

Common English Idioms – Test 1



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Name: _____ Class: _____ Date: _____ Score: / 30

Choose the best option (A, B, C or D) for each question.

Part 1: What does it mean?

Read each sentence and choose the meaning of the idiom in bold.

1. I'm sorry I can't come tonight. I'm feeling a bit under the weather. What does 'under the weather' mean?
A slightly ill
B very busy
C in a bad mood because of the rain
D stuck outside in the cold
2. Everyone was worried, but the final exam was a piece of cake. What does 'a piece of cake' mean?
A very stressful
B very easy
C badly organised
D surprisingly long
3. We've been working for ten hours. Let's call it a day. What does 'call it a day' mean?
A make a phone call
B celebrate the end of the day
C stop working for now
D plan the next day
4. Hiro let the cat out of the bag about Mia's surprise party. What did Hiro do?
A He planned the party carefully.
B He forgot about the party.
C He cancelled the party.
D He told people about the secret by mistake.
5. I'd love a new laptop, but a good one would cost an arm and a leg. What does 'cost an arm and a leg' mean?
A be extremely expensive
B be physically painful
C take a long time
D be difficult to carry
6. Amara has been on cloud nine since she got the job. How does Amara feel?
A very tired
B extremely happy
C confused
D worried about the future
7. Go and buy your coffee. I'll keep an eye on your bag. What will the speaker do?
A carry it for you
B look inside it
C take it home
D watch it carefully
8. When you said the project failed because of poor planning, you hit the nail on the head. What did the person do?
A made a serious mistake
B worked very hard
C described the situation exactly right
D changed the subject
9. Don't worry about the delay. We're all in the same boat. What does 'in the same boat' mean?
A facing the same difficult situation
B travelling together
C working for the same company
D going on the same holiday

24. A: I finally passed my driving test! B: _____
A Well done! You must be over the moon. **B** Break a leg!
C That's the last straw! **D** Don't cry over spilt milk.
25. A: I failed my chemistry test and I can't stop thinking about it. B: _____
A You're pulling my leg.
B That rings a bell.
C There's no use crying over spilt milk. Just prepare better next time.
D Don't put all your eggs in one basket.

Part 4: Idioms in a reading text

Read the text and choose the best meaning for each idiom as it is used in the text.

When Priya moved to a new city for her first full-time job, she felt like a fish out of water. Everything was unfamiliar: the streets, the office, even the way people spoke in meetings. Her manager, Tomás, told her to relax. 'It takes everyone a few weeks to learn the ropes,' he said. 'Ask as many questions as you like.'

During her second month, Priya offered to organise a large conference on her own. Although she was enthusiastic, she soon realised she had bitten off more than she could chew. She was working late every night and still falling behind. Just before the event, she almost got cold feet and considered asking Tomás to give the project to someone else.

Instead, she asked two colleagues for help. Working as a team, they made sure everyone was on the same page, and the conference went off without a hitch. Looking back, Priya thinks her difficult start was a blessing in disguise. 'I learned that asking for help isn't a weakness,' she says. 'Now, when a new colleague joins, I'm the first to offer support.'

26. Tomás says it takes everyone a few weeks to 'learn the ropes'. This means to _____.
A work long hours without complaining
B understand how things are done in a new job
C find their way around a new city
D make friends with their colleagues
27. Priya realised she had 'bitten off more than she could chew'. This means _____.
A she had eaten too much at work
B she had argued with her manager
C she had taken on more work than she could manage
D she had made a careless mistake
28. Before the event, Priya 'almost got cold feet'. This means she _____.
A became nervous and nearly decided not to continue
B felt ill because the office was cold
C forgot to send the invitations
D lost interest in her job
29. The conference 'went off without a hitch'. This means it happened _____.
A with a few small delays **B** later than planned
C without any problems **D** without any guests

30. Priya thinks her difficult start was 'a blessing in disguise'. This means it was _____.

- A** a secret she kept from her colleagues
- B** a lucky event that she had planned
- C** a problem that she never solved
- D** something that seemed bad but turned out to be good

Answer key – Common English Idioms – Test 1

1 A	2 B	3 C	4 D	5 A	6 B	7 D	8 C	9 A	10 B
11 B	12 C	13 A	14 D	15 B	16 C	17 A	18 D	19 B	20 C
21 D	22 C	23 B	24 A	25 C	26 B	27 C	28 A	29 C	30 D

Explanations

- A** – 'Under the weather' means feeling slightly ill.
- B** – 'A piece of cake' describes something very easy.
- C** – 'Call it a day' means to stop working for the time being.
- D** – 'Let the cat out of the bag' means to reveal a secret accidentally.
- A** – Something that costs an arm and a leg is very expensive.
- B** – 'On cloud nine' means extremely happy.
- D** – 'Keep an eye on' something means to watch it and look after it.
- C** – 'Hit the nail on the head' means to say exactly what is true or correct.
- A** – 'In the same boat' means sharing the same difficult situation.
- B** – 'Once in a blue moon' means very rarely.
- B** – The idiom is 'have butterflies in your stomach', meaning to feel nervous.
- C** – 'Give someone a hand' means to help them.
- A** – 'Beat around the bush' means to avoid saying something directly.
- D** – 'A shot in the dark' is a guess made without much information.
- B** – 'Burn the candle at both ends' means to work too hard and rest too little.
- C** – 'Second nature' describes something you can do easily without thinking.
- A** – 'Break a leg!' is a way of wishing someone good luck, especially before a performance.
- D** – 'Out of the blue' means suddenly and unexpectedly.
- B** – 'Sleep on it' means to wait until the next day before making a decision.
- C** – 'Face the music' means to accept the unpleasant results of your actions.
- D** – Finishing early fits a test that was very easy; the other idioms contradict their contexts.
- C** – The fixed expression is 'as fit as a fiddle', not 'a violin'.
- B** – The idiom is fixed: 'raining cats and dogs', with both nouns in the plural.
- A** – 'Over the moon' means very happy, which suits good news; 'Break a leg' is said before an event.
- C** – 'No use crying over spilt milk' means there is no point worrying about something that has already happened.
- B** – 'Learn the ropes' means to learn how to do a job or how things work in a new place.
- C** – The idiom means trying to do more than you are able to; the text shows she was falling behind.
- A** – 'Get cold feet' means to become too nervous to do something you had planned.
- C** – 'Without a hitch' means smoothly, with no problems.
- D** – A blessing in disguise is something that seems bad at first but has good results, as Priya explains.

Notes for teachers: Use this test after a unit on idiomatic language or as a diagnostic for upper-intermediate groups. It targets typical learner errors: taking idioms literally, changing fixed words (for example, 'cats and dog' or 'fish out of the water'), and using an idiom in the wrong situation. As a follow-up, ask students to write a short dialogue or story that uses five idioms from the test correctly.