



American Idioms

IDIOM	DEFINITION	EXAMPLE
a memory like an elephant	have an excellent memory	I never forget anything. I have a memory like an elephant.
be all ears	listen attentively	The little girl was all ears as I was telling her the exciting story.
be back to square one	to be back where you started	After many months of unsuccessful negotiations, we were back to square one.
be two-faced	be hypocritical	Don't trust him; he will tell you one thing and do another. He is two-faced.
be up to your neck in	be in a difficult situation	After graduation, he owed a lot of money and was up to his neck in debt.
black and blue	be badly bruised	After falling down the stairs, her knee was black and blue for days.
black market	illegal trade	It's illegal to buy that in a store but you can get it on the black market.
break someone's heart	to sadden someone very much	She broke his heart when she left him.
bug someone	irritate someone	He bugs me all the time. I wish he would leave me alone.
butter fingers	drop things or be clumsy	Mr. Paez has butter fingers. He is always dropping his pencil.
cost an arm and a leg	very expensive	Her new Mercedes cost her an arm and a leg.
dressed to kill	very dressed up	When she walked into the party she was dressed to kill, and everyone said, "Wow."
face-to-face	in person	I don't think we should discuss this over the phone. Let's meet face-to-face.
fair and square	completely fair	There was no cheating and I won the game fair and square.
feeling blue	feeling unhappy	When my boyfriend went away, I was feeling blue.
foot the bill	pay for something	My son couldn't afford his tuition, so I told him I would foot the bill.
get off on the wrong foot	start off in a bad way	The project got off on the wrong foot; Jose lost the proposal on his way to the meeting.
give someone a hand	help someone	My brother gave me a hand with the laundry.
go the extra mile	work more than expected	She is a very good worker; she always goes the extra mile to make sure everything is done.
have butterflies in your stomach	be very nervous about something	The day of her wedding, she woke up with butterflies in her stomach.



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have someone in the palm of your hand	have influence over someone	He does whatever I want; I have him in the palm of my hand.
have your eyes on something/someone	want something/someone	I have my eyes on the house down the street. I will buy it as soon as it goes on sale.
have your hands full	be very busy	I have my hands full with my 2 year old daughter.
keep your fingers crossed	wish for something good to happen	I have a job interview tomorrow; please keep your fingers crossed for me.
learn something by heart	to memorize	Irregular verbs have to be learned by heart.
look someone square in the eye	look at someone directly	I can't believe that he looked square in my eyes and lied to me.
move in the same circles	know the same people socially	I never ran into your brother. I guess we don't move in the same circles.
on the tip of my tongue	when you have forgotten the word you want to say	I couldn't remember his name, but I had it on the tip of my tongue.
out of the blue	completely unexpected	When I had the accident, I didn't see the other car; it seemed to come out of the blue.
pull a few strings	use your influence for something	In order to get the job I want, I will have to pull a few strings with some people I know.
put pen to paper	start writing	You better put pen to paper if you want to finish the essay on time.
red carpet treatment	treat someone with great respect	When I go to visit her I feel like a king. She always gives me the red carpet treatment.
red tape	bureaucratic paperwork	There is so much red tape in this company, you need to fill out several forms to get one thing done.
see eye to eye on something	agree with someone	I don't always see eye to eye with my mother.
spiral out of control	situation that gets worse all the time	The argument started small but two days later it had spiraled out of control.
take the bull by the horns	face a problem and take action	It's a tough job, but I'm going to take the bull by the horns and do it.
walk on eggshells	be careful about something	The teacher was so moody, she always had us walking on eggshells.