

Idioms and Fixed Expressions (C2) – Worksheet 1

Name: _____ Class: _____ Date: _____ Score: / 37



Do this worksheet
online and check your
answers instantly

Exercise 1: Match the idioms with their meanings

Match each idiom with its meaning from the box. There are two extra meanings that you do not need.

Example: to bite the bullet → to accept something unpleasant with courage

WORD BOX

to be anxiously waiting for news to act recklessly, ignoring the risks
to shift responsibility to someone else an event that is much less impressive than expected
to have a private, often selfish, motive to have nothing in particular to do
to take attention away from someone else's achievement
something that distracts from the real issue to criticise someone unfairly
to make a bad situation worse

1. to be on tenterhooks → _____
2. to throw caution to the wind → _____
3. to pass the buck → _____
4. a damp squib → _____
5. to have an axe to grind → _____
6. to be at a loose end → _____
7. to steal someone's thunder → _____
8. a red herring → _____

Exercise 2: Complete the fixed expressions

Complete each sentence with a word from the box. There are two extra words that you do not need.

Example: Don't worry, it's not rocket ____; anyone can learn it. → science

WORD BOX

grain bush tether wool nutshell salt hat cheek line plate

9. Stop beating about the _____ and tell me what actually happened.
10. After three sleepless nights with the new baby, Tomasz was at the end of his _____.
11. I'd take the reviewer's claims with a pinch of _____; he loves exaggerating.
12. Getting up at 5 a.m. to go running really goes against the _____ for me.

13. Don't try to pull the _____ over my eyes; I know the figures don't add up.
14. In a _____, the project failed because nobody took ownership of it.
15. Priya is so organised that she can plan a whole trip at the drop of a _____.
16. Don't be offended; his remark about your cooking was clearly tongue in _____.

Exercise 3: Use the correct verb form

Complete each idiom with the correct form of the verb in brackets.

Example: Since the new year, she has ____ (turn) over a new leaf. → turned

17. By the time we arrived, the guests had already _____ (get) wind of the surprise.
18. I wish I hadn't _____ (bite) off more than I could chew with this renovation.
19. Someone _____ (spill) the beans about the merger yesterday, so it's no longer a secret.
20. After years of rivalry, the two neighbours finally _____ (bury) the hatchet last summer.
21. Everything was going smoothly until Ana _____ (throw) a spanner in the works by resigning.
22. You've really _____ (hit) the nail on the head with that analysis.
23. Fortunately, the rumour was _____ (nip) in the bud before it could cause any damage.

Exercise 4: Correct the idioms

Each sentence contains one wrong word in the idiom. Rewrite the sentence correctly.

Example: He's got cold toes about the wedding. → He's got cold feet about the wedding.

24. Don't count your chickens before they're born.

25. Our new manager is a different pot of fish from the last one.

26. Jonas let the dog out of the bag about the party.

27. Mira was over the sky when she heard she'd got the job.

28. The proof of the pudding is in the tasting.

29. We'll cross that river when we come to it.

30. Lena has been burning the candle at both sides for weeks.

Exercise 5: Form the correct word

Use the word in capitals to form a word that completes each fixed expression.

Example: After the argument, he was ___ shown the door. (CEREMONY) → unceremoniously

31. It goes without _____ that safety must come first. (SAY)
32. With such a strong team, the result of the final was a foregone _____. (CONCLUDE)
33. When it comes to _____ to detail, she is second to none. (ATTEND)
34. He made a _____ attempt to apologise, but nobody was convinced. (HEART)
35. The twins are like two peas in a pod; they're practically _____. (DISTINGUISH)
36. To add insult to _____, the train was cancelled after we'd waited an hour. (INJURE)
37. The deal almost fell through, but they reached an agreement at the _____ hour.
(ELEVEN)

Answer key – Idioms and Fixed Expressions (C2) – Worksheet 1

Exercise 1: Match the idioms with their meanings

1. **to be anxiously waiting for news**

Being on tenterhooks means being in a state of nervous suspense.

2. **to act recklessly, ignoring the risks**

You stop worrying about danger and take a risk.

3. **to shift responsibility to someone else**

Passing the buck means making someone else deal with a problem or take the blame.

4. **an event that is much less impressive than expected**

A damp squib is a disappointing anticlimax.

5. **to have a private, often selfish, motive**

Someone with an axe to grind has a personal reason for their opinion or behaviour.

6. **to have nothing in particular to do**

Being at a loose end means having free time and no plans.

7. **to take attention away from someone else's achievement**

You get the praise or attention that someone else expected to get.

8. **something that distracts from the real issue**

A red herring is a misleading clue or distraction.

Exercise 2: Complete the fixed expressions

9. **bush**

'Beat about the bush' means to avoid saying something directly.

10. **tether**

'At the end of your tether' means you have no patience or energy left.

11. **salt**

'Take something with a pinch of salt' means not to believe it completely.

12. **grain**

'Go against the grain' means to be contrary to your natural instincts.

13. **wool**

'Pull the wool over someone's eyes' means to deceive them.

14. **nutshell**

'In a nutshell' means in very few words, briefly.

15. **hat**

'At the drop of a hat' means immediately, without hesitation.

16. **cheek**

'Tongue in cheek' means said as a joke and not seriously.

Exercise 3: Use the correct verb form

17. **got**

The past perfect needs the past participle: 'got' in British English or 'gotten' in American English.

18. **bitten**

After 'hadn't', you need the past participle 'bitten'.

19. **spilled**

The reviewer's answer 'spilled' is already accepted, because 'yesterday' requires the past simple and both 'spilled' and 'spilt' are correct forms, so no change is needed.

20. **buried**

'Last summer' calls for the past simple 'buried'.

21. **threw**

The past simple of 'throw' is 'threw'.

22. **hit**

The present perfect uses the past participle 'hit', which is the same as the base form.

23. **nipped**

The passive needs the past participle 'nipped', with a double 'p'.

Exercise 4: Correct the idioms

24. **Don't count your chickens before they're hatched.**
The fixed expression is 'before they're hatched' or 'before they hatch'.
25. **Our new manager is a different kettle of fish from the last one.**
The idiom is 'a different kettle of fish'.
26. **Jonas let the cat out of the bag about the party.**
The idiom is 'let the cat out of the bag', meaning to reveal a secret.
27. **Mira was over the moon when she heard she'd got the job.**
The idiom is 'over the moon', meaning extremely happy.
28. **The proof of the pudding is in the eating.**
The fixed expression is 'the proof of the pudding is in the eating'.
29. **We'll cross that bridge when we come to it.**
The idiom is 'cross that bridge when we come to it'.
30. **Lena has been burning the candle at both ends for weeks.**
The idiom is 'burn the candle at both ends', meaning to work too hard and rest too little.

Exercise 5: Form the correct word

31. **saying**
The fixed expression is 'it goes without saying'.
32. **conclusion**
'A foregone conclusion' is a result that is certain in advance.
33. **attention**
The collocation is 'attention to detail'.
34. **half-hearted**
'A half-hearted attempt' is one made without real effort or sincerity.
35. **indistinguishable**
You need a negative adjective, meaning impossible to tell apart.
36. **injury**
The fixed expression is 'to add insult to injury'.
37. **eleventh**
'At the eleventh hour' means at the last possible moment.

Notes for teachers: Start with the matching task to activate meaning, then move to the gap-fill and correction tasks, which focus on the exact form of each expression. A typical mistake is changing a key word, for example 'end of the line' instead of 'end of my tether', or using the wrong verb form, such as 'spilled out the beans'. As a follow-up, ask learners to write a short anecdote that uses at least five of the expressions, then have partners check them for accuracy.