

Idioms, Expressions and Figurative Language

Vocabulary Lesson, Examples & Practice Questions

Idioms, Expressions and Figurative Language

Have you ever told someone to *break a leg* before a performance, or warned a friend that they were *skating on thin ice*? If so, you were using **idioms and figurative language** — one of the most colourful and expressive aspects of the English language. At B2 level, understanding these expressions is essential for sounding natural, interpreting authentic texts, and navigating both formal and informal conversations with confidence.

Idioms, metaphors, similes, and other forms of figurative language cannot always be understood word by word. Their meaning is often *implied* rather than *literal*. In this lesson, you will learn a wide range of common and advanced idiomatic expressions grouped by theme, understand the nuances between similar expressions, and discover how register affects your choice of language.

Contextual Situation: A Conversation Between Two Colleagues

Read this short dialogue between two colleagues, Maya and David, discussing a difficult project at work. Notice how naturally idioms and figurative language appear in everyday speech.

Maya: "David, I think we're really **in hot water** with this deadline. The client wasn't happy with the last draft."

David: "I know. I've been **burning the midnight oil** trying to fix the report, but honestly, I feel like I'm going around in circles."

Maya: "Don't throw in the towel just yet. Let's **hit the nail on the head** — the main problem is the data presentation, not the writing."

David: "You're absolutely right. I was **barking up the wrong tree** the whole time. Let's start fresh."

Each bold expression above is an idiom. None of them should be interpreted literally. As you work through this lesson, you will learn these and many more examples of figurative language used in natural English contexts.

Key Vocabulary & Meaning Breakdown

1. Idioms Related to Problems, Challenges and Pressure

These idioms are frequently used when discussing difficulties, stress, mistakes, and decision-making — particularly useful in professional and academic contexts.

Word / Phrase	Part of Speech & Meaning	Example Sentence	Collocations / Notes
in hot water	<i>idiom (informal)</i> — in a situation that causes trouble or difficulty	She found herself in hot water after missing the second deadline in a row.	Often used with <i>get into</i> , <i>land in</i> , <i>find oneself in</i> hot water

Word / Phrase	Part of Speech & Meaning	Example Sentence	Collocations / Notes
burn the midnight oil	<i>idiom</i> — to work or study late into the night	The students were burning the midnight oil the night before their final exams.	Often used in progressive form: <i>burning the midnight oil</i>
skating on thin ice	<i>idiom</i> — taking a serious risk; in a dangerous or uncertain situation	You're skating on thin ice if you submit that report without checking the figures again.	Paired with <i>be, you're, he's</i> ; implies imminent danger or risk
back against the wall	<i>idiom</i> — in a very difficult situation with no easy way out	With only one week left and half the work undone, the team had their backs against the wall .	Common in negotiations and crisis situations; often used with <i>have your/their</i>
bite off more than you can chew	<i>idiom</i> — to take on more responsibility than you are able to handle	He bit off more than he could chew when he agreed to manage three departments at once.	Usually used in past tense or warning contexts: <i>don't bite off more than you can chew</i>
go around in circles	<i>idiom</i> — to keep discussing or attempting something without making any progress	The meeting was useless — we just went around in circles without reaching any conclusion.	Used with <i>go, keep going, talk</i> in circles; frustration implied

2. Idioms Related to Communication, Ideas and Understanding

These expressions are commonly used when discussing whether someone has understood a point, expressed an idea clearly, or been completely honest.

Word / Phrase	Part of Speech & Meaning	Example Sentence	Collocations / Notes
hit the nail on the head	<i>idiom</i> — to describe or identify something exactly correctly	"That's a brilliant point — you've really hit the nail on the head ."	Used to affirm accuracy; often said in response to someone else's comment
bark up the wrong tree	<i>idiom</i> — to look for something in the wrong place or make a wrong assumption	If you think I took the files, you're barking up the wrong tree — I haven't been near that office.	Often used in accusations or when correcting a misunderstanding
beat around the bush	<i>idiom</i> — to avoid getting to the main point; to speak indirectly	Stop beating around the bush and tell me what actually happened.	Implies impatience; used in requests to be direct: <i>don't beat around the bush</i>

Word / Phrase	Part of Speech & Meaning	Example Sentence	Collocations / Notes
read between the lines	<i>idiom</i> — to understand the hidden or implied meaning in something said or written	Her email sounded polite, but if you read between the lines , she was clearly unhappy.	Used with <i>learn to, try to, if you</i> read between the lines
on the same page	<i>idiom (informal)</i> — to share the same understanding or agreement about something	Before we proceed, let's make sure we're all on the same page regarding the schedule.	Very common in business English; used with <i>be, get, make sure we're all</i>
speak volumes	<i>idiom</i> — to express a great deal without using words; to be highly revealing	The fact that nobody attended his farewell party speaks volumes about his reputation.	Often used with <i>it, that, this</i> + speaks volumes; strong emotional implication

3. Figurative Language: Metaphors, Similes and Hyperbole

Beyond fixed idioms, English speakers regularly use **metaphors** (describing one thing as if it were another), **similes** (making a direct comparison using *like* or *as*), and **hyperbole** (deliberate exaggeration for effect). Understanding these devices will transform your comprehension of spoken and written English.

Word / Phrase	Type & Meaning	Example Sentence	Collocations / Notes
time is money	<i>metaphor</i> — time is a valuable resource that should not be wasted	"Let's not delay any further — time is money , after all."	Classic business metaphor; used to justify efficiency and urgency
life is a rollercoaster	<i>metaphor</i> — life involves many extreme ups and downs	After everything she'd been through that year, she told her friends, " Life is a rollercoaster — you just have to hold on."	Can be used literally for emotional turbulence or varied experiences
as cool as a cucumber	<i>simile</i> — very calm and composed, especially in a stressful situation	Despite the chaos around him, Tom remained as cool as a cucumber during the interview.	Always used with <i>as ... as</i> structure; informal register
like a fish out of water	<i>simile</i> — feeling very uncomfortable or out of place in a particular situation	At the formal gala, she felt completely like a fish out of water — it simply wasn't her scene.	Used with <i>feel, look, seem like</i> ; expresses awkwardness or displacement

Word / Phrase	Type & Meaning	Example Sentence	Collocations / Notes
I've told you a million times	<i>hyperbole</i> — extreme exaggeration used to emphasise frustration or emphasis	" I've told you a million times — please don't leave the door open!"	Very common in informal speech; not intended to be taken literally
move mountains	<i>metaphor / hyperbole</i> — to accomplish something that seems impossible; to make an extraordinary effort	She would move mountains for her children — there's nothing she wouldn't do.	Used with <i>would, could, can</i> ; strong positive connotation of dedication
a storm is brewing	<i>metaphor</i> — a difficult or unpleasant situation is developing	The silence in the office was uneasy — everyone could feel that a storm was brewing .	Used to suggest conflict, argument, or crisis approaching; often atmospheric in tone

4. Idioms Related to Success, Effort and Giving Up

These expressions are widely used when discussing ambition, persistence, and the results of hard work — invaluable for professional, academic, and everyday social contexts.

Word / Phrase	Part of Speech & Meaning	Example Sentence	Collocations / Notes
throw in the towel	<i>idiom</i> — to give up; to admit defeat	After months of failed negotiations, the company finally threw in the towel and withdrew from the deal.	Origin: boxing; used with <i>give up, not ready to, refuse to throw in the towel</i>
go the extra mile	<i>idiom</i> — to make more effort than is required; to do more than expected	Our customer service team always goes the extra mile to ensure clients are satisfied.	Very common in professional English; positive connotation; used in CVs and appraisals
pull yourself up by your bootstraps	<i>idiom</i> — to improve your situation through your own efforts without help	Growing up with very little, she had to pull herself up by her bootstraps to get where she is today.	Strong connotation of self-reliance and resilience; formal and informal contexts
hit the ground running	<i>idiom</i> — to begin something energetically and make immediate progress	The new marketing director hit the ground running and launched three campaigns in her first month.	Very popular in job interviews and business contexts; implies enthusiasm and readiness
reap the rewards	<i>idiom</i> — to enjoy the benefits of hard work or a good decision	After years of studying, she is now reaping the rewards of her dedication.	Used with <i>finally, begin to, now</i> reap the rewards; positive outcome implied

Word / Phrase	Part of Speech & Meaning	Example Sentence	Collocations / Notes
bear fruit	<i>idiom / metaphor</i> — to produce positive results or outcomes after effort	Their investment in research is finally beginning to bear fruit , with three new patents secured this year.	Used with <i>begin to</i> , <i>start to</i> , <i>finally</i> bear fruit; formal and neutral register

Collocations & Useful Expressions

Learning the collocations around idioms and figurative expressions will help you use them more naturally and avoid sounding unnatural or forced.

get into + hot water

He got into hot water with his manager after leaking the confidential report.

don't + beat around the bush

Don't beat around the bush — just tell me whether I got the job or not.

make sure + on the same page

Before the meeting starts, let's make sure everyone is on the same page.

refuse to + throw in the towel

Despite all the setbacks, she refused to throw in the towel.

finally + bear fruit / reap the rewards

All those years of hard work have finally begun to bear fruit.

it + speaks volumes

It speaks volumes that he didn't even say goodbye on his last day.

try to + read between the lines

You have to try to read between the lines with her — she never says exactly what she means.

feel like + a fish out of water

On his first day in the city, he felt completely like a fish out of water.

a storm + is brewing

Judging by the tense atmosphere in the office, a storm is definitely brewing.

go + the extra mile

In this industry, you have to be willing to go the extra mile to stand out.

Important Differences & Confusing Expressions

Literal vs Figurative Meaning

One of the most important skills at B2 level is recognising when language is being used **literally** (the actual, dictionary meaning) or **figuratively** (a symbolic or implied meaning). Consider these pairs:

"She was burning."

Literal: She was on fire, or very hot.

Figurative: She was burning with anger / embarrassment / excitement.

"He threw in the towel."

Literal: He physically threw a towel (e.g. in a boxing match or laundry context).

Figurative (idiomatic): He gave up and admitted defeat.

Context is everything. If someone says, *"I was drowning in work last week,"* they do not mean they were literally underwater — they mean they were overwhelmed. Learning to interpret figurative language from context is a key B2 skill.

"Throw in the Towel" vs "Give Up" vs "Quit"

These three expressions all mean to stop doing something, but they carry different **register and connotation**:

- **Throw in the towel** — idiomatic, slightly informal; suggests a dramatic or significant defeat after struggle.
- **Give up** — neutral; the most common and versatile option in speech and writing.
- **Quit** — can be informal or formal depending on context; in American English, it is used more broadly; in British English, it often implies resigning from a job.

"Beat Around the Bush" vs "Be Diplomatic"

Both expressions describe indirect communication, but the connotation is very different:

- **Beat around the bush** — negative connotation; implies someone is being evasive, wasting time, or avoiding an uncomfortable truth.
- **Be diplomatic** — positive or neutral connotation; implies someone is choosing words carefully to avoid offence or maintain good relations.

Example: "Stop beating around the bush and just say it." (frustration)

Example: "She was very diplomatic when she gave him the feedback." (approval)

Metaphor vs Simile

Students often confuse these two figures of speech. The difference is simple:

- **Metaphor** — states that something *is* something else (no *like* or *as*). *"Life is a rollercoaster."*
- **Simile** — makes a comparison using *like* or *as*. *"She handled the situation like a professional."* / *"As cool as a cucumber."*

Both are figurative — neither is meant to be taken literally.

Common Mistakes

✗ *He was barking the wrong tree.*

✓ **He was barking up the wrong tree.** — The preposition *up* is essential and cannot be omitted.

✗ *She hit on the nail on the head.*

✓ **She hit the nail on the head.** — Do not add an extra preposition. The correct form is *hit the nail on the head*.

✗ *They were burning the midnight candle.*

✓ **They were burning the midnight oil.** — The idiom is always *midnight oil*, not *midnight candle* or *midnight lamp*.

✗ *We need to be on the same book before the meeting.*

✓ **We need to be on the same page before the meeting.** — The idiom uses *page*, not *book*, *sheet*, or *chapter*.

✗ *She is like a fish in the wrong water.*

✓ **She feels like a fish out of water.** — The fixed form is *a fish out of water*. Do not alter the structure.

✗ *He literally moved mountains to finish the project.* (when used to mean figuratively)

✓ **He moved mountains to finish the project.** — In figurative contexts, adding *literally* to a metaphor creates a contradiction. Avoid using *literally* with non-literal expressions unless speaking informally for dramatic emphasis.

✗ *She beat around the tree during the negotiation.*

✓ **She beat around the bush during the negotiation.** — The idiom is always *bush*, not *tree*, *hedge*, or *garden*.

✗ *The company started to bear fruits after the rebranding.*

✓ **The company started to bear fruit after the rebranding.** — *Bear fruit* is always singular — never *bear fruits*.

Idioms, Expressions and Figurative Language: Quick Summary & Review

In this lesson, you have explored a rich range of **idioms, expressions, and figurative language** used in everyday and professional English. Here is a summary of the key takeaways:

- **Idioms** are fixed phrases whose meanings cannot be understood word by word — they must be learned as a whole unit. Examples: *burn the midnight oil*, *hit the nail on the head*, *throw in the towel*.
- **Metaphors** describe one thing as if it were another, without using *like* or *as*. Examples: *time is money*, *a storm is brewing*, *bear fruit*.
- **Similes** make comparisons using *like* or *as*. Examples: *as cool as a cucumber*, *like a fish out of water*.
- **Hyperbole** uses deliberate exaggeration for emotional effect. Examples: *I've told you a million times*, *move mountains*.
- **Register matters** — some idioms (e.g. *on the same page*) are common in business English, while others (e.g. *I've told you a million times*) belong to informal speech.
- **Collocations are key** — idioms have fixed partners. Do not change the words: it's always *midnight oil*, *the same page*, and *the bush*.
- Always consider **context** to decide whether language is being used literally or figuratively.

Now practise **idioms, expressions and figurative language** vocabulary in the exercises below.

Idioms, Expressions and Figurative Language – Practice Test

B2 | Practice Exercises: Multiple Choice, Fill-in-the-Gap, Fill-in-the-Blank, Matrix Matching & Sorting

Part 1: Multiple Choice (Questions 1–10)

1 She decided to 'bite the bullet' and go through with the difficult surgery. What does this expression mean?

- A** to delay a decision indefinitely
- B** to endure a painful situation with courage
- C** to make a hasty and unwise choice
- D** to seek advice from a medical professional

2 The new manager 'turned a blind eye' to the minor rule violations in the office. What does this idiom mean?

- A** to report an issue to higher authorities
- B** to deliberately ignore something one is aware of
- C** to examine a problem very carefully
- D** to enforce rules more strictly than necessary

3 After years of rivalry, the two colleagues finally 'buried the hatchet'. What does this expression mean?

- A** to intensify a long-standing argument
- B** to make peace and end a disagreement
- C** to expose a hidden conflict publicly
- D** to compete aggressively for a promotion

4 The journalist's article was described as 'sitting on the fence'. What does this figurative expression suggest about the article?

- A** It argued one side of the debate very convincingly.
- B** It was written carelessly without proper research.
- C** It avoided taking a clear position on the issue.
- D** It was published without editorial approval.

5 His ambitious business plan turned out to be a 'pipe dream'. What does this expression mean?

- A** a highly profitable and realistic venture
- B** a plan that is simple to execute with minimal effort
- C** an idea that is unrealistic and unlikely to happen
- D** a project that was completed ahead of schedule

6 The CEO's bold speech at the conference 'set the tone' for the company's future strategy. What does 'set the tone' mean in this context?

- A** to raise the volume of a discussion
- B** to establish the general character or direction of something
- C** to create an atmosphere of conflict and tension
- D** to summarise the key points of a previous meeting

7 The politician's explanation for the scandal was described as 'beating around the bush'. What does this idiom mean?

- A** to give a very honest and direct account of events
- B** to exaggerate the severity of a situation unnecessarily
- C** to avoid speaking directly about a difficult subject
- D** to repeat the same information several times

8 After hearing the unexpected news, he was described as 'over the moon'. What does this expression convey?

- A** deeply shocked and confused by an event
- B** extremely happy and delighted
- C** feeling emotionally overwhelmed and tearful
- D** worried and anxious about an upcoming change

9 The project manager reminded the team not to 'let the cat out of the bag' before the official announcement. What does this idiom mean?

- A** to introduce unnecessary complications to a plan
- B** to accidentally reveal a secret
- C** to delay an important decision without reason
- D** to take credit for someone else's work

- 10** The start-up company was described as 'going from strength to strength' in its first year. What does this figurative expression mean?
- A** experiencing significant setbacks but recovering quickly
 - B** becoming progressively more successful over time
 - C** struggling to maintain its initial level of performance
 - D** taking unnecessary risks in order to grow faster

Part 2: Fill in the Gap (Questions 11–20)

- 11** After working three jobs simultaneously, Maria finally decided to ____ the towel and take a long rest.
- A** throw in
 - B** pick up
 - C** hold out

- 12** The new manager tried to ____ the boat by suggesting radical changes on his very first day.
- A** rock
 - B** sink
 - C** steer

- 13** His explanation of quantum physics went completely over my head — I didn't ____ a word of it.
- A** catch
 - B** drop
 - C** miss

- 14** You really need to ____ the bullet and have that difficult conversation with your boss about your salary.
- A** bite
 - B** dodge
 - C** swallow

- 15** The politician tried to ____ the issue under the rug, hoping nobody would notice the scandal.
- A** sweep
 - B** brush
 - C** push

16 I know James seems unfriendly at first, but once you get to know him, you'll realise he has a heart of ____.

- A** gold
- B** iron
- C** stone

17 The two rival companies have finally decided to ____ the hatchet and collaborate on a joint project.

- A** bury
- B** sharpen
- C** raise

18 She seemed calm during the meeting, but I could tell she was ____ under the surface about the unfair decision.

- A** seething
- B** melting
- C** glowing

19 Don't count your ____ before they hatch — we haven't won the contract yet, so let's not celebrate.

- A** chickens
- B** eggs
- C** blessings

20 The new employee was thrown in at the ____ end when she was asked to lead the presentation on her second day.

- A** deep
- B** far
- C** sharp

Part 3: Fill in the Blank (Questions 21–30)

21 After working 80-hour weeks for months, Sarah finally decided to call it _____ and resign from her demanding job.

22 The politician's speech was full of promises, but his opponents argued that it was just hot _____ with no real substance.

- 23** The new manager came in and immediately wanted to change everything, but his colleagues warned him not to throw the baby out with the _____ .
- 24** When the CEO announced the company's losses, the board knew it was time to face the _____ and explain the situation to shareholders.
- 25** The two rival companies have been at each other's _____ for years over the rights to that valuable patent.
- 26** Don't count your _____ before they hatch — we haven't received the contract yet, so let's not celebrate too soon.
- 27** His sudden apology after years of conflict came completely out of the _____ and left everyone in the office speechless.
- 28** The professor's explanation of quantum physics went completely over my _____ — I couldn't understand a single concept.
- 29** After the merger fell through, the company found itself in deep _____ financially and had to seek emergency investment.
- 30** The journalist decided to let the scandal _____ after realising there was not enough evidence to support the story.

Part 4: Matrix / Match Values (Questions 31–40)

31 Match each idiom on the left with its correct meaning on the right.

MATCHING OPTIONS:

- | | |
|--|--|
| A To avoid taking a side or making a decision | B To avoid speaking directly about a subject |
| C To permanently damage a relationship or opportunity | D To endure a painful or difficult situation with courage |

Item / Phrase	Write Match Letter (A, B, C...)
Bite the bullet	[]
Burn bridges	[]
Beat around the bush	[]
Sit on the fence	[]

32 Match each figurative expression on the left with the situation it best describes on the right.

MATCHING OPTIONS:

- | | |
|---|--|
| A To unintentionally disclose a surprise or hidden information | B To describe something with perfect accuracy |
| C To accidentally reveal a secret | |

Item / Phrase	Write Match Letter (A, B, C...)
Hit the nail on the head	[]
Spill the beans	[]
Let the cat out of the bag	[]

33 Match each idiom related to effort and work on the left with its correct meaning on the right.

MATCHING OPTIONS:

- | | |
|--|---|
| A To do something poorly in order to save time or money | B To contribute a fair share of effort to a group task |
| C To work or study late into the night | D To put in more effort than is expected or required |

Item / Phrase	Write Match Letter (A, B, C...)
Pull your weight	[]
Go the extra mile	[]
Cut corners	[]
Burn the midnight oil	[]

34 Match each body-part idiom on the left with its correct meaning on the right.

MATCHING OPTIONS:

- A** To say something embarrassing or tactless by mistake
- B** To watch or monitor someone or something carefully
- C** To deliberately ignore something wrong or illegal

Item / Phrase	Write Match Letter (A, B, C...)
Keep an eye on	[]
Put your foot in your mouth	[]
Turn a blind eye	[]

35 Match each idiom about money and resources on the left with its correct meaning on the right.

MATCHING OPTIONS:

- A** To spend less money due to financial difficulty
- B** Managing with very little money or resources
- C** To cost an extremely large or unaffordable amount
- D** To take advantage of a situation for financial gain

Item / Phrase	Write Match Letter (A, B, C...)
Tighten your belt	[]
Break the bank	[]
On a shoestring	[]
Cash in on	[]

36 Match each figurative expression about emotions on the left with its correct meaning on the right.

MATCHING OPTIONS:

- A** To be an extremely kind and generous person
- B** To express your emotions openly and without hiding them
- C** To talk about something that has been worrying you

Item / Phrase	Write Match Letter (A, B, C...)
Get something off your chest	[]
Have a heart of gold	[]
Wear your heart on your sleeve	[]

37 Match each idiom about communication on the left with its correct meaning on the right.

MATCHING OPTIONS:

- A** Information received directly from the original source
- B** To misunderstand each other because you are discussing different things
- C** To understand the hidden or implied meaning of something
- D** To convey a great deal without using words

Item / Phrase	Write Match Letter (A, B, C...)
Read between the lines	[]
Straight from the horse's mouth	[]
Talk at cross purposes	[]
Speak volumes	[]

38 Match each idiom about time and speed on the left with its correct meaning on the right.

MATCHING OPTIONS:

- A** Immediately and without hesitation
- B** Just before it is too late; at the last possible moment
- C** Very rarely; almost never

Item / Phrase	Write Match Letter (A, B, C...)
In the nick of time	[]
Once in a blue moon	[]
At the drop of a hat	[]

39 Match each idiom about success and failure on the left with its correct meaning on the right.

MATCHING OPTIONS:

- A** To attract the most attention and praise in a situation
- B** To fail to meet a required standard or expectation
- C** To return to the beginning after an attempt has failed
- D** To succeed in doing something difficult or unexpected

Item / Phrase	Write Match Letter (A, B, C...)
Back to square one	[]
Steal the show	[]
Come up short	[]
Pull off	[]

40 Match each figurative or metaphorical expression on the left with the abstract idea it represents on the right.

MATCHING OPTIONS:

- A** Something that has both advantages and serious disadvantages
- B** Something that seems bad at first but turns out to be beneficial
- C** A small visible part of a much larger hidden problem

Item / Phrase	Write Match Letter (A, B, C...)
A double-edged sword	[]
The tip of the iceberg	[]
A blessing in disguise	[]

Part 5: Sort the Values (Questions 41–50)

41 Arrange the words to make a correct sentence.

decided bullet resign bite from job. She the and her to

42 Arrange the words to make a correct sentence.

promotion blessing disguise sudden whole team. His was for the in

a

43 Arrange the words to make a correct sentence.

meeting people. should judge cover book when You not its new by

a

44 Arrange the words to make a correct sentence.

manager finally merger. about The let the cat out the bag the

of

45 Arrange the words to make a correct sentence.

promoted.

After

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46 Arrange the words to make a correct sentence.

negotiating

companies

directly.

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bush

The

two

the

of

47 Arrange the words to make a correct sentence.

centre.

costs

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flat

city

arm

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leg

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It

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a

48 Arrange the words to make a correct sentence.

deadline.

midnight

burning

finish

report

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We

to

49 Arrange the words to make a correct sentence.

double-edged

benefiting

harming

others.

policy

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50 Arrange the words to make a correct sentence.

deadlines.

important

missing

music

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Answer Key & Explanations

Idioms, Expressions and Figurative Language | B2

Part 1: Multiple Choice

1. **B** Correct Answer: to endure a painful situation with courage
✓ Explanation: **Bite the bullet** means to accept and endure a painful or difficult situation with **resilience** and courage. *She bit the bullet and sat through the three-hour meeting without complaint.*
2. **B** Correct Answer: to deliberately ignore something one is aware of
✓ Explanation: **Turn a blind eye** means to **deliberately** pretend not to notice something, even though you are aware of it. *The supervisor turned a blind eye to employees leaving early on Fridays.*
3. **B** Correct Answer: to make peace and end a disagreement
✓ Explanation: **Bury the hatchet** is an idiom meaning to **reconcile** and end a conflict or disagreement. *After months of tension, they finally buried the hatchet and agreed to work together.*
4. **C** Correct Answer: It avoided taking a clear position on the issue.
✓ Explanation: **Sitting on the fence** means refusing to commit to a definite **opinion** or side in a debate. *Politicians are often accused of sitting on the fence to avoid upsetting any voters.*
5. **C** Correct Answer: an idea that is unrealistic and unlikely to happen
✓ Explanation: A **pipe dream** refers to a hope or plan that is completely **unrealistic** and has little chance of being achieved. *Owning a yacht by the age of twenty seemed like a pipe dream to most of her friends.*
6. **B** Correct Answer: to establish the general character or direction of something
✓ Explanation: **Set the tone** means to establish the overall **character**, mood, or direction that others will follow. *The opening ceremony set the tone for what would be a highly competitive tournament.*
7. **C** Correct Answer: to avoid speaking directly about a difficult subject
✓ Explanation: **Beat around the bush** means to avoid getting to the main point or talking **indirectly** about something uncomfortable. *Stop beating around the bush and tell me what you really think of my proposal.*
8. **B** Correct Answer: extremely happy and delighted
✓ Explanation: **Over the moon** is an idiom expressing extreme **happiness** or joy about something. *She was over the moon when she found out she had been accepted into her first-choice university.*
9. **B** Correct Answer: to accidentally reveal a secret
✓ Explanation: **Let the cat out of the bag** means to **accidentally disclose** information that was supposed to be kept secret. *He let the cat out of the bag about the surprise party when he mentioned it to her sister.*

10. **B** Correct Answer: becoming progressively more successful over time
✓ Explanation: Go from strength to strength means to continue to become more **successful** or to improve steadily over a period of time. *Since launching their second product line, the company has gone from strength to strength.*

Part 2: Fill in the Gap

11. **A** Correct Answer: throw in
✓ Explanation: The idiom **throw in the towel** means to **give up** or admit defeat after great effort. *After months of struggling, he threw in the towel and quit the project.*
12. **A** Correct Answer: rock
✓ Explanation: To **rock the boat** means to **disturb a stable situation** or cause unnecessary trouble. *She didn't want to rock the boat by complaining about the policy.*
13. **A** Correct Answer: catch
✓ Explanation: **Didn't catch a word** is a figurative expression meaning you **failed to understand** or follow what was said. *He spoke so quickly that I didn't catch a word of the lecture.*
14. **A** Correct Answer: bite
✓ Explanation: To **bite the bullet** means to **endure a painful or difficult situation** with courage. *She bit the bullet and told him the truth about the mistake.*
15. **A** Correct Answer: sweep
✓ Explanation: To **sweep something under the rug** means to **hide or conceal** a problem rather than dealing with it openly. *The company tried to sweep the safety violations under the rug.*
16. **A** Correct Answer: gold
✓ Explanation: Having a **heart of gold** is an idiom meaning someone is **extremely kind and generous** in nature. *Despite her tough appearance, she has a heart of gold.*
17. **A** Correct Answer: bury
✓ Explanation: To **bury the hatchet** means to **end a conflict** and make peace with someone. *After years of disagreement, the two colleagues buried the hatchet.*
18. **A** Correct Answer: seething
✓ Explanation: **Seething under the surface** is a figurative expression meaning someone is **extremely angry** but not showing it outwardly. *He was seething inside but kept a professional face throughout the discussion.*
19. **A** Correct Answer: chickens
✓ Explanation: The idiom **don't count your chickens before they hatch** warns against **assuming success** before it actually happens. *You shouldn't count your chickens — the deal could still fall through.*

20. **A** Correct Answer: deep

✓ **Explanation:** To be **thrown in at the deep end** means to be **given a difficult task** without adequate preparation or experience. *He was thrown in at the deep end when he had to manage the team alone.*

Part 3: Fill in the Blank

21. **quits** Correct Answer: quits

✓ **Explanation:** The expression **call it quits** means to decide to stop doing something, often because it has become too difficult or exhausting. *After years of disagreements, the business partners decided to call it quits.*

22. **air** Correct Answer: air

✓ **Explanation:** **Hot air** is an idiom meaning talk or promises that sound impressive but have no real meaning or value. *His grand plans turned out to be nothing but hot air.*

23. **bathwater** Correct Answer: bathwater

✓ **Explanation:** **Throw the baby out with the bathwater** means to accidentally discard something valuable while trying to get rid of something unwanted. *Cancelling the whole project means throwing the baby out with the bathwater.*

24. **music** Correct Answer: music

✓ **Explanation:** **Face the music** is an idiom meaning to accept and deal with the unpleasant consequences of one's actions. *He had been avoiding the issue, but eventually had to face the music.*

25. **throats** Correct Answer: throats

✓ **Explanation:** **At each other's throats** is an expression meaning two people or groups are in a fierce and bitter argument or conflict. *The neighbours were constantly at each other's throats over the property boundary.*

26. **chickens** Correct Answer: chickens

✓ **Explanation:** **Don't count your chickens before they hatch** means you should not rely on something good happening before it has actually occurred. *She was already spending her bonus, but I told her not to count her chickens.*

27. **blue** Correct Answer: blue

✓ **Explanation:** **Out of the blue** is an idiom meaning something happens suddenly and unexpectedly, without any warning. *She received a job offer out of the blue from a company she had never contacted.*

28. **head** Correct Answer: head

✓ **Explanation:** **Go over someone's head** is a figurative expression meaning something is too complex or difficult for a person to understand. *The legal jargon in the contract went completely over her head.*

29. **water** Correct Answer: water

✓ **Explanation:** **In deep water** is an idiom meaning to be in serious trouble or a very difficult situation. *He was in deep water after missing three consecutive deadlines.*

30. **rest** Correct Answer: rest

✓ **Explanation:** **Let something rest** is a figurative expression meaning to stop pursuing or discussing a matter any further. *The lawyer advised his client to let the dispute rest rather than escalate it further.*

Part 4: Matrix / Match Values

31. **Bite the bullet: D • Burn bridges: C • Beat around the bush: B • Sit on the fence: A**

Correct Matches:

- **Bite the bullet** → To endure a painful or difficult situation with courage
 - **Burn bridges** → To permanently damage a relationship or opportunity
 - **Beat around the bush** → To avoid speaking directly about a subject
 - **Sit on the fence** → To avoid taking a side or making a decision
- ✓ **Explanation:** **Bite the bullet** originates from surgery without anaesthesia. **Burn bridges** uses fire as a metaphor for irreversible damage. **Beat around the bush** suggests circling a topic without addressing it, while **sit on the fence** implies neutrality, as in *"She always sits on the fence during arguments."*

32. Hit the nail on the head: B • Spill the beans: C • Let the cat out of the bag: A

Correct Matches:

• **Hit the nail on the head** → To describe something with perfect accuracy

• **Spill the beans** → To accidentally reveal a secret

• **Let the cat out of the bag** → To unintentionally disclose a surprise or hidden information

✓ **Explanation:** **Hit the nail on the head** is used when someone identifies a problem precisely, as in "*You've hit the nail on the head with that analysis.*" Both **spill the beans** and **let the cat out of the bag** relate to revealing secrets, but **let the cat out of the bag** more specifically implies ruining a surprise.

33. Pull your weight: B • Go the extra mile: D • Cut corners: A • Burn the midnight oil: C

Correct Matches:

• **Pull your weight** → To contribute a fair share of effort to a group task

• **Go the extra mile** → To put in more effort than is expected or required

• **Cut corners** → To do something poorly in order to save time or money

• **Burn the midnight oil** → To work or study late into the night

✓ **Explanation:** These idioms all relate to work ethic. **Pull your weight** and **go the extra mile** are positive, while **cut corners** is negative, implying shortcuts. **Burn the midnight oil** refers to the old practice of using oil lamps to work at night, as in "*She burned the midnight oil to finish the report.*"

34. Keep an eye on: B • Put your foot in your mouth: A • Turn a blind eye: C

Correct Matches:

- **Keep an eye on** → To watch or monitor someone or something carefully
- **Put your foot in your mouth** → To say something embarrassing or tactless by mistake
- **Turn a blind eye** → To deliberately ignore something wrong or illegal

✅ **Explanation:** All three idioms use body parts figuratively. **Keep an eye on** uses 'eye' to mean attention, as in "*Can you keep an eye on my bag?*"

Put your foot in your mouth describes a social blunder. **Turn a blind eye** is attributed to Admiral Nelson, who famously ignored a signal in battle.

35. Tighten your belt: A • Break the bank: C • On a shoestring: B • Cash in on: D

Correct Matches:

- **Tighten your belt** → To spend less money due to financial difficulty
- **Break the bank** → To cost an extremely large or unaffordable amount
- **On a shoestring** → Managing with very little money or resources
- **Cash in on** → To take advantage of a situation for financial gain

✅ **Explanation:** **Tighten your belt** and **on a shoestring** both suggest financial restraint, but **on a shoestring** describes a fixed condition, as in "*They launched the business on a shoestring.*" **Break the bank** is often used in the negative: "*It won't break the bank.*" **Cash in on** implies opportunism.

36. Get something off your chest: C • Have a heart of gold: A • Wear your heart on your sleeve: B

Correct

Matches:

• **Get something off your chest →**

To talk about something that has been worrying you

• **Have a heart of gold →** To be an extremely kind and generous person

• **Wear your heart on your sleeve →** To express your emotions openly and without hiding them



Explanation:

All three expressions use the **heart** figuratively to represent feelings. **Get something off your chest** implies emotional relief through confession, while **wear your heart on your sleeve** describes emotional transparency, as in "*She always wears her heart on her sleeve.*"

Heart of gold is a metaphor for moral goodness.

37. Read between the lines: C • Straight from the horse's mouth: A • Talk at cross purposes: B •
Speak volumes: D

**Correct
Matches:**

- **Read
between the
lines** → To
understand
the hidden or
implied
meaning of
something
- **Straight
from the
horse's
mouth** →
Information
received
directly from
the original
source
- **Talk at
cross
purposes** →
To
misunderstand
each other
because you
are discussing
different
things
- **Speak
volumes** → To
convey a great
deal without
using words



Explanation:

**Read
between the
lines** refers to
implicit
meaning, as in
*"If you read
between the
lines, you can
tell she's
unhappy."*

**Straight from
the horse's
mouth**
originates
from horse

racing, where owners were the most reliable source. **Speak volumes** often applies to silence or gestures.

38. In the nick of time: B • Once in a blue moon: C • At the drop of a hat: A

Correct Matches:

- **In the nick of time** → Just before it is too late; at the last possible moment
- **Once in a blue moon** → Very rarely; almost never
- **At the drop of a hat** → Immediately and without hesitation

✓ **Explanation:** **In the nick of time** suggests a narrow escape from failure, as in "*The ambulance arrived in the nick of time.*" **Once in a blue moon** refers to the rare occurrence of two full moons in a month. **At the drop of a hat** evokes the image of a signal being given instantly.

39. Back to square one: C • Steal the show: A • Come up short: B • Pull off: D

Correct Matches:

- **Back to square one** → To return to the beginning after an attempt has failed
- **Steal the show** → To attract the most attention and praise in a situation
- **Come up short** → To fail to meet a required standard or expectation
- **Pull off** → To succeed in doing something difficult or unexpected

✓ **Explanation:** **Back to square one** originates from board games and suggests restarting completely. **Steal the show** comes from theatre, as in "*The young actress stole the show.*" **Come up short** implies near but insufficient success, while **pull off** celebrates an unlikely achievement.

40. A double-edged sword: A • The tip of the iceberg: C • A blessing in disguise: B

Correct Matches:

• A double-edged sword →

Something that has both advantages and serious disadvantages

• The tip of the iceberg → A

small visible part of a much larger hidden problem

• A blessing in disguise →

Something that seems bad at first but turns out to be beneficial

✓ **Explanation:** These expressions use **extended metaphors** to represent abstract ideas. **A double-edged sword** refers to a literal blade that cuts both ways, used in contexts like "*Social media is a double-edged sword.*" **The tip of the iceberg** alludes to the fact that most of an iceberg is submerged. **A blessing in disguise** suggests hidden positivity within apparent misfortune.

Part 5: Sort the Values

41. Correct Answer: She decided to bite the bullet and resign from her job.

✓ **Explanation:** The idiom **bite the bullet** means to endure a painful or difficult situation with courage. It follows the infinitive marker *to* and functions as a verb phrase. The conjunction **and** connects two infinitive verbs: *bite the bullet* and *resign*.

42. Correct Answer: His sudden promotion was a blessing in disguise for the whole team.

✓ **Explanation:** The expression **a blessing in disguise** refers to something that seems bad at first but turns out to be good. It functions as a **subject complement** after the linking verb *was*, describing the subject *His sudden promotion*.

43. Correct Answer: You should not judge a book by its cover when meeting new people.

✓ **Explanation:** The idiom **judge a book by its cover** means to form an opinion based on appearances alone. The modal *should not* expresses advice, and the **adverbial clause** *when meeting new people* provides context for when the advice applies.

44. Correct Answer: The manager finally let the cat out of the bag about the merger.

✓ **Explanation:** The idiom **let the cat out of the bag** means to accidentally reveal a secret. The adverb *finally* is placed between the subject *The manager* and the main verb *let*, and the prepositional phrase *about the merger* specifies the topic of the revealed information.

45. Correct Answer: After years of hard work, she was on cloud nine when she got promoted.

✓ **Explanation:** The expression **on cloud nine** means extremely happy. It follows the linking verb *was* as a **prepositional phrase complement**. The sentence uses two **adverbial phrases**: *After years of hard work* (time/background) and *when she got promoted* (specific trigger).

46. Correct Answer: The two rival companies have been beating around the bush instead of negotiating directly.

✓ **Explanation:** The idiom **beat around the bush** means to avoid getting to the main point. The **present perfect continuous** tense (*have been beating*) emphasises that this avoidance has been ongoing. The phrase *instead of negotiating directly* creates a contrast using the preposition **instead of** followed by a gerund.

47. Correct Answer: It costs an arm and a leg to rent a flat in the city centre.

✓ **Explanation:** The idiom **an arm and a leg** means an extremely large amount of money. The sentence uses an **impersonal subject** *It* with the verb *costs*, followed by the idiomatic object. The **infinitive of purpose** *to rent a flat* explains what is expensive.

48. Correct Answer: We were all burning the midnight oil to finish the report before the deadline.

✓ **Explanation:** The idiom **burn the midnight oil** means to work late into the night. The **past continuous** tense (*were burning*) emphasises the ongoing nature of the effort. The adverb *all* is placed after the auxiliary *were* to refer to the entire group, and the **infinitive of purpose** *to finish the report* explains the reason.

49. Correct Answer: The new policy was a double-edged sword, benefiting some while harming others.

✓ **Explanation:** The figurative expression **a double-edged sword** describes something that has both advantages and disadvantages. It serves as a **noun phrase complement** after the linking verb *was*. The **participial clauses** *benefiting some* and *harming others* are connected by the conjunction *while* to show contrast.

50. Correct Answer: He knew he had to face the music after missing so many important deadlines.

✓ **Explanation:** The idiom **face the music** means to accept the consequences of one's actions. It follows the modal expression *had to*, which expresses obligation or necessity. The **adverbial clause** *after missing so many important deadlines* uses a **gerund phrase** to explain the reason why facing consequences was inevitable.

Score Guide

45–50 Correct	Excellent! You have mastered this topic.
38–44 Correct	Very good! Review the rules you missed.
30–37 Correct	Good start. Re-read the lesson and examples.
0–29 Correct	Study the lesson again before retaking the test.