



Learn English Through
Stories.

U Series

Advanced Idioms

Adapted and modified by

Kulwant Singh Sandhu.

<https://learn-by-reading.co.uk>

Banta Learning More Idioms by K S Sandhu

Banta was an international student in London, studying advanced English at a language school. He loved idioms because they made conversations feel more natural and British. "I want to know English inside out," he often said to his classmates. But learning them wasn't easy—he mixed them up sometimes.

One lazy Saturday morning, Banta was still in bed at noon, scrolling on his phone. His flatmate, Sukha, knocked on the door. "Come on, mate! Get off your backside and help me clean the kitchen. It's a mess!"

Banta groaned. "Alright, alright. I have occasion to use idioms today, so let's practise while we work."

They started scrubbing. Sukha explained, "You know, our boss at the part-time job is always feathering his own nest. He takes the best shifts for himself and gives us the rubbish ones. It's not fair."

Banta nodded. "Yes, that's selfish. But he never does the dirty work himself—he doesn't soil his hands with the actual complaints or extra tasks."

Suddenly, Sukha's phone rang. It was their colleague, Priya. "Guys, the manager found out about the missing stock from last week. The shit hits the fan now—he's hopping mad and might go spare any minute!"

Banta's eyes widened. "What? Will he send us to Coventry? Or worse?"

"No idea," Sukha replied. "But if he thinks we knew and said nothing, we'll be in trouble."

Later that afternoon, the three friends met at a café to discuss. Priya was upset. "I told the manager everything. He said the behaviour was beyond the pale and the person responsible has already been given the sack. But now he's asking everyone questions."

Banta sighed. "This is stressful. Sometimes you just have to grin and bear it, right? Pretend everything's fine and keep going."

Sukha laughed. "Or maybe pigs might fly before our boss changes! He's too stubborn."

Priya pulled out a contract from her bag. "Look, he gave us this new rule: work extra hours without pay, or leave. It's take it or leave it."

Banta thought for a moment. "I don't like it, but complaining won't help. We can't change his mind—he knows the rules inside out and won't budge."

Sukha shrugged. "True. So, what do we do?"

Banta smiled. "We get off our backsides, find better jobs, and move on. No more feathering someone else's nest while ours stays empty!"

The friends laughed, feeling better. From that day, Banta used idioms confidently in conversations. He realised they weren't just words—they helped express real feelings about life, work, and friendship in a colourful way.

Even when things went wrong, he could say, "Well, the shit hit the fan, but we grinned and bore it—and came out stronger."

3 Using reference resources

At advanced level, your aim will be not only to understand idioms, but also to use them accurately and appropriately. This book will help you achieve these aims. There are other resources which you should use too.

A Dictionaries

To help you study idioms, you need a good learner's dictionary, ideally one which focuses on idioms. The *Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary* gives you examples of how idioms are used and also gives information on their use, e.g. whether they are used humorously, or informally, or in a more literary context. It also highlights the most important idioms to learn. You can access this dictionary online at www.dictionary.cambridge.org. The best learner's dictionaries are corpus-based, i.e. they focus on idioms that people actually use and give authentic examples of their use. *English Idioms in Use Advanced* is based on the Cambridge International Corpus, which is a collection of over one billion words of real spoken and written English. Here is an example of how idioms are presented in the *Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary*:

like it or lump it *informal*

if you tell someone to like it or lump it, you mean they must accept a situation they do not like, because they cannot change it • *The fact remains, that's all we're going to pay him and he can like it or lump it.* • *Like it or lump it, romantic fiction is read regularly by thousands.*

B The Internet

You can use the Internet to find out more about the meanings and origins of idioms, and to see more examples of their use.

- The website <http://www.phrases.org.uk> lists the meanings and origins of many idioms, and the site provides examples of how the idioms are used. There is also a link to a Phrase Finder Facebook page, where you can ask questions about the meaning and origin of idioms.
- Use a search engine such as Google to find further examples of idioms in use. You could specify the context in which you want to find examples, for example by typing 'like it or lump it news', to find examples of the idiom used in newspaper headlines or articles.

C Vocabulary notebooks

Always make good, detailed notes about idioms in your vocabulary notebook. Include an example of the idiom in context, as well as its meaning. Add any notes about its usage, e.g. *informal* or *literary*. Doing a quick drawing of an idiom may help you to learn it.

Each time they asked him a question, he was like a rabbit caught in the headlights.
The speaker unfortunately looked like a rabbit caught in the headlights during most of the discussion.
= looked very frightened, unable to move or think
(also 'deer' instead of 'rabbit')



Exercises

A

3.1 Answer these questions. Use the information in A opposite to help you.

- 1 What two things does a good learner's dictionary do, as well as explain the meaning of idioms?
- 2 How much language and what kind of language is in the Cambridge International Corpus?
- 3 What does the dictionary say about the usage of *like it or lump it*?

3.2 Use the Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary (book or online) to match each idiom on the left with the label used in the dictionary on the right. Can you explain the meaning of the idioms?

- | | |
|---------------------------------|---------------|
| 1 get off your backside | informal |
| 2 have occasion to do something | formal |
| 3 the shit hits the fan | slang |
| 4 know something inside out | old-fashioned |
| 5 not soil your hands | offensive |
| 6 send someone to Coventry | humorous |
| 7 pigs might fly | literary |

3.3 Complete each sentence with an idiom from 3.2. You may need to change the form of the verb.

- 1 Henry will help you deal with these forms. He the system
- 2 They think he's the boss of the criminal gang, but he never by committing crimes personally.
- 3 Joey can be so lazy. I wish he'd
- 4 'I won't be late to work ever again.' 'Oh yes, and!'
- 5 If Greg finds out what you've done,
- 6 I live very close to the hospital, but luckily I've never go there.
- 7 She had lied to them, and so they

3.4 Search for "like it or lump it" in the two ways described in B on the opposite page. What information did you get?

3.5 Underline the eight idioms in this newspaper article. What do you think each idiom means? Use a dictionary to help you.

SPORTS MINISTER HOPPING MAD

John Hamilton has made a name for himself by running a tight ship at the Ministry of Sport. So it was no surprise to his staff that he reportedly 'went spare' when he learnt what had been going on behind his back. Two of his leading advisors had been

feathering their own nests with government money intended for young people's sports organisations. 'Such behaviour is quite beyond the pale,' said Hamilton, 'and the two people concerned have already been given the sack'.



Answers

Unit 3

- 3.1**
- 1 It gives information – where necessary – about the usage of the idiom (e.g. whether it is used in a literary or an informal context), and it gives examples of the idiom in a typical context.
 - 2 There are over 1 billion words of international English (e.g. British, American and Australian) taken from both spoken and written contexts.
 - 3 It is informal.
- 3.2**
- 1 slang (*Get off your backside* means 'stop being lazy'.)
 - 2 formal (*Have occasion to do something* means 'need to do something'.)
 - 3 offensive (*The shit hits the fan* means 'a situation causes a lot of trouble'.)
 - 4 informal (*Know something inside out* means 'know everything about a subject'.)
 - 5 literary (*Not soil your hands* means 'not become involved in something unpleasant or bad'.)
 - 6 old-fashioned (*Send someone to Coventry* means 'refuse to speak to someone as a punishment'.)
 - 7 humorous (*Pigs might fly* means 'there is no chance at all of something happening'.)
- 3.3**
- 1 Henry will help you deal with these forms. He **knows** the system **inside out**.
 - 2 They think he's the boss of the criminal gang, but he never **soils his hands** by committing crimes personally.
 - 3 Joey can be so lazy. I wish he'd **get off his backside**.
 - 4 'I won't be late to work ever again.' 'Oh yes, and **pigs might fly!**'
 - 5 If Greg finds out what you've done, **the shit will hit the fan**.
 - 6 I live very close to the hospital, but luckily I've never **had occasion** to go there.
 - 7 She had lied to them, and so they **sent her to Coventry**.
- 3.4**
- At the time of writing, the Phrase Finder website gives a definition of the phrase, and a long description of its origin and history.
- The search engine Google finds 20,900,00 sites using this idiom. A search for 'like it or lump it news' gets 32,400,00 results. Some of these sites directly discuss the idiom, while many provide examples of it in a range of different contexts.
- 3.5** SPORTS MINISTER HOPPING MAD
- John Hamilton has made a name for himself by running a tight ship at the Ministry of Sport. So it was no surprise to his staff that he reportedly 'went spare' when he learnt what had been going on behind his back. Two of his leading advisors had been feathering their own nests with government money intended for young people's sports organisations. 'Such behaviour is quite beyond the pale,' said Hamilton, 'and the two people concerned have already been given the sack'.
- Meaning of idioms from 'Sports Minister Hopping Mad':
- hopping mad = very angry
 - make a name for = become famous or respected for
 - run a tight ship = control something firmly and effectively
 - go spare = be extremely angry
 - behind someone's back = without someone knowing
 - feather your own nest = dishonestly use your position to get money for yourself
 - be beyond the pale = be unacceptable
 - be given the sack = be dismissed from your job