businessman and I will work hard for it at all costs.

20. **Explore all avenues** – investigate every possible means to find a solution to a given problem or to achieve a desired outcome.

- We need to explore all avenues before doing something that is not very safe to a great number of people in order to minimize unfavourable consequences

21. **On the ball** – active and aware of things

- Our staff is really on the ball to get projects done on time.

22. **Throw in the towel** – Give up on something

- I've spent too much time on this project to throw in the towel now.

23. **Down to earth** – practical and realistic; Back to reality

- It's time we were brought down to earth to figure out difficult situation, and offer a good solution.

24. **Full of beans** – A person who is lively, active and healthy.

- I really enjoy being with my best friend because he is always full of beans.

25. **Get a head start** – Start before all others.

- This year we'll get a head start on the competition by running more advertisements.

20 Useful Idioms to Help you Get Band 8.0+ for IELTS Speaking (Part 5/5)

1. **Hear on the grapevine** - This idiom means 'to hear rumors' about something or someone.
 - I heard on the grapevine that she was pregnant, but I don't know anything more.
2. **Hit the nail on the head** - To be right about something
 - Mike hit the nail on the head when he said most people can use a computer without knowing how it works.
3. **In the heat of the moment** - say or do it without thinking because you are very angry or excited
 - She doesn't hate you. She just said that in the heat of the moment.
4. **It takes two to tango** - both people involved in a bad situation are responsible for it
 - She blames Tracy for stealing her husband. 'Well, it takes two to tango.'
5. **Get/jump on the bandwagon** - Join a popular trend or activity.
 - You jump on the bandwagon when all your friends begin eating at a new popular restaurant.
6. **Keep something at bay** - Keep something away
 - She fought to keep her unhappiness at bay.
7. **Kill two birds with one stone** - to accomplish two different things at the same time.
 - I killed two birds with one stone and saw some old friends while I was in Leeds visiting my parents.
8. **Last straw** - The final problem in a series of problems.
 - This is the last straw. I'm calling the police.
9. **Let sleeping dogs lie** - to not talk about things which have caused problems in the past, or to not try to change a situation because you might cause problems
 - Jane knew she should report the accident but decided to let sleeping dogs lie.
10. **Let the cat out of the bag** - To reveal a secret or a surprise, often without an intention to do so
 - It's a secret. Try not to let the cat out of the bag.
11. **Not playing with a full deck** - Someone who lacks intelligence.
 - Jim's a nice guy, but with some of the foolish things he does, I wonder if he's not playing with a full deck.

12. **Far cry from** - Very different from
- What you did was a far cry from what you said you were going to do.
13. **Give the benefit of the doubt** - to decide you will believe someone or something
- I didn't know whether his story was true or not, but I decided to give him the benefit of the doubt.
14. **Pull the wool over someone's eyes** - Deceive someone into thinking well of them.
- You can't pull the wool over my eyes. I know what's going on.
15. **See eye to eye** - two (or more people) agree on something.
- My father and I see eye to eye on most things.
16. **Take with a grain of salt** - Consider something to be not completely true or right
- I've read the article, which I take with a grain of salt.
17. **Taste of your own medicine** - Means that something happens to you, or is done to you that you have done to someone else
- Tom talks way too much – but last night he met someone who talked even more than he does, and he got frustrated. He finally got a taste of his own medicine.
18. **Whole nine yards** - Everything, the entire amount, as far as possible
- When I was little, my family always had lots of pets – dogs, cats, hamsters, fish, rabbits – the whole nine yards.
19. **Wouldn't be caught dead** - Would never like to do something
- My father wouldn't have been caught dead in a white suit.
20. **At the drop of a hat** - immediately; instantly
- If you need help, just call on me. I can come at the drop of a hat.