

Lesson Plan: Idioms and idiomatic expressions in context

Level	Advanced (C1–C2)
Time	60–90 minutes
Skills	Vocabulary, speaking
Focus	Thematic idiom categories; register; when NOT to use idioms; authenticity in use

OBJECTIVES

By the end of the lesson, students will be able to:

- Understand and use 25+ common English idioms accurately
- Infer the meaning of unknown idioms from context
- Understand that idioms are fixed and cannot be modified
- Use idioms appropriately — knowing when they are suitable and when they are not

TARGET LANGUAGE & EXAMPLES

Time idioms

- in the nick of time — just in time: She arrived in the nick of time.
- at the eleventh hour — at the last possible moment
- once in a blue moon — very rarely
- kill two birds with one stone — achieve two things at once

Difficulty / problems

- bite off more than you can chew — take on too much
- hit a wall — stop making progress suddenly
- burn bridges — permanently damage a relationship
- in hot water — in trouble with someone

Success / progress

- hit the ground running — start something energetically and successfully
- go from strength to strength — keep improving
- turn the corner — begin to improve after a difficult period
- ahead of the curve — more advanced or innovative than others

Register warning

- Most idioms are informal or neutral — not suitable for formal academic writing
- Some work in business: at the eleventh hour, ahead of the curve, turn the corner
- Avoid overuse — one or two idioms used well is far better than seven forced ones

Meaning & Nuance

Idiom	Meaning	Register	Typical context
bite off more than you can chew	take on too much	informal/neutral	work, projects, commitments

at the eleventh hour	at the last moment	neutral/formal OK	deadlines, last-minute decisions
hit the ground running	start quickly and effectively	neutral/business	new job, new project
burn bridges	permanently damage a relationship	neutral	career decisions, personal choices
go from strength to strength	keep improving	neutral/formal OK	careers, businesses, teams
turn the corner	begin to improve	neutral	illness, finances, difficult situation

LESSON PROCEDURE

1. Warm-up: Literal or idiomatic? (10 min)

Task: Students read sentences and decide: literal or idiomatic meaning?

- 'She burned the bridge carefully.' (literal) vs. 'He burned his bridges.' (idiomatic)
- *Demonstrates that context is everything.*

2. Presentation (15 min)

Task: Idioms grouped by theme — easier to learn and remember than random lists.

- Register guide: which can you use in a meeting? A letter? A casual conversation?
- The idiom is fixed: 'kill two birds with one stone' — NOT 'kill three birds'.

3. Idiom gap-fill in context (15 min)

Task: 10 authentic-style sentences with an idiom to complete from a list.

- Students must understand the context to choose the right idiom.
- *Move beyond matching idiom to definition — practice using in context.*

4. Tell a story using idioms (30 min)

Task: Students tell an anecdote that naturally incorporates an idiom.

- Prompts: a time you were in hot water / hit a wall / had to burn bridges
- Others: can you identify which idiom was used?

→ *High communicative value — builds idiomatic fluency.*

TEACHER NOTES

- Idioms in thematic categories (time, difficulty, success) are retained far better than arbitrary lists.
- Caution against overuse: one or two idioms used well are far more effective than several forced ones.

EXTENSION / HOMEWORK

Choose one or more:

1. Learn 5 idioms from a theme not covered in class and write them in context sentences.
2. Find 5 idioms in a novel, film, or podcast and write the context and meaning for each.
3. Write a short story (100–130 words) using at least 5 idioms naturally.