

# Illustrated Idioms

## Level B2



We're going to have to **get our act together** if we want to finish this job by the end of the month.



I had to **be at his beck and call**, night and day. He often got me out of bed at night to run an errand.



The robber was trying to escape with the money but I **caught him in the act**.



It's no **bed of roses** teaching in a secondary school.



I can't believe these shoes have broken already; they **cost an arm and a leg**.



I don't want to **rock the boat**, but he is making so much noise. I think we should call the police!

# Illustrated Idioms

## Preface

An idiom is an **expression**, a colloquial metaphor, which has a figurative meaning that is known only through common use. The meaning of this phrase or expression cannot be deduced by finding the meaning of each individual word.

Idioms are considered part of the language's culture and, in order to be understood, they require some knowledge, information, or experience that the members of this culture share. It is believed that William Shakespeare coined over 2,000 idioms that are still in use today.

Example: e.g. *If you finish your lessons, you can come with me; the ball's in your court now.*

In the English language expression: *the ball's in your court now*, a non-native speaker would be unable to deduce the actual meaning of this phrase, which has nothing to do with sports and it is used to show that somebody is responsible for the **next move in a situation**. Although it can refer literally to sports/football, it is rarely used in that way. Also, it cannot always be directly translated to other languages because it might have a completely different meaning. However, some idioms can be found in many different languages and they can be easily translated, or their metaphorical meaning can be easily deduced.

Idioms are very important in English and quite difficult for students to learn. Students have to learn idiomatic expressions the way they learn other vocabulary. Some of the most common ones that students will come across are dealt with in this book.

Some things to keep in mind about idioms are:

- a) The meaning of an idiom cannot be deduced by a literal translation of its words.
- b) We cannot substitute a word in an idiom with a word similar in meaning.
- c) We cannot usually modify an idiomatic phrase syntactically.

This book aims to build up students' knowledge of Idioms through full-colour illustrations, which are accompanied by graded exercises. The Idioms are recycled throughout the unit and students are exposed to each Idiom on seven (7) different occasions.

There are also 2 Review Units, (units: 1-5, and 6-10) which also revise and consolidate the Idioms that students have already been taught.

The book is intended for intermediate/upper- intermediate level students (**B1** and **B2**), or even more advanced students who want to practise or revise their knowledge of this area of the language. It can be used in the classroom, or for self-study purposes. The exercises can be given as homework and then discussed in class.

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# Contents

<b>Contents</b>	
UNIT 1	Page 5
UNIT 2	Page 11
UNIT 3	Page 17
UNIT 4	Page 23
UNIT 5	Page 29
<b>REVIEW UNIT: UNITS 1-5</b>	Page 35
UNIT 6	Page 39
UNIT 7	Page 45
UNIT 8	Page 51
UNIT 9	Page 57
UNIT 10	Page 63
<b>REVIEW UNIT: UNITS 6-10</b>	Page 69
IDIOMS INDEX	Page 74
IRREGULAR VERBS INDEX	Page 76

# Illustrated Idioms

## The structure of each Unit:

The Idioms are presented with their definitions at the beginning of the unit

Full colour illustrations show what each Idiom means, accompanied by Activity A (matching/gap-filling)

**UNIT 1**

IDIOMS		
to no avail	cost an arm and a leg	get off someone's back
be on the ball	the ball is in somebody's court	stab someone in the back
catch someone in the act	have an ace up your sleeve	act your age
get your act together	alive and kicking	into thin air

**to no avail** - You do something to no avail when you do not get the desired result.  
e.g. I went to the shops to buy a shirt to no avail: the shops were closed.

**cost an arm and a leg** - Something costs an arm and a leg when it is very expensive.  
e.g. These football socks cost us an arm and a leg!

**get off someone's back** - If you tell someone to get off your back you mean that you want them to stop criticizing and pressuring you.  
e.g. If bring my exercise book, the teacher will get off my back.

**be on the ball** - If you say that someone is on the ball, you mean they are clever, alert and knowledgeable.  
e.g. I rely on my secretary to be on the ball.

**the ball is in somebody's court** - You say that the ball is in a certain person's court when they are responsible for the next move in a situation.  
e.g. If you finish your lessons, you can come with me, the ball's in your court now.

**stab someone in the back** - Someone stabs you in the back if they appear to be friendly when they are with you, but then say unpleasant or harmful things about you when you are not there.  
e.g. Although she was my best friend, she stabbed me in the back, so I didn't see her again.

**catch someone in the act** - You catch someone in the act when you discover them while they are doing something wrong.  
e.g. After the party, I was trying to clear up the mess before anyone noticed it, but my mum came in and caught me in the act.

**have an ace up your sleeve** - You have an ace up your sleeve when you have a secret or hidden advantage that you can use against an opponent.  
e.g. That job applicant has an ace up her sleeve. She's known the boss since she was at school.

**act your age** - If you tell someone to act their age you are telling them to stop being childish or silly.  
e.g. Oh, act your age, Mary! Don't behave like a child.

**get your act together** - You get your act together when you organize yourself, your time and your work efficiently.  
e.g. If we get our act together, we will finish 2 books by the end of the month.

**alive and kicking** - Someone is alive and kicking when they are still alive and in a strong and healthy condition.  
e.g. He's still alive and kicking, although he's 80 years old now.

**into thin air** - Someone or something disappears into thin air if they seem to disappear suddenly and completely.  
e.g. Have you seen my bag? It seems to have disappeared into thin air.

**Illustrated Idioms** Unit 1

**A. Fill in the gaps in the sentences below with the correct Idiom from unit 1.**

1. I can't believe these shoes have already got an arm and a leg.  
2. I have ordered tickets for you, but the match has already sold out.  
3. I don't like you getting off my back! You're nagging me too much.  
4. Someone tried to break into my house last night but I caught them in the act.  
5. I have an ace up my sleeve.  
6. I'm going to act my age.  
7. I've got my act together.  
8. I've been on the ball since I started working.  
9. I've been on the ball since I started working.  
10. I've been on the ball since I started working.  
11. I've been on the ball since I started working.  
12. I've been on the ball since I started working.

A fun activity revising the Idioms at the end of each unit

Variety of Exercises help students master the use of the most frequent Idioms

**Illustrated Idioms** Unit 1

**B. Choose the correct answer A, B, C or D.**

- Everyone thought Bill's proposal would win, but Anna had \_\_\_\_\_ and was able to show some more persuasive data.
  - an ace up her sleeve
  - the ball in her court
  - be alive and kicking
  - be on the ball
- You can't have a terrorist every time you don't get your own eggs just \_\_\_\_\_ and learn to compromise!
  - have an ace up your sleeve
  - act your age
  - be alive and kicking
  - be on the ball
- Mum is never going to \_\_\_\_\_ until I've cleaned my room.
  - get off my back
  - get my act together
  - get off my back
  - stab me in the back
- I've tried talking to him, but he won't listen to anybody. \_\_\_\_\_ he's alive and kicking.
  - he's on the ball
  - the ball's in his court
  - he's on the ball
  - he's on the ball
- Tim is a loyal friend, he would never \_\_\_\_\_ on you in the back.
  - stab you in the back
  - stab you in the back
  - stab you in the back
  - stab you in the back
- I'd love to buy that pair of trousers, but \_\_\_\_\_ and I can't justify it.
  - it's too small
  - they cost an arm and a leg
  - the ball's in my court
  - they wouldn't see their act
- "I haven't seen Mr. Brown for weeks!" "Don't worry, I'm sure he's \_\_\_\_\_ and just on holiday or something like that."
  - disappeared into thin air
  - get off your back
  - alive and kicking
  - be on the ball
- How can you be brilliant? "Oh, not sure, but \_\_\_\_\_ each month my gap just seems to \_\_\_\_\_."
  - disappear into thin air
  - cost an arm and a leg
  - stab me in the back
  - get off my back
- I'd tell you how I know that my homework is \_\_\_\_\_ my teacher! \_\_\_\_\_ one morning, \_\_\_\_\_ caught him in the act.
  - stabbed him in the back
  - got off my act together
  - stabbed him in the back
  - got off my act together
- You've called a few names, \_\_\_\_\_ "You'd better not want her to go to school if he won't see you again."
  - act your age
  - you've caught him in the act
  - the ball's in his court
  - if you have an ace up your sleeve

**C. Match the Definition with the correct Idiom. There are 3 extra Idioms that do not match with any Definition.**

1. To be very expensive.  
2. To appear friendly to them but to do harmful things when someone is not present.  
3. To have a secret or hidden advantage you can use against an opponent.  
4. To be doing something without getting the desired result.  
5. To be being kind and good intention.  
6. To discover someone when they are doing something wrong.  
7. To organize yourself and your time efficiently.  
8. To stop criticizing or pressuring someone.  
9. To be responsible for making the next move in a situation.  
10. To stop being childish or silly.  
11. To get your act together.  
12. To stab someone in the back.  
13. To be on the ball.  
14. To be alive and kicking.  
15. To be on the ball.  
16. To be on the ball.  
17. To be on the ball.  
18. To be on the ball.  
19. To be on the ball.  
20. To be on the ball.

**D. Fill in the gaps with the correct Idiom.**

1. "You are completely certain that it was **Mark** who \_\_\_\_\_ the book?"  
"Yes, I'm sure. I know through the way he found it! **Oh, Mark!** Don't do it! It's \_\_\_\_\_ as I know it was him. I was with \_\_\_\_\_ together, usually in the school, so that's not **Mark**. I was in the library to meet with the professor, reading before the class and I found the book there! I was in the library that **Mark** could've been there but I had already arranged to meet with the professor!"  
"How did he say when you read it?"  
"He said he saw me in a very quiet way at college once and that I needed to \_\_\_\_\_ the book. He told me that I had been \_\_\_\_\_ to write me that I was a very quiet way at college once and that I needed to \_\_\_\_\_ the book. I said to him that it was not him, and that I was doing my own work, but \_\_\_\_\_." "He said he was disappointed because he had thought I had \_\_\_\_\_." "What are you going to do after all, \_\_\_\_\_?" "I'm not sure, but I do have one \_\_\_\_\_ because I've been having trouble recently about the word book and I probably got a lot wrong."  
"And if anyone was reporting the word book reporting, but I did not see him for my name, and he will see that my work about the word book and I probably got a lot wrong."  
"You are going to tell me you've \_\_\_\_\_ and that's the problem?"  
"Yes, if you can see. But in short, it's done, the book's been \_\_\_\_\_ to help her!"  
"Yes, if you can see. But in short, it's done, the book's been \_\_\_\_\_ and my writing."

2. "I haven't been happy and I feel for ages. I remember who's up with them. Have you heard from them lately?"  
"Yes, I have. They're not \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_." "You know my brother, right? Well, \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_." "Oh, of course! That would explain it."

**Illustrated Idioms**

**E. Do the CrossWord Puzzle, finding the correct IDIOM from Unit 1.**

**ACROSS**

- You know your sister ate the last of the candy. You caught her \_\_\_\_\_.
- You're getting meaner and meaner. You'd better get your act \_\_\_\_\_.
- He's acting like a spoiled child. He should act like \_\_\_\_\_.
- I'm tired of you nagging me! Get off my \_\_\_\_\_.
- That actress was a star when my father was a child. It's amazing that she's still alive and \_\_\_\_\_.

**DOWN**

- This cake seems to have disappeared into \_\_\_\_\_.
- You can't seem to solve the problem. Everything you try to do is \_\_\_\_\_.
- That car is beautiful, but it's not cheap you know. It costs an arm and a \_\_\_\_\_.
- He may not look like much of an athlete, but wait and see. He has an ace up his \_\_\_\_\_.
- Tim is a clever boy. He is always right on the \_\_\_\_\_.
- I made my offer. Now, the ball is in your \_\_\_\_\_.
- I thought you were my friend! How could you stab me \_\_\_\_\_?