

# ESL Idiom Activities

for

Kids and Adults

# Idiom Match-Up Listening

**Objective:** To improve students' listening comprehension and reinforce idiom recognition by matching spoken idioms to their meanings.

**Level:** Intermediate to Advanced

**Duration:** 20–30 minutes

## Materials Needed

- Audio recordings of sentences using idioms (10–15 examples)
- Printed idiom definition cards
- Student worksheets or matching grids

## Instructions

Begin by introducing the lesson with a brief explanation of idioms and how they are used in everyday conversation. Tell students they will listen to several audio clips containing idioms and will need to match each idiom to its correct meaning. Distribute a worksheet or grid with idioms on one side and shuffled definitions on the other.

Play each audio clip twice. After the first playthrough, allow students time to jot down the idiom they heard. On the second playthrough, have them match the idiom to the correct meaning on their worksheet. Encourage them to discuss in pairs if unsure about specific meanings.

After all the audio has been played, review the answers as a class. Play each clip one more time, pausing to ask students to explain why the idiom matches its definition. Wrap up by inviting a few volunteers to create their own sentences using the idioms learned.

# Fill in the Idiom

**Objective:** To develop listening accuracy and idiom recognition by completing audio-based gap-fill exercises.

**Level:** Intermediate

**Duration:** 20–25 minutes

## Materials Needed

- Audio recordings of dialogues containing idioms
- Printed transcripts with idioms removed (blanks in place)
- Answer keys for review

## Instructions

Begin the lesson by briefly reviewing some common idioms. Explain that students will listen to audio clips where idioms have been removed from a transcript, and their task is to fill in the missing idioms based on what they hear. Hand out the worksheets before playing the audio.

Play the audio clip once without interruption and allow students to follow along with the transcript. Then, play the audio a second time and pause after each sentence or idiomatic phrase to give students time to write in the missing idiom. Encourage students to work individually for the first attempt, then compare answers in pairs.

After the second listen, review the correct answers as a class. Discuss the meaning and context of each idiom, and ask students to volunteer their own example sentences using the idioms they filled in. For extra practice, students can rewrite the full paragraph using other idioms.

# Idioms in Conversation

**Objective:** To enhance students' listening comprehension and contextual understanding of idioms through natural dialogues.

**Level:** Intermediate to Advanced

**Duration:** 25–30 minutes

## Materials Needed

- Audio recordings of short conversations featuring idioms
- Dialogue transcripts (with or without gaps)
- Comprehension question handouts

## Instructions

Begin by introducing the idea that idioms are often used in everyday conversations. Tell students they will listen to several short dialogues that contain idiomatic expressions and will analyze usage. Distribute a transcript of each dialogue and a set of comprehension questions.

Play each dialogue once while students follow along silently. Then, play it again and pause after key idiomatic expressions. Ask students to highlight or underline the idioms as they hear them. After listening, have students answer the comprehension questions related to the meaning, tone, and function of the idioms in context.

Once students have completed their answers, review each idiom as a class. Discuss what it means, why it was used in the conversation, and how it changes the tone. Optionally, put students into pairs to act out one of the dialogues using two or three of the idioms from the activity.

# Idiom Roleplays

**Objective:** To develop students' speaking fluency and confidence by using idioms naturally in roleplay conversations.

**Level:** Intermediate to Advanced

**Duration:** 30–40 minutes

## Materials Needed

- List of idioms and their meanings
- Roleplay scenario cards or prompts
- Optional: recording devices for self-evaluation

## Instructions

Start by introducing a selection of idioms relevant to the roleplay scenarios. Review their meanings and provide example sentences to ensure understanding. Explain that students will act out short roleplay dialogues using these idioms naturally.

Divide students into pairs or small groups and give each group a roleplay scenario card or prompt. Encourage them to plan their dialogue, incorporating as many idioms as possible while keeping the conversation realistic. Provide support as needed with vocabulary or pronunciation.

Once prepared, have groups perform their roleplays for the class. After each performance, facilitate feedback focusing on idiom usage, pronunciation, and creativity. To extend the activity, ask students to switch roles or create their own scenarios featuring the idioms learned.

# Story Circle

**Objective:** To encourage creative speaking and collaborative storytelling using idioms in context.

**Level:** Intermediate to Advanced

**Duration:** 30–35 minutes

## Materials Needed

- List of idioms for reference
- A comfortable seating arrangement for a circle
- Optional: a timer

## Instructions

Begin by introducing the idioms students will use during the storytelling activity. Review their meanings and provide examples to ensure comprehension. Explain that students will take turns adding to a group story, incorporating idioms naturally as they speak.

Arrange students in a circle. The first student starts the story with one or two sentences using an idiom from the list. Each subsequent student continues the story, adding their own sentences and including at least one idiom. Encourage creativity to build an engaging narrative.

After the story completes a full round or time runs out, review the idioms used as a group. Discuss how they fit into the story and the impact they had on the narrative. For homework or further practice, students can write their own short idiomatic stories based on the group activity.

# Idiom Charades

**Objective:** To improve students' speaking and descriptive skills by encouraging them to explain idioms without using the key words.

**Level:** Intermediate

**Duration:** 25–30 minutes

## Materials Needed

- Cards or slips with idioms written on them
- Timer or stopwatch
- Whiteboard or paper for keeping score (optional)

## Instructions

Start by explaining the rules: students will take turns drawing an idiom card and must describe the meaning or situation of the idiom without using any of the words in the idiom itself. Their classmates will try to guess the idiom based on the description.

Divide students into small teams or pairs. One student from each team picks a card and describes the idiom within a time limit (e.g., 1 minute). Encourage creativity and use of examples or gestures to help convey the meaning. Rotate turns to give everyone a chance to describe and guess.

After the game, review any challenging idioms and clarify their meanings. Discuss strategies for effective description and encourage students to use the idioms in their own sentences. For further practice, students can write short dialogues incorporating some of the idioms from the game.

# Idioms in Short Stories

**Objective:** To improve reading comprehension and idiom recognition by analyzing idioms used within short stories.

**Level:** Intermediate to Advanced

**Duration:** 30–40 minutes

## Materials Needed

- Short stories containing several idioms
- Idiom glossary or list for reference
- Comprehension question sheets

## Instructions

Begin by introducing the short story and explaining that it contains several idioms. Distribute copies of the story and provide students with a glossary or list of idioms featured in the text. Review the meanings of the idioms to ensure understanding.

Have students read the story silently or take turns reading aloud. Encourage them to underline or highlight idioms as they read. After reading, distribute comprehension questions focusing on the context and meaning of the idioms as well as overall story understanding.

Discuss the answers as a class, focusing on how the idioms contribute to the story's meaning and tone. For follow-up, students can write their own short stories using some of the idioms learned or rewrite parts of the story by replacing idioms with their literal meanings to see the difference in impact.



# Cloze Paragraphs

**Objective:** To enhance idiom recognition and contextual guessing skills by filling in missing idioms in reading passages.

**Level:** Intermediate to Advanced

**Duration:** 25–30 minutes

## Materials Needed

- Paragraphs or short passages with missing idioms
- List of idioms for the gaps
- Printed worksheets or digital documents

## Instructions

Start by explaining the cloze activity format, where students read passages with blanks that need to be filled with appropriate idioms from a provided list. Review the idioms beforehand, ensuring students understand their meanings.

Distribute the worksheets and have students read each paragraph carefully, then choose the idiom that best fits the context for each blank. Encourage them to think about the overall meaning of the passage and how the idiom changes the tone or message.

After completing the exercise, review answers as a class. Discuss why certain idioms fit better than others and explore alternative idioms that might work. For follow-up, students can create their own cloze paragraphs using idioms to challenge their classmates.

# Matching Definitions

**Objective:** To strengthen students' understanding of idiomatic expressions by reading passages and matching idioms to their correct definitions.

**Level:** Intermediate to Advanced

**Duration:** 25–30 minutes

## Materials Needed

- Short reading passages or sentences containing idioms
- Definition cards or lists matching the idioms
- Printed worksheets or matching grids

## Instructions

Begin by distributing reading passages or sentences that contain various idioms. Ask students to read the texts carefully and underline or highlight the idioms they find. Provide them with a list of idioms and a separate list of definitions.

Students then match each idiom they found in the reading with the correct definition on their worksheet. Encourage them to use context clues from the reading to inform their choices.

After the matching exercise, review the answers as a class, discussing any idioms that were challenging or confusing. To extend the activity, have students write their own sentences using the idioms matched or create short stories incorporating several idioms.

# Short Story with Idioms

**Objective:** To develop creative writing skills and idiom usage by crafting a short story that naturally incorporates three idioms.

**Level:** Intermediate to Advanced

**Duration:** 30–40 minutes

## Materials Needed

- List of idioms for reference
- Writing materials or digital devices

## Instructions

Begin by reviewing three idioms from the provided list, discussing their meanings and examples of usage. Encourage students to think about how these idioms can be woven naturally into a story.

Ask students to write a short story that includes all three idioms, making sure the idioms fit the context and enhance the narrative. Encourage creativity in setting, characters, and plot.

After writing, have students share their stories with peers or in small groups. Discuss how effectively the idioms were used and how they contributed to the story's meaning and style. For follow-up, students can exchange stories and identify the idioms used by their classmates.

# Rewriting Dialogues

**Objective:** To enhance students' understanding and usage of idiomatic expressions by rewriting everyday dialogues incorporating idioms.

**Level:** Intermediate to Advanced

**Duration:** 30–35 minutes

## Materials Needed

- Sample dialogues without idioms
- List of idioms with meanings
- Writing materials or digital devices

## Instructions

Begin by providing students with simple dialogues that do not include idioms. Review a list of idioms that fit naturally into conversational speech and discuss their meanings.

Ask students to rewrite the dialogues by replacing some phrases with appropriate idioms, ensuring the conversations remain clear and natural. Encourage students to think about how idioms change the tone or expressiveness of the dialogue.

After rewriting, have students practice reading their dialogues aloud in pairs or groups. Discuss how the use of idioms affects communication and fluency. For follow-up, students can write their own dialogues using idioms learned during the lesson.

# Personal Journal with Idioms

**Objective:** To encourage reflective writing while practicing the use of idiomatic expressions in personal contexts.

**Level:** Intermediate to Advanced

**Duration:** 25–30 minutes

## Materials Needed

- List of common idioms with meanings
- Writing journals or digital devices

## Instructions

Start by introducing a selection of idioms commonly used to describe feelings, experiences, or daily events (e.g., “*under the weather*,” “*hit the nail on the head*,” “*break the ice*”). Review their meanings and usage in context.

Ask students to write a personal journal entry about a recent experience, incorporating at least three idioms naturally within their writing. Encourage them to express their thoughts and emotions clearly while using the idioms to add color and emphasis.

After writing, students can share excerpts with the class or in small groups, discussing how the idioms helped convey their feelings or stories. For follow-up, students can keep a daily journal using new idioms learned over time.

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