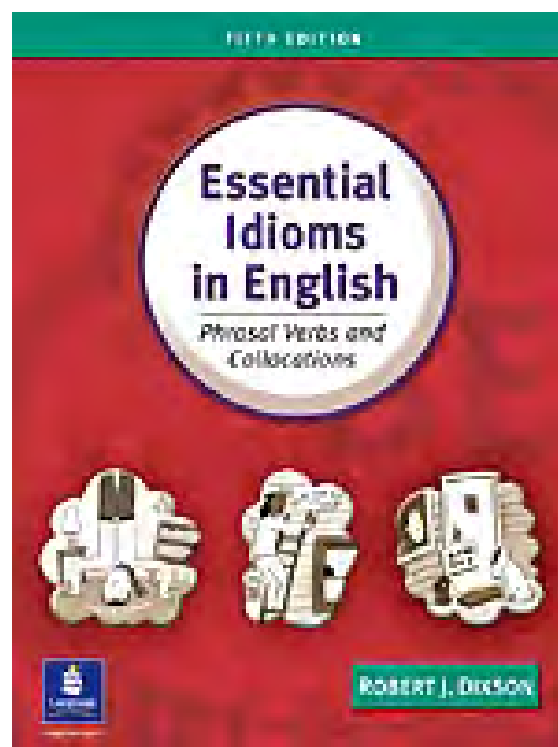


# Longman Essential Idioms in English



*Robert J. Dixon*



visit [Obama-OMama.blogspot.com](http://Obama-OMama.blogspot.com)  
for more eBooks and materials

## **FOREWORD**

Idiomatic expressions have long played an important role in the English language. In fact, the use of idioms is so widespread that an understanding of these expressions is essential to successful communication, whether in listening, speaking, reading, or writing.

The student may learn grammar and, with time, acquire adequate vocabulary, but without a working knowledge of such idioms as above all, to get along, on the whole, to look up, etc., even the best student's speech will remain awkward and ordinary.

Of course, the idioms selected for study should have practical value and be within the student's ability to comprehend. Such expressions as *to set the world on fire* or *to wash one's dirty laundry in public* may be very colorful, but they do little to help the student achieve fluency in English.

Teachers of English have long recognized that idiomatic expressions add grace and exactness to the language. The alert teacher will make their study an integral part of the teaching process. However, learning such expressions is never an easy task for the student learning English as a second or foreign language. Attempts to translate literally from the student's native tongue usually lead to roundabout expression of meaning and, more often, to confusion.

For this reason, only basic idioms have been included in this book, appropriately named *Essential Idioms in English, New Edition*. Furthermore, it was decided not to burden the student with discussion of the origins of idioms. There is no need to define the exact nature of an idiom except to assume that it is a phrase that has a meaning different from the meanings of its individual parts. This helps to explain why it is often difficult to translate an idiom from one language to another without incurring some change in meaning or usage.

For the purposes of this book, two-word verbs are included in the general category of idioms. A two-word verb is a verb whose meaning is altered by the addition of a particle (a preposition used with a verb to form an idiomatic expression.) to look, for example, may become to look up or to look over, each having its own special meaning. When a two-word verb can be separated by a noun or pronoun, the symbol (**S**) for separable is inserted in the definition. Sentences illustrating both separable and nonseparable forms are included in the examples.

Experienced ESL and EFL teachers will agree, for the most part, with the selection of idioms in this text. However, it should be recognized that any selection is somewhat arbitrary because the range is so great. Some teachers might prefer to omit certain idioms and to add others not included, but all should appreciate the attempt to make *Essential idioms in English, New Edition* as representative as possible.

## ESSENTIAL IDIOMS IN ENGLISH by ROBERT J. DIXSON

Mention should be made of a unique feature that adds to the usefulness of this book: Appendix II is a listing of the idioms in the text with their equivalents in Spanish, French, and German. Having these equivalents should give the student a surer grasp of the meaning of the English idioms and greater confidence in using them.

This fourth revision of *Essential Idioms in English, New Edition* has undergone several important changes. The text has been restored to the original three-section format: Elementary (lessons 1-13), Intermediate (lesion 14-27), and Advanced (lessons 28-39). As would be expected, new idioms have been included and outdated idioms have been removed. Lessons in all sections review and build upon idioms introduced in earlier lessons. In some cases, notes that explain special usage or meaning are provided after the definitions, and related idiomatic forms are listed. New types of exercises provide greater variety in activity from one section to another. Finally, there is an answer key in the back of the book for all multiple-choice, matching, true-false, and fill-in-the-blank exercises.

### SECTION ONE --- ELEMENTARY

#### LESSON 1

**to get in/to get on:** to enter or to board a vehicle

*To get in* is used for cars; *to get on* is used for all other forms of transportation.

- It's easiest *to get in* the car from the driver's side. The door on the other side doesn't work well.
- I always *get on* the bus to work at 34<sup>th</sup> Street.

**to get out of/to get off:** to leave or to descend from a vehicle.

*To get out of* is used for cars; *to get off* is used for all other forms of transportation.

- Why don't we stop and *get out of* the car for a while?
- Helen *got off* the train at the 42<sup>nd</sup> Street terminal.

**to put on:** to place on oneself (usually said of clothes) (S)

- Mary *put on* her coat and left the room.
- *Put* your hat *on* before you leave the house.

**to take off:** to remove (usually said of clothes) (S)

- John *took off* his jacket as he entered the office.
- *Take* your sweater *off*. The room is very warm.

**to call up:** to telephone (also: **to give some one a call**) (S)

*To call* can be used instead of *to call up*, as in the first example below.

- I forgot to *call up* Mr. Jones yesterday. I'd better *call* him now.
- *Call me up* tomorrow, Jane. We'll arrange a time to have lunch together.
- I promise to *give you a call* as soon as I arrive in New York.

## ESSENTIAL IDIOMS IN ENGLISH by ROBERT J. DIXSON

**to turn on:** to start or cause to function (also: **to switch on**) (S)

- Please *turn on* the light; it's too dark in here.
- Do you know who *turned* the air conditioning *on*?

**to turn off:** to cause to stop functioning (also: to switch off, to shut off) (S)

*Turn on* and *turn off*, as well as their related forms, are used for things that flow, such as electricity, water, gas, etc.

- Please *turn off* the light when you leave the room.
- Are you really listening to the radio, or should I *turn* it *off*?

**right away:** very soon; immediately (also: **at once**)

- Dad says that dinner will be ready *right away*, so we'd better wash our hands and set the table.
- Tell Will to come to my office *right away*. I must see him immediately.
- Stop playing that loud music *at once*!

**to pick up:** to lift from the floor, table, etc., with one's fingers (S)

- Harry *picked up* the newspaper that was on the front doorstep.
- Could you *pick* your toy *up* before someone falls over it?

**sooner or later:** eventually, after a period of time

- If you study English seriously, *sooner or later* you'll become fluent.
- I'm too tired to do my homework now; I'm sure I'll do it *sooner or later*.

**to get up:** to arise, to rise from a bed; **to make someone arise** (S)

For the last definition a noun phrase must separate the verb and particle.

- Carla *gets up* at seven o'clock every morning.
- **At what time should we *get* the children *up* tomorrow?**

**at first:** in the beginning, originally

- *At first* English was difficult for him, but later he made great progress.
- I thought *at first* that it was Sheila calling, but then I realized that it was Betty.

## LESSON 2

**to dress up:** **to wear formal clothes**, to dress very nicely

- We should definitely *dress up* to go to the theater.
- You don't have to *dress up* for Mike's party.

**at last:** finally, after a long time.

- We waited for hours and then the train arrived *at last*.
- Now that I am sixteen, *at last* I can drive my parents' car.

**as usual:** as is the general case, as is typical

- George is late for class *as usual*. This seems to happen every day.
- *As usual*, Dora received first prize in the swimming contest. It's the third consecutive year that she has won.

**to find out:** get information about, to determine (S)

## ESSENTIAL IDIOMS IN ENGLISH by ROBERT J. DIXSON

This idiom is separable only when a pronoun is used, as in the second example.

- Will you please try to *find out* what time the airplane arrives?
- I'll call right now to *find it out*.

**to look at:** give one's attention to; to watch

- The teacher told us to look at the blackboard and not at our books.
- I like to walk along a country road at night and look at the stars.

**to look for:** to try to find, to search for

An adverb phrase such as *all over* can be put between the verb and preposition, as in the second example, however, the idiom cannot be separated by a noun or pronoun.

- He's spent over an hour *looking for* the pen that he lost.
- So there you are! We've *looked* all over *for* you.

**all right:** acceptable, fine; yes, okay

This idiom can also be spelled *alright* in informal usage.

- He said that it would be *all right* to wait in her office until she returned.
- Do you want me to turn off the TV? *Alright*, if you insist.

**all along:** all the time, from the beginning (without change)

- She knew *all along* that we'd never agree with his plan.
- You're smiling! Did you know *all along* that I'd give you a birthday present?

**little by little:** *gradually*, slowly (also: **step by step**)

- Karen's health seems to be improving *little by little*.
- If you study regularly each day, *step by step* your vocabulary will increase.

**to tire out:** to make very weary due to difficult conditions or hard effort (also: **to wear out**) (S)

- The hot weather *tired out* the runners in the marathon.
- Does studying for final exams wear you out? **It makes me feel *worn out!***

**to call on:** **to ask for a response from;** to visit (also: **to drop in on**)

- **Jose didn't know the answer when the teacher *called on* him.**
- **Last night several friends *called on* us at our home.**
- Shy don't we *drop in on* Sally a little later?

**never mind:** don't be concerned about it; ignore what was just said

- When he spilled his drink on my coat, I said, "*Never mind*. It needs to be cleaned anyway."
- So you weren't listening to me again. *Never mind*; it wasn't important.

## LESSON 3

**to pick out:** **to choose,** to select (S)

- Ann *picked out* a good book to give to her brother as a graduation gift.
- Johnny, if you want me to buy you a toy, then *pick* one *out* now.

## ESSENTIAL IDIOMS IN ENGLISH by ROBERT J. DIXSON

**to take one's time:** to do without rush, not to hurry

This idiom is often used in the imperative form. (See the first example)

- There's no need to hurry doing those exercises. *Take your time.*
- William never works rapidly. He always *takes his time* in every thing that he does.

**to talk over:** to discuss or consider a situation with others (S)

- *We talked over Carla's plan* to install an air conditioner in the room, but we couldn't reach a decision.
- Before I accepted the new job offer, I *talked* the matter *over* with my life.

**to lie down:** to place oneself in a flat position, to recline

- If you are tired, why don't you *lie down* for an hour or so?
- The doctor says that Grace must *lie down* and rest for a short time every afternoon.

**to stand up:** to rise from a sitting or lying position (also: to **get up**)

- When the president entered the room, everyone *stood up*.
- Suzy, stop rolling around on the floor; *get up* now.

**to sit down:** to be seated (also: take a seat)

- We *sat down* on the park bench and watched the children play.
- There aren't any more chairs, but you can *take a seat* on the floor.

**all (day, week, month, year) long:** the entire day, week, month, year

- I've been working on my income tax forms *all day long*. I've hardly had time to eat.
- It's been raining *all week long*. We haven't seen the sun since last Monday.

**by oneself:** alone, without assistance

- Francis translated that French novel *by himself*. No one helped him.
- Paula likes to walk through the woods *by herself*, but her brother prefers to walk with a companion.

**on purpose:** for a reason, deliberately

This idiom is usually used when someone does something wrong or unfair.

- Do you think that she didn't come to the meeting *on purpose*?
- It was no accident that he broke my glasses. He did it *on purpose*.

**to get along with:** to associate or work well with; to succeed or manage in doing (also: **to get on with**)

- Terry isn't *getting along with* her new roommate; they argue constantly.
- How are you *getting on with* your students?

**to make a difference (to):** to be of importance (to), to affect

This idiom is often used with adjectives to show the degree of importance.

- It *makes a big difference* to me whether he likes the food I serve.
- Does it *make any difference* to you where we go for dinner?

## ESSENTIAL IDIOMS IN ENGLISH by ROBERT J. DIXSON

- No, it doesn't *make any difference*.
- It *makes no difference* to Lisa either.

**to take out:** to remove, to extract (**S**); to go on a date with (**S**) (also **to go out with**)

- Student, *take out* your books and open them to page twelve.
- Did you *take Sue out* last night?
- No, she couldn't *go out with* me.

### LESSON 4

**to take part in:** to be involved in, to participate in (also: to be in on)

- Martin was sick and could not *take part in* the meeting yesterday.
- I didn't want to *be in on* their argument, so I remained silent.

**at all:** to any degree (also: **in the least**)

- Larry isn't *at all* shy about expressing his opinions.
- When I asked Donna whether she was tired, she said, "Not *in the least*. I'm full of energy."

**to look up:** to locate information in a directory, dictionary, book, etc. (**S**)

- Ellen suggested that we *look up* Lee's telephone number in the directory.
- Students should try to understand the meaning of a new word from context before *looking* the word *up* in the dictionary.

**to wait on:** to serve in a store or restaurant

- A very pleasant young clerk *waited on* me in that shop.
- The restaurant waitress asked us, "Has anyone *waited on* you yet?"

**at least:** a minimum of, no fewer (or less) than

- I spend *at least* two hours every night on my studies.
- Mike claims that he drinks *at least* a quart of water every day.

**so far:** until now, until the present time (also: **up to now, as of yet**)

This idiom is usually used with the present perfect tense.

- *So far*, this year has been excellent for business. I hope that the good luck continues.
- How many idioms have we studied in this book *up to now*?
- *As of yet*, we have not had an answer from him.

**to take a walk, stroll, hike, etc.:** to go for a walk, stroll, hike, etc.

A *stroll* involves slow, easy walking; a *hike* involves serious, strenuous walking.

- Last evening we *took a walk* around the park.
- It's a fine day. Would you like to *take a stroll* along Mason Boulevard?
- Let's *take a hike up* Cowles Mountain this afternoon.

**to take a trip:** to go on a journey, to travel

- I'm so busy at work that I have no time to *take a trip*.
- During the summer holidays, the Thompsons *took a trip* to Europe.

## ESSENTIAL IDIOMS IN ENGLISH by ROBERT J. DIXSON

**to try on:** to wear clothes to check the style or fit before buying (S)

- He *tried on* several suits before he picked out a blue one.
- Why don't you *try* these shoes *on* next?

**to think over:** to consider carefully before deciding (S)

- I'd like to *think over* your offer first. Then can we talk it over tomorrow?
- You don't have to give me your decision now. *Think it over* for a while.

**to take place:** to occur, to happen according to plan

- The regular meetings of the committee *take place* in Constitution Hall.
- I thought that the celebration *was taking place* at John's house.

**to put away:** to remove from sight, to put in the proper place (S)

- Please *put away* your papers before you open the test booklet.
- John *put* the notepad *away* in his desk when he was finished with it.

## LESSON 5

**to look out:** to be careful or cautious (also: to **watch out**)

Both of these idioms can occur with the preposition *for*.

- "*Look out!*" Jeffrey cried as his friend almost stepped in a big hole in the ground.
- *Look out for* reckless drivers whenever you cross the street.
- Small children should always *watch out for* strangers offering candy.

**to shake hands:** to exchange greetings by clasping hands

- When people meet for the first time, they usually *shake hands*.
- The student warmly *shook hands* with his old professor.

**to get back:** to return (S)

- Mr. Harris *got back* from his business trip to Chicago this morning.
- Could you *get* the children *back* home by five o'clock?

**to catch cold:** to become sick with a cold of the nose for throat

- If you go out in this rain, you will surely *catch cold*.
- How did she ever *catch cold* in such warm weather?

**to get over:** to recover from an illness; to accept a loss or sorrow

- It took me over a month to *get over* my cold, but I'm finally well now.
- It seems that Mr. Mason will never *get over* the death of his wife.

**to make up one's mind:** to reach a decision, to decide finally

- Sally is considering several colleges to attend, but she hasn't *made up her mind* yet.
- When are you going to *make up your mind* about your vacation plans?

**to change one's mind:** to alter one's decision or opinion

- We have *changed our minds* and are going to Canada instead of California this summer.

## ESSENTIAL IDIOMS IN ENGLISH by ROBERT J. DIXSON

- Matthew has *changed his mind* several times about buying a new cat.

**for the time being:** temporarily (also: for now)

- *For the time being*, Janet is working as a waitress, but she really hopes to become an actress soon.
- We're living in an apartment *for now*, but soon we'll be looking for a house to buy.

**for good:** permanently, forever

- Ruth has returned to Canada *for good*. She won't ever live in the United States again.
- Are you finished with school *for good*, or will you continue your studies some day?

**to call off:** to cancel (S)

- The referee *called off* the soccer game because of the darkness.
- The president *called* the meeting *off* because she had to leave town.

**to put off:** to postpone (S)

- Many student's *put off* doing their assignments until the last minute.
- Let's *put* the party *off* until next weekend, okay?

**in a hurry:** hurried, rushed (also: in a rush)

- Alex seems *in a hurry*; he must be late for his train again.
- She's always *in a rush* in the morning to get the kids to school.

## LESSON 6

**under the weather:** not feeling well, sick

- John stayed home from work because he was feeling *under the weather*.
- When you catch cold, you feel *under the weather*.

**to hang up:** to place clothes on a hook or hanger (S); to replace the receiver on the phone at the end of a conversation (S)

- Would you like me to *hang up* your coat for you in the closet?
- The operator told me to *hang* the phone *up* and call the number again.

**to count on:** to trust someone in time of need (also: **to depend on**)

- I can *count on* my parents to help me in an emergency.
- Don't *depend on* Frank to lend you any money; he doesn't have any.

**to make friends:** to become friendly with others

- Patricia is a shy girl and doesn't *make friends* easily.
- During the cruise Ronald *made friends* with almost everyone on the ship.

**out of order:** not in working condition

- The elevator was *out of order*, so we had to walk to the tenth floor of the building.
- We couldn't use the soft drink machine because it was *out of order*.

## ESSENTIAL IDIOMS IN ENGLISH by ROBERT J. DIXSON

**to get to:** to be able to do something special; to arrive at a place, such as home, work, etc. for the second definition, do not use the preposition *to* with the words home or there.

- The children *got to* stay up late and watch a good movie for the family.
- I missed the bus and couldn't *get to* the office until ten o'clock.
- When are you planning to *get home* tonight?

**few and far between:** not frequent, unusual, rare

- The times that our children get to stay up late are *few and far between*.
- Airplane travel is very safe because accidents are *few and far between*.

**to look over:** to examine, to inspect closely (also: **to go over**, **to read over**, **to check over**) (S)

*Go over* is different from the other forms because it is not separable.

- I want to *look* my homework *over* again before I give it to the teacher.
- The politician *went over* his speech before the important presentation.
- You should never sign any legal paper without *checking* it *over* first.

**to have (time) off:** to have free time, not to have to work (also: **to take time off**) (S)

The related form (S) to *take time off* is used when someone makes a decision to have free time, sometimes when others might not agree with the decision.

- Every morning the company workers *have time off* for a coffee break.
- Several workers *took* the afternoon *off* to go to a baseball game.

**to go on:** to happen; to resume, to continue (also: **to keep on**)

- Many people gathered near the accident to see what was *going on*.
- I didn't mean to interrupt you. Please *go on*.
- The speaker *kept on* talking even though most of the audience had left.

**to put out:** extinguish, to cause to stop functioning (S)

*To put out* has the same meaning as to turn off (Lesson 1) for a light fixture.

- No smoking is allowed in here. Please *put out* your cigarette.
- The fire fighters worked hard to *put* the brush fire *out*.
- Please *put out* the light before you leave. Okay, I'll *put* it *out*.

**all of a sudden:** suddenly, without warning (also: all at once)

- *All of a sudden* Ed appeared at the door. We weren't expecting him to drop by.
- *All at once* Millie got up and left the house without any explanation.

## LESSON 7

**to point out:** to show, to indicate, to bring to one's attention (S)

- What important buildings did the tour guide *point out* to you?
- The teacher *pointed out* the mistakes in my composition.
- A friend *pointed* the famous actor *out* to me.

**to be up:** to expire, to be finished

This idiom is used only with the word *time* as the subject.

## ESSENTIAL IDIOMS IN ENGLISH by ROBERT J. DIXSON

- "The time *is up*," the teacher said at the end of the test period.
- We have to leave the tennis court because our hour *is up*; some other people want to use it now.

**to be over:** to be finished, to end (also: **to be through**)

This idiom is used for activities and events.

- After the dance *was over*, we all went to a restaurant.
- The meeting *was through* ten minutes earlier than everyone expected.

**on time:** exactly at the correct time, punctually

- I thought that Margaret would arrive late, but she was right *on time*.
- Did you get to work *on time* this morning, or did rush hour traffic delay you?

**in time to:** before the time necessary to do something

- We entered the theater just *in time to* see the beginning of the movie.
- The truck was not able to stop *in time to* prevent an accident.

**to get better, worse, etc.:** to become better, worse, etc.

- Heather has been sick for a month, but now she is *getting better*.
- This medicine isn't helping me. Instead of *getting better*, I'm *getting worse*.

**to get sick, well, tired, busy, wet, etc.:** to become sick, well, tired, busy, wet, etc.

This idiom consists of a combination of *get* and various adjectives.

- Gerald *got sick* last week and has been in bed since that time.
- Every afternoon I *get* very *hungry*, so I eat a snack.

**had better:** should, ought to, be advisable to

This idiom is most often used in contracted form (I'd better).

- I think *you'd better* speak to Mr. White right away about this matter.
- The doctor told the patient that *he'd better* go home and rest.

**would rather:** prefer to (also: would just as soon)

- *Would you rather* have the appointment this Friday or next Monday?
- I *would just as soon* go for a walk as watch TV right now.

**to all it a day/night:** to stop working for the rest of the day/night

- Herb tried to repair his car engine all morning before he *called it a day* and went fishing.
- We've been working hard on this project all evening; let's *call it a night*.

**To figure out:** to solve, to find a solution (S); to understand (S)

- How long did it take you to *figure out* the answer to the math problem?
- I was never able to *figure it out*.

**to think of:** to have a (good or bad) opinion of

This idiom is often used in the negative or with adjectives such as *much* and *highly*.

- I don't *think much of* him as a baseball player; he's a slow runner and a poor hitter.

## ESSENTIAL IDIOMS IN ENGLISH by ROBERT J. DIXSON

- James *thinks highly of* his new boss, who is a kind and helpful person.

### LESSON 8

**to be about to:** to be at the moment of doing something, to be ready

This idiom is often used with the adverb *just*.

- I *was just about to* leave when you telephoned.
- Oh, hi, John. We *'re just about to* eat dinner.

**to turn around:** to move or face in the opposite direction (**S**); to completely change the condition of (**S**)

- The man *turned* his car *around* and drove back the way he came.
- The company has been very successful since the new business manager was able to *turn* it *around*.

**to take turns:** to alternate, to change people while doing something

- During the trip, Darlene and I *took turns* driving so that neither of us would tire out.
- I have to make sure that my two sons *take turns* playing the video game.

**to pay attention (to):** to look at and listen to someone while they are speaking, to concentrate

- Please *pay attention to* me while I'm speaking to you!
- You'll have to *pay* more *attention* in class if you want to get a good grade.

**to brush up on:** to review something in order to refresh one's memory

- Before I traveled to Mexico, I *brushed up on* my Spanish; I haven't practiced it since high school.
- In order to take that advanced mathematics class, Sidney will have to *brush up on* his algebra.

**over and over (again):** repeatedly (also: **time after time, time and again**)

- The actress studied her lines in the movie *over and over* until she knew them well.
- Children have difficulty remembering rules, so it's often necessary to repeat them *over and over again*.
- *Time and again* I have to remind Bobby to put on his seatbelt in the car.

**to wear out:** to use something until it has no value or worth anymore, to make useless through wear (**S**)

- When I *wear out* these shoes, I'll have to buy some that last longer.
- What do you do with your clothes after you *wear* them *out*?

**to throw away:** to discard, to dispose of (**S**)

- I generally *throw away* my clothes when I wear them out.
- Don't *throw* the magazines *away*; I haven't read them yet.

**to fall in love:** to begin to love

## ESSENTIAL IDIOMS IN ENGLISH by ROBERT J. DIXSON

This idiom is used with the expression at first sight to indicate a sudden interest in love.

- Ben and Sal *fell in love* in high school, and got married after graduation.
- Have you ever *fallen in love at first sight*?

**to go out:** to stop functioning; to stop burning; to leave home or work (also: to **step out**)

- The lights *went out* all over the city because of an electrical problem.
- The campers didn't have to put out the fire because it *went out* by itself.
- Gary isn't here right now; he *went out* to the store for a moment.
- I have to *step out* of the office briefly to pick up a newspaper.

**out of the question:** impossible, not feasible

- Stephen told Deborah that it was *out of the question* for her to borrow his new car.
- Don't expect me to do that again. It's absolutely *out of the question*.

**to have to do with:** to have some connection with or relationship to

- Ralph insisted that he *had nothing to do with* breaking the window.
- What does your suggestion *have to do with* our problem?

## LESSON 9

**to wake up:** to arise from sleep, to awaken (**S**)

Compare *wake up* and *get up* (Lesson 1) as used in the first example.

- Marge *woke up* this morning very early, but she did not *get up* until about ten o'clock.
- My alarm clock *wakes me up* at the same time every day.

**to be in charge of:** to manage, to have responsibility for

- Jane *is in charge of* the office while Mrs. Haig is on a business trip.
- Who *is in charge of* arrangements for the dance next week?

**as soon as:** just after, when

- *As soon as* it started to snow, the children ran outside with big smiles on their faces.
- I'm busy now, but I'll meet you *as soon as* I've finished this work.

**to get in touch with:** to communicate with, to contact

- You can *get in touch with* him by calling the Burma Hotel.
- I've been trying all morning to *get in touch with* Miss Peters, but her phone is always busy.

**to have a good time:** to enjoy oneself

- We all *had a good time* at the class reunion last night.
- Did you *have a good time* at the park? I really enjoyed it.

**in no time:** very quickly, rapidly

This idiom can be used with the idiom *at all* to add emphasis to the certainty of the statement.

## ESSENTIAL IDIOMS IN ENGLISH by ROBERT J. DIXSON

- Mac said that he'd be ready to leave *in no time*.
- We thought that the meeting would take two hours, but it was over *in no time at all*.

**to cut down on:** to reduce, to lessen (also: **to cut back on**)

- In order to lose weight, you have to *cut down on* your intake of sugar.
- The doctor told me to *cut back on* exercise until my back injury heals.

**quite a few:** many

- *Quite a few* students were absent yesterday; in fact, more than half of them were not there.
- We did not expect many people to attend to affair, but *quite a few* of our friends actually came.

**used to:** formerly did, had the habit of

This idiom is used to indicate a past situation, action, or habit that does not exist in the present. The idiom is always followed by a simple verb form.

- I *used to* live in New York, but I moved to California two years ago.
- Kim *used to* smoke cigarettes, but she stopped the habit last month.

**to be used to:** be accustomed to

This idiom refers to a situation, action, or habit that continues in the present. The idiom is always followed by a noun or gerund phrase.

- He *is used to* this climate now, so the changes in temperature do not affect him much.
- I *am used to* studying in the library, so it's difficult for me to study at home now.

**to get used to:** to become used to, to become adjusted to

This idiom describes the process of change that allows someone to be used to a situation, action, or habit.

- It took Yoshiko a long time to *get used to* the food that her American host family served her.
- Mark can't seem to *get used to* wearing contact lenses; recently he's been wearing his glasses a lot.

**back and forth:** in a backward and forward motion

- The restless lion kept pacing *back and forth* along the front of its cage.
- Grandmother finds it relaxing to sit in her rocking chair and move *back and forth*.

## LESSON 10

**to make sure:** to be sure, to ascertain (also: **to make certain**)

- Please *make sure* that you turn off the radio before you go out.
- Could you *make certain* of the time? I don't want to miss that TV show.

**now and then:** occasionally, sometimes (also: **now and again, at times, from time to time, off and on, once in a while**)

## ESSENTIAL IDIOMS IN ENGLISH by ROBERT J. DIXSON

Both *now and then* and *once in a while* can be preceded by the adjective *every*. Another idiom with the same meaning and form is **every so often**.

- I don't see him very often, but (*every*) *now and then* we arrange to have lunch together.
- Gary gets a cold (*every*) *once in a while* even though he takes good care of himself.
- *Every so often* my brother and I get together for a camping trip.
- I like to sleep late in the morning *from time to time*.

**to get rid of**: to eliminate, to remove; to discard, to throw away

- Jerry tried hard *to get rid of* the stain on his shirt, but he never succeeded.
- The stain was so bad that Jerry finally had to *get rid of* his shirt.

**every other (one)**: every second (one), alternate (ones)

- I play tennis with my father *every other* Saturday, so I usually play twice a month.
- There were twenty problems in the exercise, but the teacher told us only to do *every other* one. Actually, doing ten problems was difficult enough.

**to go with**: to match, to compare well in color to design; to date, to accompany (also: **to go out with**)

For the first definition, adverbs such as well and poorly are often used.

- That striped shirt *goes well with* the gray pants, but the pants go poorly with those leather shoes.
- **Eda went with Richard for about six months, but now she is going out with a new boyfriend.**

**first-rate**: excellent, superb

- The food served in that four-star restaurant is truly *first-rate*.
- The Beverly Hills Hotel provides *first-rate* service to its guests.

**to come from**: to originate from

This idiom is commonly used in discussion of one's home town, state, or country.

- What country in South American does she come from? She *comes from* Peru.
- I just learned that he really *comes from* Florida, not Texas.
- Where did this package *come from*? The mail carrier brought it.

**to make good time**: to travel a sufficient distance at a reasonable speed

The adjective *excellent* can also be used.

- On our last trip, it rained the entire time, so we didn't *make good time*.
- We *made excellent time* on our trip to Florida; it only took eighteen hours.

**to mix up**: to stir or shake well (**S**); to confuse, to bewilder (**S**)

For the second definition, the passive forms *to be mixed up* or *to get mixed up* are often used.

- You should *mix up* the ingredients well before you put them in the pan.

## ESSENTIAL IDIOMS IN ENGLISH by ROBERT J. DIXSON

- The teacher's poor explanation really *mixed* the students *up*.
- The students think it's their fault that they *are mixed up* so often.

**to see about:** to give attention or time to (also: **to attend to, to see to**)

- Who is going to *see about* getting us a larger room for the meeting?
- I'll *see to* arranging music for the wedding of you attend to the entertainment.

**to make out:** to do, to succeed, to progress

- Charlie didn't *make out* very well on his final examinations. He may have to repeat one or more classes.
- How did Rachelle *make out* on her acting audition in Hollywood yesterday?

**by heart:** by memorizing

- He knows many passages from Shakespeare *by heart*.
- Do you know all the idioms you have studied in this book *by heart*?

## LESSON 11

**to keep out:** not to enter, not allow to enter (**S**)

- There was a large sign outside the door that said, "Danger! *Keep out!*"
- I've told you to *keep* the dog *out* of the house.

**to keep away (from):** to stay at a distance (from) (**S**); to avoid use of (also: **stay away from**)

- Please be sure to *keep* the children *away from* the street!
- The signs on the burned-out house said, "*Keep Away!* Danger Zone."
- It's important for your health to *stay away from* dangerous drugs.

**to find fault with:** criticize, to complain about something

- It is very easy to *find fault with* the work of others, but more difficult to accept criticism of one's own work.
- Mrs. Johnson is always *finding fault with* her children, but they really try to please their mother.

**to be up to:** to be responsible for deciding; to be doing as a regular activity  
The second definition is most often used in a question as a form of greeting.

- I don't care whether we go to the reception or not. It *'s up to* you.
- Hi, George. I haven't seen you in a while. What have you *been up to*?

**ill at ease:** uncomfortable or worried in a situation

- Speaking in front of a large audience makes many people feel *ill at ease*.
- My wife and I were *ill at ease* because our daughter was late coming home from a date.

**to do over:** to revise, to do again (**S**)

A noun or pronoun must separate the two parts of this idiom.

- You'd better *do* the letter *over* because it is written so poorly.

## ESSENTIAL IDIOMS IN ENGLISH by ROBERT J. DIXSON

- Jose made so many mistakes in his homework that the teacher made him *do it over*.

**to look into:** to investigate, to examine carefully (also: **to check into**)

- The police are *looking into* the matter of the stolen computers.
- The congressional committee will *check into* the financial dealings of the government contractor.

**to take hold of:** to grasp, to grip with the hands

- You should *take hold of* the railing as you go down those steep stairs.
- The blind man *took hold of* my arm as I led him across the street.

**to get through:** to finish, to complete

This idiom is followed either by the *-ing* form of a verb (a gerund) or by the preposition *with*.

- **I didn't *get through* studying last night until almost eleven o'clock.**
- At what time does your wife *get through* with work every day?

**from now on:** from this time into the future

- Mr. Lee's doctor told him to cut down on eating fatty foods *from now on*, or else he might suffer heart disease.
- I'm sorry that I dropped by at a bad time. *From now on* I'll call you first.

**to keep track of:** to keep or maintain a record of; to remember the location of

- **Steve *keeps track of* all the long-distance telephone calls** related to his business that he makes from his house.
- With seven small children, how do the Wilsons *keep track of* all of them?

**to be carried away:** to be greatly affected by a strong feeling (S)

This idiom can also be used with *get* instead of *be*.

- Paula and Leanne *were carried away* by the sad movie that they saw together.
- James *got carried away* with anger when his roommate crashed his new car into a telephone pole.

## LESSON 12

**up to date:** modern; current, timely

Hyphens (-) separate the parts of this idiom when it precedes a noun form, as in the third example. The verb *to update* derives from this idiom.

- The president insisted that the company bring its aging equipment *up to date*.
- This catalog is not *up to date*. It was published several years ago.
- The news program gave an *up-to-date* account of the nuclear accident. The newscaster said that he would update the news report every half hour.

**out of date:** not modern; not current, not timely; no longer available in published form

## ESSENTIAL IDIOMS IN ENGLISH by ROBERT J. DIXSON

Again, hyphens separate the parts of this idiom when it precedes a noun form as, in the second example. The passive verb *to be outdated* derives from this idiom.

- Many people buy new cars when their old cars become *out of date*.
- I don't know why Gene likes to wear *out-of-date* cloth. His clothes are so *outdated* that even his girlfriend hesitates to be seen with him.
- This book can't be ordered any more because it is out of date.

**to blow up:** to inflate, to fill with air (S); to explode, to destroy (or be destroyed) by explosion (S)

- Daddy, could you please *blow up* this balloon for me?
- When the airplane crashed into the ground, it *blew up* immediately.
- The military had to *blow* the missile *up* in midair when it started to go the wrong way.

**to catch fire:** to begin to burn

- Don't stand too close to the gas stove. Your clothes may *catch fire*.
- No one seems to know how the old building *caught fire*.

**to burn down:** to burn slowly, but completely (usually said of candles); to destroy completely by fire (S)

- There was a large amount of wax on the table where the candles had *burned down*.
- The fire spread so quickly that the firefighters could not prevent the whole block of buildings from *burning down*.

**to burn up:** to destroy completely by fire (S); to make angry or very annoyed (S) (also **to tick off**)

To burn up and to burn down (previous idiom) share the same definition but also have different definitions.

- She didn't want anyone to see the letter, so she *burned* it *up* and threw the ashes away.
- It really *burns* me *up* that he borrowed my car without asking me first.
- Mike got *ticked off* that his friends never offered to help him move to his new apartment. He had to do everything himself.

**to burn out:** to stop functioning because of overuse; to make tired from too much work (S)

- This light bulb has *burned out*. Could you get another one?
- Studying all day for my final exams has really *burned* me *out*.

**to make good:** to succeed

- He is a hard worker, and I'm sure that he will *make good* in that new job.
- Alma has always *made good* in everything that she has done.

**stands to reason:** to be clear and logical

This idiom is almost always used with the pronoun subject *it* and is followed by a *that* clause.

- It *stands to reason* that a person without experience.

## ESSENTIAL IDIOMS IN ENGLISH by ROBERT J. DIXSON

- It *stands to reason* that he isn't going to pass the course if he never studies.

### **to break out:** to become widespread suddenly

- An epidemic of measles *broke out* in Chicago this past week.
- If a nuclear war ever *breaks out*, it is unlikely that many people will survive.
- The news says that a large fire has *broken out* in a huge chemical plant.

### **as for:** regarding, concerning (also: **as to**)

- **As for** the money, we will simply have to borrow some more from the bank.
- There is no doubt **as to** her intelligence; she's the smartest one in the class.

### **to feel sorry for:** to pity, to feel compassion for (also: **to take pity on**)

- Don't you *feel sorry for* someone who has to work the **night shift?**
- I helped drive Pierre around when he broke his foot because I *took pity on* him.

## LESSON 13

### **to break down:** to stop functioning

Compare this idiom with to burn out in Lesson 12. *To burn out* means that electrical equipment becomes hot from overuse and stops functioning. *To break down* means that something stops functioning mechanically, whether from overuse or not.

- I just bought my new car yesterday and already it has *broken down*.
- The elevator *broke down*, so we walked all the way up to the top floor.

### **to turn out:** to become or result; to appear, to attend (also: **to come out**)

The noun form **turnout** derives from the second definition of the idiom.

- Most parents wonder how their children will *turn out* as adults.
- Hundreds of people *came out* for the demonstration against new taxes.
- What was the *turnout* for the public hearing on the education reforms?

### **once in a blue moon:** rarely, infrequently

- Snow falls on the city of San Diego, California, *once in a blue moon*.
- *Once in a blue moon* my wife and I eat at a very expensive restaurant.

### **to give up:** to stop trying, to stop a bad habit (**S**); to surrender (**S**)

- I'm sure that you can accomplish this task. Don't *give up* yet!
- If you *give up* smoking now, you can certainly live a longer life.
- The soldiers *gave* themselves *up* in the face of a stronger enemy forces.

### **to cross out:** to cancel by marking with a horizontal lines (**S**)

- The teacher *crossed out* several incorrect words in Tanya's composition.
- I *crossed* the last line *out* of my letter because it had the wrong tone to it.

## ESSENTIAL IDIOMS IN ENGLISH by ROBERT J. DIXSON

**to take for granted:** not to appreciate fully (**S**); to assume to be true without giving much thought (**S**)

A noun or pronoun often follows the verb *take*.

- John *took* his wife *for granted* until once when he was very sick and needed her constant attention for a week.
- He spoke English so well that I *took* it *for granted* he was an American.
- He *took for granted* that I wasn't American because I spoke English so poorly!

**to take into account:** to consider a fact while evaluating a situation (**S**)

Again, a noun or pronoun often follows the verb *take*.

- The judge *took* the prisoner's young age *into account* before sentencing him to three months in jail.
- Educators should *take into account* the cultural backgrounds of students when planning a school curriculum.

**to make clear:** to clarify, to explain (**S**)

- Please *make clear* that he should never act so impolitely again.
- The supervisor *made* it *clear* to the workers that they had to increase their productivity.

**clear-cut:** clearly stated, definite, apparent

- The president's message was *clear-cut*: the company had to reduce personnel immediately.
- Professor Larsen is well known for his interesting and *clear-cut* presentations.

**to have on:** to be wearing (**S**)

- How do you like the hat which Grace *has on* today?
- When Sally came into the room, I *had* nothing *on* except my shorts.

**to come to:** to regain consciousness; to equal, to amount to

- At first they thought that the man was dead, but soon he *came to*.
- The bill for groceries at the supermarket *came to* fifty dollars.

**to call for:** to require; to request, to urge

- This cake recipe *calls for* some baking soda, but we don't have any.
- The member of Congress *called for* new laws to regulate the banking industry.

## SECTION TWO --- INTERMEDIATE

### LESSON 14

**to eat in/to eat out:** to eat at home/to eat in a restaurant

- I feel too tired to go out for dinner. Let's *eat in* again tonight.
- When you *eat out*, what restaurant do you generally go to?

## ESSENTIAL IDIOMS IN ENGLISH by ROBERT J. DIXSON

**cut and dried:** predictable, known beforehand; boring

- The results of the national election were rather *cut and dried*; the Republicans won easily.
- A job on a factory assembly line is certainly *cut and dried*.

**to look after:** to watch, to supervise, to protect (also: **to take care of, to keep an eye on**)

- Grandma will *look after* the baby while we go to the lecture.
- Who is going to *take care of* your house plants while you are away?
- I'd appreciate it if you'd *keep an eye on* my car while I'm in the store.

**to feel like:** to have the desire to, to want to consider

This idiom is usually followed by a gerund (the *-ing* form of a verb used as a noun).

- I don't *feel like* studying tonight. Let's go to a basketball game.
- I *feel like* taking a long walk. Would you like to go with me?

**once and for all:** finally, absolutely

- My daughter told her boyfriend *once and for all* that she wouldn't date him anymore.
- *Once and for all*, John has quit smoking cigarettes.

**to hear from:** to receive news or information from

*To hear from* is used for receiving a letter, telephone call, etc., from a person or organization.

- I don't *hear from* my brother very often since he moved to Chicago.
- Have you *heard from* the company about that new job?

**to hear of:** to know about, to be familiar with; to consider

The second definition is always used in the negative.

- When I asked for directions to Mill Street, the police officer said that she had never *heard of* it.
- Byron strongly disagreed with my request by saying, "I won't *hear of* it!"

**to make fun of:** to laugh at, to joke about

- They are *making fun of* Carla's new hair style. Don't you think that it's really strange?
- Don't *make fun of* Jose's English. He's doing the best he can.

**to come true:** to become reality, to prove to be correct

- The weatherman's forecast for today's weather certainly *came true*.
- Everything that the economists predicted about the increased cost of living has *come true*.

**as a matter of fact:** really, actually (also: **in fact**)

- Hans thinks he knows English well but, *as a matter of fact*, he speaks very poorly.
- I didn't say that. *In fact*, I said quite the opposite.

## ESSENTIAL IDIOMS IN ENGLISH by ROBERT J. DIXSON

**to have one's way:** to arrange matters the way one wants (especially when someone else doesn't want to same way) (also: **to get one's way**)

- My brother always wants to *have his way*, but this time our parents said that we could do what I wanted.
- If Sheila doesn't *get her way*, she becomes very angry.

**to look forward to:** to expect or anticipate with pleasure  
This idiom can be followed by a regular noun or a gerund.

- We're greatly *looking forward to* our vacation in Mexico.
- Margaret never *looks forward to* going to work.

### LESSON 15

**inside out:** with the inside facing the outside

- Someone should tell little Bobby that his shirt is *inside out*.
- The high winds ruined the umbrella by blowing it *inside out*.

**upside down:** with the upper side turned toward the lower side

- The accident caused on car to turn *upside down*, its wheels spinning in the air.
- One of the students was only pretending to read her textbook; the teacher could see that the book was actually *upside down*.

**to fill in:** to write answers in (S); to inform, to tell (S)

For the second definition, the idiom can be followed by the preposition *on* and the information that someone is told.

- You should be careful to *fill in* the blanks on the registration form correctly.
- Barry was absent from the meeting, so I'd better *fill him in*.
- Has anyone *filled* the boss *in on* the latest public relation disaster?

**to fill out:** to complete a form (S)

This idiom is very similar to the first definition above. *To fill in* refers to completing various parts of a form, while *to fill out* refers to completing a form as one whole item.

- Every prospective employee must *fill out* an application by giving name, address, previous jobs, etc.
- The teenager had some trouble *filling* the forms *out* by himself, so his mother helped him.

**to take advantage of:** to use well, to profit from; to use another person's weaknesses to gain what one wants

- I *took advantage of* my neighbor's superior skill at tennis to improve my own ability at the game.
- Teddy is such a small, weak child that his friends *take advantage of* him all the time. They *take advantage of* him by demanding money and making him do things for them.

**no matter:** regardless of

## ESSENTIAL IDIOMS IN ENGLISH by ROBERT J. DIXSON

This idiom is a shortened form of *it doesn't matter*. It is followed by a question word such as *how, where, when, who*, etc.

- *No matter* how much money he spends on his clothes, he never looks well dressed.
- *No matter* where that escaped prisoner tries to hide, the police will find him sooner or later.

**to take up:** to begin to do or study, to undertake (**S**); to occupy space, time, or energy (**S**)

- After today's exam, the class will be ready to *take up* the last chapter in the book.
- The piano *takes up* too much space in our living room. However, it would *take* too much time *up* to move it right now; so we'd better wait until later.

**to take up with:** to consult someone about an important matter (**S**)

The important matter follows the verb *take*, while the person consulted follows *with*.

- Can I take the problem up with you right now? It's quite urgent.
- I can't help you with this matter. You'll have to take it up with the manager.

**to take after:** to resemble a parent or close relative (for physical appearance only, also: **to look like**)

- Which of your parents do you *take after* the most?
- Sam looks like his father, but he *takes after* his mother in personality.

**in the long run:** eventually, after a long period of time

This idiom is similar in meaning to *sooner or later* (Lesson 1). The difference is that *in the long run* refers to a more extended period of time.

- *In the long run*, the synthetic weave in this carpet will wear better than the woolen one. You won't have to replace it so soon.
- If you work hard at your marriage, you'll find out that, *in the long run*, your spouse can be your best friend in life.

**in touch:** having contact

- James will be *in touch* with us soon to relay the details of the plan.
- I certainly enjoyed seeing you again after all these years. Let's be sure to keep *in touch*.

**out of touch:** not having contact; not having knowledge of

- Marge and I had been *out of touch* for years, but then suddenly she called me up the other day.
- Larry has been so busy that he seems *out of touch* with world events.

## LESSON 16

**on one's toes:** alert, cautious

This idiom is usually used with the verbs *stay* and *keep*.

- It's important for all the players on a soccer team to *stay on their toes*.

## ESSENTIAL IDIOMS IN ENGLISH by ROBERT J. DIXSON

- We'd better *keep on our toes* while we're walking along the dark portions of this street.

**to get along:** to make progress; to manage to live in a certain state of health

- Juan *is getting along* very well in his English studies.
- How is Mr. Richards *getting along* after his long illness?

**hard of hearing:** partially deaf, not able to hear well

- You'll have to speak a little louder. Mrs. Evans is *hard of hearing*.
- Please don't shout. I'm not *hard of hearing*.
- Listening to loud music too much can make you *hard of hearing*.

**to see eye to eye:** to agree, to concur

- I'm glad that we *see eye to eye* on the matter of the conference location.
- A husband and wife don't always *see eye to eye* with each other, but a good marriage can survive small disagreements.

**to have in mind:** to be considering, to be thinking (S)

- I don't want to see a movie now. I *have in mind* going to the park.
- It's up to you what we eat tonight. Do you *have anything in mind*?

**to keep in mind:** to remember, not to forget (S) (also: **to bear in mind**)

- Please *keep in mind* that you promised to call Stan around noon.
- I didn't know that Paula doesn't like vegetables. We should *bear that in mind* next time we invite her for dinner.

**for once:** this one time, for only one time

- *For once* I was able to win a game of golf against Steve, who is a much better player than I am.
- Dad, *for once* would you please let me drive the new car?

**to go off:** to explode; to sound as an alarm; to leave suddenly without explanation

- The accident happened when a box of firecrackers *went off* accidentally.
- For what time did you set the alarm clock to *go off* tomorrow morning?
- Vince *went off* without saying good-bye to anybody; I hope he wasn't angry.

**to grow out of:** to outgrow, to become too old for; to be a result of

- He still bites his nails now and then, but soon he'll *grow out of* the habit.
- The need for the salary committee *grew out of* worker dissatisfaction with the pay scale.

**to make the best of:** to do the best that one can in a poor situation

- If we can't find a larger apartment soon, we'll just have to *make the best of* it right here.
- Even though the Martinez family is having financial problems, they *make the best of* everything by enjoying the simple pleasures of life.

## ESSENTIAL IDIOMS IN ENGLISH by ROBERT J. DIXSON

**to cut off:** to shorten by cutting the ends (**S**); to disconnect or stop suddenly (**S**)

- The rope was two feet longer than we needed, so we *cut off* the extra length.
- The operator *cut* our long-distance phone conversation *off* after two minutes.

**to cut out:** to remove by cutting (**S**); to stop doing something (**S**) (for the second definition, also: **to knock it off**)

For the second definition, the idiom is usually separated by the pronoun *it*.

- The child likes to *cut out* pictures from the newspaper and to paste them in a notebook.
- He kept bothering her, so finally she told him to *cut it out*. However, he wouldn't *knock it off* until her larger brother appeared.

## LESSON 17

**to blow out:** to explode, to go flat (for tires); to extinguish by blowing (**S**)

- On our trip to Colorado, one of the car tires *blew out* when it hit a large hole in the road.
- Little Joey wasn't able to *blow* all the candles *out*, so his big sister helped him.

**to become of:** to happen to (a missing object or person)

This idiom is always used in a clause beginning with *what*.

- *What has become of* my pencil? I had it ten minutes ago, but now I can't find it.
- I wondered *what became of you*. I looked around the shopping center for two hours, but I couldn't find you at all.

**to shut up:** to close for a period of time (**S**); to be quiet, to stop talking

The second definition of this idiom is impolite in formal situations.

- During the hurricane, all the store owners *shut* their shops *up*.
- Bob's sister told him to *shut up* and not say anything more about it.
- The student got into big trouble for telling his teacher to *shut up*.

**have got:** to have, to possess

- Curtis *has got* a bad cold. He's sneezing and coughing a lot.
- How much money *have* you *got* with you right now?

**have got to:** must (also: **have to**)

- She *has got to* go to Chicago today to sign the contract papers.
- I *have to* be back home by two o'clock or my wife will feel ill at ease.

**to keep up with:** to maintain the same speed or rate as

- Frieda works so fast that no one in the office can *keep up with* her.
- You'll have to walk more slowly. I can't *keep up with* you.

**on the other hand:** however, in contrast

## ESSENTIAL IDIOMS IN ENGLISH by ROBERT J. DIXSON

- Democracies provide people many freedoms and privileges. *On the other hand*, democracies suffer many serious problems such as crime and unemployment.
- My sister takes after my father in appearance. *On the other hand*, I take after my mother.

**to turn down:** to reduce in brightness or volume (**S**); to reject, to refuse (**S**)

- Please *turn down* the radio for me. It's too loud while I'm studying.
- Laverne wanted to join the military but the recruiting officer *turned* her application *down* because Laverne is hard of hearing in one ear.

**fifty-fifty:** divided into two equal parts

- Let's go *fifty-fifty* on the cost of a new rug for our apartment.
- The political candidate has a *fifty-fifty* chance of winning the election.

**to break in:** gradually to prepare something for use that is new and stiff (**S**); to interrupt (for the second definition, also: **to cut in**)

- It is best to *break* a new car *in* by driving it slowly for the first few hundred miles.
- While Carrie and I were talking, Bill *broke in* to tell me about a telephone call.
- Peter, it's very impolite *to cut in* like that while others are speaking.

**a lost cause:** a hopeless case, a person or situation having no hope of positive change.

- It seems that Charles will never listen to our advice. I suppose it's *a lost cause*.
- The police searched for the missing girl for two weeks, but finally gave it up as *a lost cause*.
- Children who have committed several crimes as teenagers and show no sorrow about their actions are generally *lost causes*.

**above all:** mainly, especially

- *Above all*, don't mention the matter to Gerard; he's the last person we should tell.
- Sheila does well in all her school subjects, but *above all* in mathematics. Her math scores are always over 95 percent.

## LESSON 18

**to do without:** survive or exist without something (also: **to go without**)

With prices so high now, I'll have to do without a new suit this year.

- As a traveling salesperson, Monica can't *do without* a car.
- It's a shame that so many poor people in the world have to *go without* basic necessities of life such as nutritious food and suitable shelter.

**according to:** in the order of; on the authority of

- The students on the football team were ranked *according to* height, from shortest to tallest.

## ESSENTIAL IDIOMS IN ENGLISH by ROBERT J. DIXSON

- *According to* my dictionary, you are using that word in your essay incorrectly.

**to be bound to:** to be certain to, to be sure to

This idiom is used when the occurrence of an event seems inevitable or unavoidable.

- We *are bound to* be late if you don't hurry up.
- With the economy improving now, their business *is bound to* make more money this year.

**for sure:** without doubt (also: **for certain**)

- In the dark, I couldn't tell *for sure* whether it was Polly or Sarah who drove by.
- I now *for certain* that Gene will move back to Washington next month.

**to take for:** to perceive or understand as (**S**)

This idiom is usually used when someone is mistakenly perceived. A noun or pronoun must separate the idiom.

- Because of his strong, muscular body, I *took him for* a professional athlete. As it turns out, he doesn't play any professional sports.
- What do you *take me for* --- a fool? I don't believe what you're saying at all.

**to try out:** to test, to use during a trial period (**S**)

- You can *try out* the new car before you decide to buy it.
- I can let you *try* the computer *out* for a few days before you make a decision.

**to tear down:** to destroy by making flat, to demolish (**S**)

- The construction company had to *tear down* the old hotel in order to build a new office building.
- The owners had to *tear* the house *down* after it burned down in a fire.

**to tear up:** to rip into small pieces (**S**)

- Diedre *tore up* the letter angrily and threw all the pieces into the trash can.
- He told the lawyer to *tear* the old contract *up* and then to prepare a new one.

**to go over:** to be appreciated or accepted

This idiom is usually followed by the adverb well. (I Lesson 6 this idiom has the meaning *to review*, as in the second sentence of the second example below.)

- The teacher's organized lessons always *go over* well with her students.
- The comedian's jokes weren't *going over* well; the audience wasn't laughing much at all. I think that the comedian should go over his material more carefully before each act.

**to run out of:** to exhaust the supply of, not to have more of

- We *ran out of* gas right in the middle of the main street in town.
- It's dangerous to *run out of* water if you are in an isolated area.

## ESSENTIAL IDIOMS IN ENGLISH by ROBERT J. DIXSON

**at heart:** basically, fundamentally

This idiom is used to describe the true character of a person.

- James sometimes seems quite unfriendly, but *at heart* he's a good person.
- The Fares often don't see eye to eye, but *at heart* they both love each other very much.

**about to:** ready to, just going to

- We were *about to* leave the house when the phone rang.
- I'm sorry that I broke in. What were you *about to* say?

## LESSON 19

**to bite off:** to accept as a responsibility or task

This idiom is often used when one accepts more responsibility than one can handle alone. It is usually used in the form *to bite off more than one can chew*.

- When I accepted the position of chairman, I didn't realize how much I was biting off.
- When James registered for 18 units in his last semester at college, he *bit off more than he could chew*.

**to tell apart:** to distinguish between (also: **to pick apart, to tell from**) (S)

- The two brothers look so much alike that few people can *tell* them *apart*.
- That copy machine is so good that I can't *pick* the photocopy and the original *apart*.
- Most new cars are very similar in appearance. It's almost impossible to *tell* one *from* another.

**all in all:** considering everything

- There were a few problems, but *all in all* it was a well-organized seminar.
- Leonard got a low grade in one subject, but *all in all* he's a good student.

**to pass out:** to distribute (also: **to hand out**) (S); to lose consciousness

The verbal idiom to *hand out* can be made into the noun **handout** to refer to items that are distributed in a class or meeting.

- Please help me *pass out* these test papers; there must be a hundred of them.
- Alright, students, here are the class *handouts* for this week.
- The weather was so hot in the soccer stadium that some of the fans in the stands *passed out*.

**to go around:** to be sufficient or adequate for everyone present; to circulate, to move from place to place

- We thought that we had bought enough food and drink for the party, but actually there wasn't enough to go around.
- There's a bad strain of influenza going a

## ESSENTIAL IDIOMS IN ENGLISH by ROBERT J. DIXSON

**to be in (the/one's) way:** to block or obstruct; not to be helpful, to cause inconvenience (for both, also: **to get in the/one's way**)

- Jocelyn couldn't drive through the busy intersection because a big truck *was in the way*.
- Our small child tried to help us paint the house, but actually he just *got in our way*.

**to put on:** to gain (pounds or weight) (**S**); to present, to perform (**S**)

- Bob has put on a lot of weight recently. **He must have put at least fifteen pounds on.**
- The Youth Actor's Guild *put on* a wonderful version of Romeo and Juliet at the globe Theater.

**to put up:** to tolerate, to accept unwillingly

- The employee was fired because his boss could not *put up with* his mistakes any longer.
- While I'm studying, I can't *put up with* any noise or other distractions.

**in vain:** useless, without the desired result

- All the doctors' efforts to save the injured woman were *in vain*. She was declared dead three hours after being admitted to the hospital.
- We tried *in vain* to reach you last night. Is your phone out of order?

**day in and day out:** continuously, constantly (also: **day after day**; for longer periods of time, **year in and year out** and **year after year**)

- During the month of April, it rained *day in and day out*.
- *Day after day* I waited for a letter from him, but one never came.
- *Year in and year out*, the weather in San Diego is the best in the nation.

**to catch up:** to work with the purpose of fulfilling a requirement or being equal to others

The idiom is often followed by the preposition *with* and a noun phrase. It is similar in meaning to **keep up with** from Lesson 17.

- **The student was absent from class so long that it took her a long time to catch up.**
- If you are not equal to others, first you have to *catch up with* them before you can keep up with them.

### Lesson 20

**to hold still:** not to move (**S**)

- Please *hold still* while I adjust your tie.
- If you don't *hold* that camera *still*, you'll get a blurred picture.

**to know by sight:** to recognize (**S**)

This idiom is used when the *person* has been seen previously but is not known personally. The *person* must be used to separate the idiom.

- I have never met our new neighbors; I simply *know* them *by sight*.
- **The woman said that she would know the thief by sight if she ever saw him again.**

## ESSENTIAL IDIOMS IN ENGLISH by ROBERT J. DIXSON

**to be the matter:** to be unsatisfactory, to be improper, to be wrong  
In a question, this idiom is used with *what or something*. In an answer, *something* or *nothing* is usually used.

- A: *What is the matter*, Betty? You look very upset.
- B: Yes, *something is the matter*. I've lost my purse!
- A: *Is something the matter*, Charles? You don't look well.
- B: No, *nothing is the matter*. I'm just a little under the weather.

**to bring up:** to rear, to raise from childhood (**S**); to mention, to raise an issue, to introduce a topic (**S**)

- Parents should *bring up* their children to be responsible members of society.
- Sarah wanted to *bring* the scheduling problem *up* at the club meeting, but finally she decided against doing so.
- One of the students *brought up* an interesting point related to the subject in our textbook.

**to get lost:** to become lost; to go away in order not to bother  
The second definition provides a very informal, even rude, meaning that should be used only with close friends. It is sometimes used in a joking manner.

- While driving in Boston, we *got lost* and drove many miles in the wrong direction.
- Todd kept bothering me while I was studying, so I told him to *get lost*.
- Lisa joked that she wanted her sister to *get lost* forever.

**to hold up:** to delay, to make late (**S**); to remain high in quality

- A big accident *held up* traffic on the highway for several hours.
- Deidre is amazed at how well her car has *held up* over the years.

**to run away:** to leave without permission; **to escape**

- The young couple *ran away* and got married because their parents wouldn't permit it.
- That cat is just like a criminal --- it *runs away* from anyone who tries to come near!

**to rule out:** to refuse to consider, to prohibit (**S**)

- Heather *ruled out* applying to college in Texas because she would rather go to school in Canada.
- I'd like to watch a good movie on TV tonight, but a ton of homework *rules that out*.

**by far:** by a great margin, clearly

- Jacquie is *by far* the most intelligent student in our class.
- This is *by far* the hottest, most humid summer we've had in years.

**to see off:** to say good-bye upon departure by train, airplane, bus, etc. (also: **to send off**) (**S**)

A noun or pronoun must divide the idiom.

- We are going to the airport to *see* Peter *off* on his trip to Europe.

## ESSENTIAL IDIOMS IN ENGLISH by ROBERT J. DIXSON

- When I left for Cincinnati on a business trip, no one came to the train station to *send me off*.

**to see out:** to accompany a person out of a house, building, etc. (S)

A noun or pronoun must again divide the idiom.

- The Johnsons were certain to *see* their guests *out* as each one left the party.
- Would you please *see me out* to the car? It's very dark outside.]

**no wonder:** it's no surprise that, not surprisingly

This idiom derives from reducing it is no wonder that...

- *No wonder* the portable heater doesn't work. It's not plugged into the electrical outlet!
- Jack has been out of town for several weeks. *No wonder* we haven't seen him recently.

## LESSON 21

**to go up:** to increase (also: **to drive up**); to be constructed, to be erected

The second definition is the same as the one for *put up* in Lesson 19, except that *go up* is not used with a noun object.

- Economists are predicting that consumer prices are *going up*. Inflation always has a tendency to *drive up* the cost of products.
- A new office is *going up* in the downtown area. A major construction company is *putting it up*.

**to go up to:** to approach (also: to **come up to**, to **walk up to**, to **run up to**, to **drive up to**, etc.)

The related forms have the same meaning, but the type of movement is different.

- After the lecture, several people in the audience *went up to* the speaker to congratulate her.
- The little girl *came up to* me and shook my hand as if she had known me for years.
- Bill's friend didn't want to admit that they had gotten lost, but finally he agreed to *drive up to* a gas station and inquire about the correct route.

**to hand in:** to submit or deliver something that is due (S)

- Every student has to *hand in* an original composition each week of the semester.
- All the salespeople *hand* their weekly reports *in* on Friday.

**in case:** in order to be prepared if

When the idiom occurs at the end of the sentence (the second example), then the meaning is *in order to be prepared if something happens*. The "something" might be an accident, a delay, etc.

- You'd better close the windows *in case* it rains.
- We should be sure to leave for the airport early, just *in case*.
- Cynthia, take one of your books *in case* you have some time to read on our trip.

## ESSENTIAL IDIOMS IN ENGLISH by ROBERT J. DIXSON

**to take apart:** to disassemble, to separate the parts of something (S)

A noun or pronoun usually divides this idiom.

- It is much easier to *take* a watch *apart* than it is to assemble it.
- The engine had a serious problem, so the mechanic had to *take* it *apart* completely in order to fix it.

**to put together:** to assemble (S)

A noun or pronoun usually divides this idiom. The preposition back is used when something has been disassembled and then is being reassembled, as in the second example.

- Todd followed the directions on the box but he couldn't manage to *put* the bicycle *together* properly.
- After the teenager *took* the broken video game *apart* and fixed it, he was unable to *put* it *back together* again.

**to be better off:** to be in a more favorable condition or situation

The opposite of this idiom is **to be worse off**.

- Jim would *be better off* staying at home because of his cold.
- You'd *be* much *better off* working in an office than in a factory.
- The economies of some nations *are worse off* than they were several decades ago.

**to be well-off:** to have enough money to enjoy a comfortable life, to be rich (also: **to be well-to-do**)

- They live in the best section of town in a large home; they are very *well-off*.
- By the time I reach the age of fifty-five, I hope to be *well-to-do* and to travel frequently.

**to take by surprise:** to surprise, to amaze, to astonish (S)

A noun or pronoun usually divides this idiom.

- The offer of a high-paying position with another company *took* me *by surprise*.
- The president's announcement that the university was in financial trouble didn't *take* anyone *by surprise*.

**to keep in touch with:** to maintain contact with (also: **to stay in touch with**)

This idiom should be compared with *to get in touch with* in Lesson 9.

- You can telephone me every few days, and in that way we can *keep in touch with* each other.
- He promised to stay in touch with us while he was abroad. However, we were very disappointed that he never did *get in touch with* us.

**to name after:** to give the same name as another (S)

- Helen's parents *named* Helen *after* her grandmother.
- My grandson is *named after* Calvin Coolidge, the 30<sup>th</sup> President of the United States.

**to hold on:** to grasp tightly or firmly; to wait, to be patient

## ESSENTIAL IDIOMS IN ENGLISH by ROBERT J. DIXSON

The second definition is often used when someone is talking on the telephone.

- The little girl *held on* to her mother's hand and refused to let go as they walked through the large crowd of people.
- (on the telephone) Could you please *hold on* a moment while I get a pencil and paper?
- Come on, Mike, *hold on*. I can't get ready so quickly.

### LESSON 22

**to stop by:** to visit or stop somewhere briefly in order to do something

- James had to *stop by* the registrar's office to submit a transcript request form.
- Let's *stop by* the supermarket and pick up a few grocery items.

**to drop (someone) a line:** to write a note to someone (S)

- As soon as I get to Florida, I'll *drop you a line* and tell you about my new job.
- If you have time, *drop me a line* now and then while you're traveling.

**to come across:** to meet or find unexpectedly (also: **to run across**); to be perceived or judged as (also: **to come off**)

- While Cheryl was cleaning the attic, she *came across* some very old coins. It took her by surprise to run across something like that.
- Jeff's boss *comes across* as a tough, unpleasant person, but actually Jeff says that he is a good employer.
- Some people *come off* quite differently than they really are.

**to stand for:** to represent, to signify; to tolerate

The second definition is usually used in a negative sense. The meaning is the same as *to put up with* in Lesson 19.

- On the American flag, each star *stands for* one of the fifty states, and each stripe stands for one of the original thirteen colonies of the 1800s.
- The citizens wouldn't *stand for* the increase in crime in their city, so they hired more police officers and built another jail.

**to stand a chance:** to have the possibility of accomplishing something

This idiom is often used with an adjective such as good or *excellent*. It also occurs in the negative, sometimes with the adjective *much*.

- The New York baseball team *stands a good chance* of winning the World Series this year.
- Because John doesn't have any previous work experience, he doesn't *stand a chance* of getting that job.
- The woman injured in the serious train accident doesn't *stand much chance* of surviving.

**to take pains:** to work carefully and conscientiously

- She *takes pains* to do everything well; she's our best employee.
- He *took* great *pains* with his last assignment because he needed to get an excellent grade to pass the class.

## ESSENTIAL IDIOMS IN ENGLISH by ROBERT J. DIXSON

**to look on:** to watch as a spectator, to observe

- Hundreds of people were *looking on* as the police and firefighters rescued the passengers in the wrecked train.
- I stayed with my son at his first soccer practice and *looked on* as the coach worked with the boys.

**to look up to:** to admire, to respect greatly

- Children will most certainly *look up to* their parents if the children are brought up well.
- Everyone *looks up to* the director of our department because he is a kind and generous person.

**to look down on:** to feel superior to, to think of someone as less important

- People who are in positions of power should be careful not to *look down on* those who work for them.
- Why does Alma *look down on* Mario just because his family is so poor?

**to take off:** to leave the ground (for airplanes); to leave, often in a hurry

The noun form **takeoff** derives from this idiom.

- The plane *took off* over an hour late. The passengers had to buckle their seatbelts during *takeoff*.
- Do you have to *take off* already? You just arrive an hour ago!

**to pull off:** to succeed in doing something difficult (**S**); to exit to the side of a highway

- The group of investors *pulled off* a big deal by buying half the stock in that company. I wonder how they *pulled it off* before the company could prevent it.
- The motorist *pulled off* when the police officer turned on the red lights and the siren.

**to keep time:** to operate accurately (for watches and clocks)

This idiom is usually used with adjectives such as *good* and *perfect*.

- Although this is a cheap watch, it *keeps good time*.
- The old clock *keeps perfect time*; it's never fast or slow.

## LESSON 23

**to make do:** to manage, to cope

This idiom is used when a person must accept a substitute that is not the most suitable.

- Pearl doesn't have a clean blouse so she has to *make do* with the one she wore yesterday.
- During difficult economic times, many people have to *make do* with less.

**to give birth to:** to bear a human being or animal

- Jane's mother has just *given birth to* twin girls.
- The zoo's Siberian tiger just *gave birth to* a baby cub.

## ESSENTIAL IDIOMS IN ENGLISH by ROBERT J. DIXSON

**close call:** a situation involving a narrow escape from danger (also: **close shave**)

- Bob, that car nearly hit us! What a *close call*.
- We had a *close call* when a small fire in our kitchen almost spread to the rest of the house.

**to get on one's nerves:** to annoy or disturb (also: **to bug**)

- Laura loves to talk to anyone. Sometimes her chatter really *gets on my nerves*.
- Jack asked his neighbor to turn down the stereo because it was *bugging* him and he couldn't concentrate.

**to put down:** to suppress, to quell (**S**); to criticize unfairly (**S**)

- The police arrived just in time to *put down* the disturbance before it got very serious.
- Fred tries his best at playing tennis. You shouldn't *put him down* like that.

**to go for:** to be sold at a certain price; to seek or strive for

- This dress probably *goes for* about \$50, don't you think?
- Peter was *going for* first place in the swim meet, but he wasn't able to do better than third place.

**to go in for:** to have as an interest, such as a sport or hobby (also: **to go for, to be into, to get into**)

- Hal *goes in for* tennis while his wife goes for painting and sculpture.
- What sports *are you into*? I don't have any time to *get into* sports.

**to stay up:** to remain awake, not to go to bed

- I want to *stay up* tonight and watch a late movie on TV.
- He *stays up* every night until after one o'clock, preparing his homework.

**to stay in:** to remain at home, not to go out

An idiom with the opposite meaning is **to stay out**.

- On a rainy day, I like *to stay in* and read.
- Young people are able *to stay out* late at night and get very little sleep.

**to take over:** to assume control or responsibility for (**S**); to do or perform again (**S**)

The meaning of the second definition is almost the same as *do over* in Lesson 11. also for the second definition, a noun or pronoun must divide the idiom.

- That large investment company specializes in *taking over* smaller businesses that are in financial trouble.
- Most students didn't do well on the important test, so the instructor let them *take it over*.
- Little Mickey didn't have much chance to hit the baseball during practice, so the coach let him *take his turn over*.

**to show up:** to appear, to arrive; to be found or located (also for the second definition: **to turn up**)

- It really gets on my nerves that Ursula *shows up* late for every meeting.

## ESSENTIAL IDIOMS IN ENGLISH by ROBERT J. DIXSON

- Willie hopes that the watch he lost last Sunday *shows up* soon.
- We've looked everywhere for that book, but it hasn't *turned up* yet.

**to clean out:** to empty, to tidy by removing (S); to steal, to rob (S); to buy or purchase all of something (S)

- It's time for you to *clean out* your closet so that you can store more things in there.
- A burglar entered my apartment while I was gone and *cleaned me out*. He took over \$200 in cash and jewelry.
- Thousands of shoppers *cleaned out* the store that had gone bankrupt and was selling all its remaining products at very reduced prices.

## LESSON 24

**to knock out:** to make unconscious (S); to impress or attract greatly (S)

This idiom can be made into the noun form *knockout* for both definitions.

- The prizefighter *knocked out* his opponent with one punch in the first five seconds of the first round. It was the fastest *knockout* in boxing history.
- Linda's beautiful appearance and slender figure really *knock me out*. Isn't she a real *knockout* tonight?

**to knock one self out:** to work very hard (sometimes too hard) to do something

A reflexive pronoun must divided the idiom.

- She really *knocked* herself *out* trying to pass that difficult class.
- Don't *knock* yourself *out* during practice. Save your strength for the competition later.

**to carry out:** to accomplish, to execute (S) (also: **to go through with**)

- It's easy to write down a plan for losing weight, but much harder to *carry it out*.
- Charles promised to *go through with* his plan to enroll in graduate school and get an advanced degree.

**to run into:** to meet someone unexpectedly; to crash or collide into (also: **to bump into**)

- It was a shock to *run into* an old friend from high school recently.
- The drunk driver was slightly injured when he *ran into* a telephone pole.

**to set out:** to start traveling toward a place (also: **to set off, to head out**); to arrange or display neatly (also: **to lay out**) (S)

- We set out for the top of the mountain at dawn. Unfortunately, as we *set off*, it started to snow heavily, so we decided to *head out* again later.
- The children tried to *set out* the dishes on the table, but their dad had to help to lay the dishes out properly.

**to draw up:** to create by drawing, such as a map (S); to prepare documents or legal papers (S)

## ESSENTIAL IDIOMS IN ENGLISH by ROBERT J. DIXSON

- Max asked me to *draw up* a map to the party so that he wouldn't get lost.
- Our lawyer agreed to *draw* the contract *up* as soon as possible.

**give and take:** compromise, cooperation between people

- *Give and take* is an important element of a successful marriage.
- Most business negotiations involve *give and take* between the parties involved.

**to drop out of:** to stop attending; to withdraw from

This idiom can be made into the noun form dropout.

- Some students *drop out of* secondary school early in order to get jobs. However, such *dropouts* often regret their decision later in life.
- Two more baseball teams have *dropped out of* the youth league due to a lack of players.

**to believe in:** to accept as true, have faith in

- Some people *believe in* being honest in all human affairs, while others accept the need to lie in order to get one's way.
- Throughout the history of man, some cultures have *believed in* one god while others have *believed in* the existence of many gods.

**to cheer up:** to make happier, to feel less sad (**S**)

- We all tried to *cheer up* the little boy when he started to cry.
- After the death of Deanne's husband, it was difficult to *cheer her up* at all.

**to make sense:** to be sensible or reasonable

- It *makes sense* to wait until a sunny day to visit the park together.
- That Jimmy ran away from home suddenly doesn't *make sense* to any of us.

## LESSON 25

**to burst out:** to depart quickly (also: **to storm out**); to act suddenly

For the second definition, this idiom is usually followed by a gerund form such as laughing, crying, singing, etc.

- Faye and Debbie were so angry at each other that one of them *burst out* the front door of the house and the other *stormed out* the back door.
- It was so funny to see a little baby in the audience *burst out* crying when the choir group *burst out* singing at the start of the recital.

**to get away:** to get free, to escape

- We always try to *get away* from the noise and heat of the city for a month or two each summer.
- No one knows how the suspected criminal *got away* from the police.

**to get away with:** to avoid punishment for

- Jonathan tries to *get away with* coming late to work almost every day; someday he'll suffer the consequences.

## ESSENTIAL IDIOMS IN ENGLISH by ROBERT J. DIXSON

- Terence can't continue to put his friends down like that and expect to *get away with* it forever.

**to serve (someone) right:** to receive one's just punishment (S)

This idiom is usually used at the beginning of a sentence after the subject *it*. Compare the following examples with those in the previous idiom above.

- It *serves* Jonathan *right* to be fired from his job.
- It *serves* Terence *right* that none of his friends are willing to help him move to a new apartment.

**to keep up:** to prevent from sleeping (S); to continue maintaining (speed, level of work, condition, etc.) (S)

- Could you please turn down the TV volume? You're *keeping up* the children.
- If we can *keep up* this speed, we should arrive there in about two hours.
- James is so proud of his daughter for getting mostly A's in school. He's certain that she can *keep up* the good work.
- The Federal Reserve Bank hopes to *keep* the value of the dollar *up* at least through the rest of the year.

**to keep up with:** to have current knowledge of; to understand as an explanation

This idiom should be compared to the meaning of *keep up with* in Lesson 17.

- Evan *keeps up with* world affairs by reading a new magazine each week.
- I understand a lot of the Spanish language, but I can't *keep up with* the fast conversation in this Mexican film.

**to stand out:** to be easily visible or noticeable (also: **to stick out**)

This idiom is used for someone or something that is different from all others.

- Her bright red hair makes her *stand out* from others in the group.
- Brandon Styles is a tall, distinguished gentleman who *sticks out* in any crowd.

**to let on:** to reveal or tell what you know, to hint

- We are going to the movies tonight and we don't want Doris to go. If you see her, make sure not to *let on*.
- They asked me not to *let on* to Ted that we're planning the birthday party; it's supposed to be a big surprise.

**to go wrong:** to fail, to result badly

- Something *went wrong* with the engine, so we had to have the car towed to a garage.
- Shawn should have been here over an hour ago; I'm certain that something *went wrong*.

**to meet (someone) halfway:** to compromise with someone

- Steve wanted \$4,500 for his car, and Gwen offered \$4,000. They *met* each other *halfway* and agreed on \$4,250.
- After a long process of give and take, the owners of the company agreed to *meet* the workers *halfway* by providing some additional health benefits but no wage increase.

## ESSENTIAL IDIOMS IN ENGLISH by ROBERT J. DIXSON

**to check up on:** to examine with the purpose of determining condition (also: **to check on**)

This idiom has the related noun form *checkup*.

- The government always *checks up* on the background of employees who are hired for sensitive military projects.
- The doctor wants me to have a thorough medical *checkup* as part of a preventive medicine program.

**to stick up:** to point or place upwards (**S**); to rob (**S**)

- You should put some water on your hair. It's *sticking up* in the back.
- A masked thief *stuck up* a grocery store in the neighborhood last night.

## LESSON 26

**to come about:** to happen

- I didn't find any explanation in the newspaper about how the political coup *came about*.
- The flood *came about* as a result of the heavy winter rains.

**to bring about:** to cause to happen

This idiom is used to indicate who or what caused something to come about.

- John *brought about* the accident because of his carelessness.
- The heavy rains we have each spring *bring about* serious flooding.

**to build up:** to increase slowly, to make stronger gradually (**S**)

- They *built up* their savings account so that they could buy a new house.
- The professional athlete exercises regularly to *build* her strength *up*.

**to die down:** to decrease, to lessen in strength

- The hurricane became a less serious tropical storm when its winds *died down*.
- We let the fire in the fireplace *die down* and enjoyed watching the embers as they glowed in the dark.

**to fade away:** to diminish gradually in time or distance

- The memory of that unpleasant experience has slowly *faded away*.
- The music of the band gradually *faded away* as the parade passed down the street.

**to die out:** not to exist anymore; to be in the process of disappearing

- Scientists still are not sure exactly why the dinosaurs *died out*.
- That strange, new style of dancing is slowly *dying out*.

**to make out:** to read or see clearly (**S**); to prepare a legal document, such as a will, a check, etc. (**S**)

- The letter was so poorly handwritten that I couldn't *make out* many of the words.
- Harold, please *make* the check *out* to Acme Piano Company.

## ESSENTIAL IDIOMS IN ENGLISH by ROBERT J. DIXSON

**to live up to:** to fulfill (a standard or promise)

- It was clear that the lazy student would never *live up to* his family's expectations.
- It surprised us that the car salesperson *lived up to* all the promises he made.

**to stick to:** to adhere to (a promise), to follow or obey (a set of rules, procedures, etc.)

- He made a promise to his wife to quit smoking and drinking, and so far he has *stuck to* it.
- All organizations expect their employees to *stick to* established work rules and procedures.
- If you try hard to *stick to* your principles, then you'll be able to live up to them.

**to stick it to:** to cheat, to take unfair advantage of (also: **to rip off, the ripoff**)

- Be careful in doing business with that salesperson. He'll *stick it to* you at the first opportunity.
- The car dealership certainly *ripped me off* when I bought this car. It has caused me trouble constantly.
- You paid over \$400 for that jacket? What a *ripoff*!

**to stand up for:** to insist on, to demand; to defend, to support

- If you don't *stand up for* your rights in court, the lawyers will try to stick it to you.
- Frank *stood up for* his friend, who was being put down by other teenagers nearby.

**to cut corners:** to economize, to save money

- Most students live on limited budgets and have to *cut corners* whenever possible.
- The Livingstons have nine children, so it is essential that they *cut corners* at all times.

## LESSON 27

**to take on:** to employ, to hire (**S**); to accept responsibility for, to undertake

- That factory is *taking* a lot of new employees *on* for its new production line.
- Would you be willing to *take on* the task of organizing the next company picnic?

**to take down:** to remove from an elevated place (**S**); to write what is said, to note

- We should *take* the pictures *down* from the wall and clean off the dust.
- The secretary *took down* everything that was said at the meeting.

**to fall through:** to fail to materialize, not to succeed

This idiom is usually used with the noun *plan or plans* as the subject.

## ESSENTIAL IDIOMS IN ENGLISH by ROBERT J. DIXSON

- Our plan to travel to Europe last summer *fell through* when we were unable to save up enough money.
- Felix made plans to have a party for everyone in his office, but they *fell through* at the last moment.

**to give in:** to surrender, to stop resisting

- Completely surrounded by our soldiers, the enemy finally *gave in*.
- Management *gave in* to the strikers' demands and agreed to a shortened work week.

**to give off:** to release, to produce, to release

- When water boils, it *gives off* steam.
- The flowers in this garden *give off* a strange odor.

**to give out:** to distribute; to become exhausted or depleted (also: **to run out**)  
The first definition has the same meaning as the second definition of *to pass out* in Lesson 19.

- An usher stood at the door of the theater *giving out* programs.
- I couldn't finish the ten-mile race because my energy *gave out*.
- Jeff plans to stay in Las Vegas and gamble until his money *runs out*.

**to have it in for:** to want revenge on, to feel hostile towards (also: **to hold a grudge against**)

- Martina expects to lose her job because her boss has *had it in for* her for a long time.
- The teacher has *held a grudge against* Al ever since the time that he insulted her in front of the class.

**to have it out with:** to quarrel with, to confront

- I am going to *have it out with* Jack about all the times that he has told us lies.
- Ben *had it out with* his roommate about coming back home so late and making a lot of noise.

**to hold off:** to delay, or to be delayed, in occurring (**S**)

This idiom has the same meaning as *to put off* in Lesson 5 when a noun or pronoun is used as an object, as in the second example.

- If the rain *holds off* for a few more days, they can finish planting the rest of the crop.
- The judge agreed to *hold off* making a decision until new evidence could be introduced into court.

**to hold out:** to endure, to be sufficient; to survive by resisting; to persist in one's efforts

The first definition for to hold out has the opposite meaning of the second definition for to *give out* (seventh idiom, this lesson).

- If our supply of food and water *holds out*, we plan to camp here for another week. However, whenever it gives out, we'll have to leave.
- That nation's troops cannot *hold out* much longer against the superior forces of the enemy.

## ESSENTIAL IDIOMS IN ENGLISH by ROBERT J. DIXSON

- The valuable football player *held out* for more money before signing a new contract with his team.

**to hold over:** to extend, to keep for a longer time (S)

- They are going to *hold over* that movie for another week because so many people are coming to see it.
- Let's *hold* discussion of this problem *over* until our next meeting.

## SECTION THREE --- ADVANCED

### LESSON 28

**to let up:** to slacken, to lessen in intensity; to relax or ease one's effort (also: related idiom: **to take it easy**)

- If the rain doesn't *let up* soon, we won't be able to have our picnic.
- When Jane is working, she never *lets up* for a moment.
- Jane should *take it easy* or she'll get exhausted.

**to lay off:** to abstain from, stop using as a habit; to release or discharge from a job (also: related idiom: **to let go**) (S)

- If you're trying to lose weight, you should *lay off* sweet things.
- If business continues to be slow, we will have to *lay off* some workers.
- It will be necessary to *let* the youngest employees *go* first.

**to bring out:** to show or introduce (to the public) (S); to make available (S)

- Most automobile companies *bring out* new models each year.
- My mother *brought* some snacks *out* for my friends and me to have.

**to bring back:** to return a bought or borrowed item (also: **to take back**) (S)  
*To bring back* is used when you are speaking at the place that speaking at another place.

- Ma'am, our store policy is that you can *bring back* the dress as long as you have your sales receipt.
- You can borrow my car if you promise to *bring* it *back* by six o'clock.
- I have to *take* this book *back* to the library today.

**to wait up for:** to wait until late at night without going to bed

- Don't *wait up for* me. I may be back after midnight.
- We *waited up for* our son until two o'clock in the morning before we called the police.

**to leave (someone or something) alone:** not to disturb, to stay away from (S) (also: **to let alone**)

- *Leave* the baby *alone* for a while and she may go to sleep.
- After the cat had scratched Peter twice, he *let* it *alone*.

**let along:** and certainly not (also: **not to mention, to say nothing of**)

## ESSENTIAL IDIOMS IN ENGLISH by ROBERT J. DIXSON

*Let alone* is used after negative forms. The example that follows *let alone* is much less possible than the example that precedes *let alone*.

- I'm too sick today to walk to the kitchen, *let alone* to go to the zoo with you.
- He doesn't even speak his own language well, *let alone* French.

**to break off:** to terminate, to discontinue (S)

- After war began, the two countries *broke off* diplomatic relations.
- Elsa and Bob were once engaged, but they have already *broken it off*.

**to wear off:** to disappear gradually

- My headache isn't serious. It will *wear off* after an hour or so.
- The effect of the painkilling drug didn't *wear off* for several hours.

**to wear down:** to become worn gradually through use (also: *to wear away*, *to wear through*) (S)

Compare with *to wear out* (to become useless from wear) in Lesson 8.

- If you drag your feet while you walk, you'll *wear down* your shoes quickly.
- The pounding of ocean waves against the coast gradually *wears it away*.
- Johnny has *worn through* the seat of his pants.
- Helga threw away that dress because she had *worn it out*.

**on the whole:** in general, in most ways (also: **by and large**)

- He is, *on the whole*, a good student.
- *By and large*, I agree with your suggestions.

**touch and go:** risky, uncertain until the end

- The complicated medical operation was *touch and go* for several hours.
- The outcome of the soccer final was *touch and go* for the entire match.

## LESSON 29

**to work out:** to exercise; to develop, to devise (a plan) (S)

- Jane *works out* at the fitness center every other morning before going to school.
- The advertising department *worked out* a plan to increase company sales.
- We couldn't come up with a good plan for solving the problem, but we agree to *work it out* at a later date.

**to back up:** to drive or go backwards (S); to defend, to support (S); to return to a previous thought

- I couldn't *back* my car *up* because there was a bicycle in the driveway behind me.
- Ursula asked her friends to *back* her *up* when she went to court to fight a ticket for an illegal lane change on the highway.
- Wait a minute. Could you *back up* and say that again?

## ESSENTIAL IDIOMS IN ENGLISH by ROBERT J. DIXSON

**to back out:** to drive a vehicle out of a parking space (**S**); to withdraw support, to fail to fulfill a promise or obligation

- The parking lot attendant had to *back* another car *out* before he could get to mine.
- We were all ready to sign the contracts when one of the parties to the agreement *backed out*.

**to have one's heart set on:** to desire greatly, to be determined to

- She *has her heart set on* taking a trip abroad. She's been thinking about it for months.
- Todd *has his heart set on* going to medical school and becoming a doctor.

**to buy up:** to buy the complete stock of (**S**)

- Before the hurricane struck, residents *bought up* all the food and water in local stores.
- The government plans to *buy up* all surplus grain in order to stabilize the price.

**to buy out:** to purchase a business or company (**S**); to purchase all of a person's shares or stock (**S**)

This idiom is similar in meaning *to take over* in Lesson 23.

- Larger companies often *buy out* smaller companies that are having financial difficulties.
- Mr. Lee has been trying for some time to *buy* his partner *out* so that he can control the company by himself.

**to sell out:** to sell all items (**S**); to arrange for the sale of a company or business (**S**)

- That store is closing its doors for good and is *selling out* everything this weekend.
- If my new business enterprise is successful, I'll *sell* it *out* for a few million dollars.

**to catch on:** to become popular or widespread; to understand, to appreciate a joke

This idiom is often used with the preposition *to* for the second definition.

- Fashions of the past often *catch on* again among young people.
- When the teacher speaks quickly like that, can you *catch on* easily?
- His joke was very funny at the time, but when I told it to others later, nobody seemed to catch on. I had to tell the joke again before anyone could *catch on* to it.

**to be cut out for:** to have the necessary skills or talent for

The idiom is most often used in the negative or in questions.

- John *is* certainly not *cut out for* the work of a trial lawyer.
- Are you certain that you *are cut out for* that kind of job.

**to throw out:** to discard (**S**); to remove by force (**S**); to refuse to consider, to reject (**S**)

## ESSENTIAL IDIOMS IN ENGLISH by ROBERT J. DIXSON

- Instead of *throwing out* our paper waste in the office, we should recycle it.
- When a fight broke out between two people on the dance floor, the management *threw them out*.
- The judge *threw* the case *out* because there was insufficient evidence to try the defendant successfully.

**to throw up:** to erect or construct quickly (**S**); to vomit (**S**)

- The Red Cross *threw up* temporary shelters for the homeless victims of the earthquake.
- The ill patient is unable to digest her food properly, so she is *throwing* all of it *up*.

**to clear up:** to make understandable (also: **to straighten out**) (**S**); to become sunny

- The teacher tried to *clear up* our confusion about the meaning of the difficult paragraph in the reading.
- It's rather cloudy this morning. Do you think that it will *clear up* later?

## LESSON 30

**to slow down:** to go, or cause to go, more slowly (also: **to slow up**) (**S**)

This idiom can be used both with and without an object.

- The car was going so fast that the motorist couldn't *slow it down* enough to make the sharp curve.
- You're eating too fast to digest your food well. *Slow down!*
- *Slow up* a bit! You're talking so quickly that I can't catch on well.

**to dry up:** to lose, or cause to lose, all moisture (**S**); to be depleted

- Every summer the extreme heat in this valley *dries* the stream *up*.
- All funds for the project *dried up* when the local government faced budget crisis.

**to dry out:** to lose, or cause to lose, moisture gradually (**S**); to stop drinking alcohol in excess (also: **to sober up**)

- Martha hung the towel outside on the clothesline in order to *dry it out*.
- Some people go to alcohol recovery centers in order to *dry out*.

**to be up to (something):** to be doing something; to be planning or plotting something, scheming

The first definition usually takes the form of a question.

- Hi, Jake. I haven't seen you in a long time. What have you *been up to*?
- Those boys hiding behind the building must *be up to* something bad.

**to beat around the bush:** to avoid discussing directly, to evade the issue

- Our boss *beats around* the bush so much that no one in the office knows exactly what he wants us to do.
- Instead of *beating around* the bush, Melinda explained her objection in very clear terms.

## ESSENTIAL IDIOMS IN ENGLISH by ROBERT J. DIXSON

**to come to an end:** to end, to stop

This idiom is used with *finally* and *never* when some activity lasts too long.

- The meeting finally *came to an end* at ten o'clock in the evening.
- Even though my friend seemed to enjoy the movie, I thought that it would never *come to an end*.

**to put an end to:** to cause to end, to terminate in a definite manner (also: **to do away with**)

- The dictatorial government *put an end to* organized opposition in the country by making it illegal to form a political party.
- It may never be possible to *do away with* all forms of prejudice and discrimination in the world.

**to get even with:** to seek revenge, to retaliate

This idiom is similar in meaning to *to have it in for* in Lesson 27.

- Bill has had it in for his boss for a long time. He told me he's planning to *get even with* his boss by giving some company secrets to a competitor.
- I want to *get even with* Steve for beating me so badly in tennis last time. The scores were 6-1 and 6-2.

**to fool around:** to waste time (also: **to screw around**); to joke, not to be serious

- The teacher got angry because her students were *fooling around* and couldn't finish their work before the end of class.
- Sometimes I wish that Pat would stop *fooling around* so much and talk about something more interesting to others.

**to look out on:** to face, to overlook

- We really enjoy our new apartment that *looks out on* a river.
- Their rear window *looks out on* a lovely garden.

**to stir up:** to cause anger (**S**); to create (trouble or difficulty) (**S**)

- The senseless murder of a small child *stirred up* the whole neighborhood.
- The boss is in a bad mood today so don't *stir her up* with any more customer complaints.

**to take in:** to visit in order to enjoy (**S**); to decrease the size of clothes (**S**); to deceive, to fool (**S**)

- We decided to *take in* Toronto on our trip to Canada, and that is where we *took in* the most memorable outdoor stage play we have ever seen.
- Lois lost so much weight that she had her skirts and slacks *taken in* by her tailor.
- The fraudulent investment advisor *took* everyone *in* with his sincere manner and generous promises. Most investors lost all their money.

## LESSON 31

## ESSENTIAL IDIOMS IN ENGLISH by ROBERT J. DIXSON

**to go through:** to undergo, to experience; to consume, to use (also: **to use up**)

The first definition is used when someone is having some hardship or difficulty.

- I can't believe what she *went through* to get that job. She had four interviews with the hiring committee in one week!
- Frank said that they had *gone through* all the toilet paper in the house, but Steve couldn't believe that they had used it all up.

**to go without saying:** to be known without the need to mention

This idiom occurs with a *that*-clause, often with the pronoun *it* as the subject.

- It *goes without saying* that you shouldn't drive quickly in bad weather.
- That he will gain weight if he continues to eat and drink so much *goes without saying*.

**to put (someone) on:** to mislead by joking or tricking (**S**)

This idiom is usually used in a continuous tense form. A noun object must divide the idiom.

- Don't worry. I wouldn't expect you do all that work by yourself. I'm just *putting you on*.
- Jack can't be serious about what he said. He must be *putting us on*.

**to keep one's head:** to remain calm during an emergency

- When the heater caused a fire, Gloria *kept her head* and phoned for assistance right away; otherwise, the whole house might have burned down.
- When the boat starting sinking in heavy seas, the crew members *kept their heads* and led the passengers to the lifeboats.

**to lose one's head:** not to think clearly, to lose one's self-control

- When Mel saw a god in the street right in front of his car, he *lost his head* and drove onto the sidewalk and into a tree.
- If the politician hadn't gotten stirred up and *lost his head*, he never would have criticized his opponent unfairly.

**narrow-minded:** not willing to accept the ideas of others (the opposite of narrow minded is **broad-minded**)

- *Narrow-minded* people tend to discriminate against groups of people with which they have nothing in common.
- Ted is so *broad-minded* that he has almost no standards by which he judges others.

**to stand up:** to withstand use or wear; to fail to appear for a date or social engagement (**S**)

- My old car has *stood up* well over the years. I haven't had any major problems at all.
- Janet was very angry because her new boyfriend *stood her up* on their second date. She waited over an hour for him before returning home.

**to get the better of:** to win or defeat by gaining an advantage over someone

## ESSENTIAL IDIOMS IN ENGLISH by ROBERT J. DIXSON

- Jim doesn't seem very athletic at tennis, but if you're not careful, he'll *get the better of* you.
- Lynn gets frustrated when Bruce *gets the better of* her in arguments. No matter what she says, he always has a clever response.

**to break loose:** to become free or loose, to escape

- During the bad storm, the boat *broke loose* from the landing and drifted out to sea.
- One bicyclist *broke loose* from the pack of racers and pulled ahead towards the finish line.

**on edge:** nervous, anxious; upset, irritable

- Cynthia was *on edge* all day about the important presentation she had to give to the local citizens group.
- I don't like being around Jake when he's *on edge* like that. Someone should tell him to calm down and relax.

**to waste one's breath:** not be able to convince someone

This idiom is used when someone is wasting time trying to convince another person. The idiom **to save one's breath** is related and means *not to waste effort trying to convince someone*.

- Don't argue with Frank any longer. You are *wasting your breath* trying to get him to agree with you.
- I have already decided what I'm going to do. You can't change my mind, so *save your breath*.

**to cut short:** to make shorter, to interrupt (S)

- The moderator asked the speaker to *cut short* his talk because there wasn't much time remaining for questions from the audience.
- We were very unfortunate when we received bad news from home that forced us to *cut* our trip *short*.

## LESSON 32

**to step in:** to become involved or concerned with something; to enter a place for a brief time (also: **to step into**)

- When the children started fighting on the play-ground, a teacher had to *step in* and stop the fight.
- The supervisor asked one of the employees to *step in* her office for a moment.
- Would you *step into* the hallway so that I can show you the information posted on the bulletin board?

**to step down:** to retire or leave a top position, to resign

- Next May the principal will *step down* after thirty-five years of service to the school.
- The angry shareholders wanted the company president to *step down* because of the stock scandal.

**to step on:** to treat severely, to discipline; to go faster, to work more quickly

## ESSENTIAL IDIOMS IN ENGLISH by ROBERT J. DIXSON

For the second definition, the idiom is followed by the pronoun *it*.

- Sometimes it's necessary to *step on* children when they do something dangerous.
- We're going to be late for the movies. You'd better *step on it!*

**a steal:** very inexpensive, a bargain

This idiom is often used in an exclamation using *what*.

- I can't believe that I paid only \$2,000 for this three year-old car. What *a steal!*
- Scott considered it *a steal* when he bought a complete bedroom set for only \$99.

**to play up to:** to behave so as to gain favor with someone

- The other students in the class resent Jim because he *plays up to* the teacher in order to get better grades.
- When my children asked me to go shopping for a new video game, I knew why they had been *playing up to* me all morning.

**more or less:** approximately, almost; somewhat, to a certain degree

- Although your bedroom feels smaller, it's *more or less* the same size as mine.
- Ted *more or less* agreed with our decision to put off the meeting until more members could show up. At least he didn't object strongly.

**to screw up:** to confuse, to scramble (**S**); to cause problems in (**S**)

- Chris had trouble finding Jane's apartment because the addresses of the buildings *screwed him up*.
- Instead of fixing the television set, the technician *screwed it up* even more.

**to goof up:** to perform badly, to make a mistake (also: **to mess up, to slip up**)

- I really *goofed up* on the exam today; did you mess up, too?
- Karen *slipped up* when she forgot to deposit money into her checking account.

**to go off the deep end:** to get very angry and do something hastily

- Just because you had a serious argument with your supervisor, you didn't have to *go off the deep end* and resign, did you?
- When Dan's wife demanded a divorce, he *went off the deep end* again. This time he was shouting so that the whole neighborhood could hear.

**to lose one's touch:** to fail at what one used to do well

- Milton used to be the best salesman at the car dealership, but recently he seems to have *lost his touch*.
- I used to play tennis very well, but today you beat me easily. I must be *losing my touch*.

**in hand:** under firm control, well managed

- The copilot asked the pilot if he had the plane *in hand* or whether he needed any help navigating through the severe thunderstorm.

## ESSENTIAL IDIOMS IN ENGLISH by ROBERT J. DIXSON

- The police officer radioed to the station that she had the emergency situation *in hand* and didn't require any assistance.

**on hand:** available, nearby

This idiom is often followed by *in case*.

- I always keep some extra money *on hand* in case I forget to get cash from the bank.
- The concert organizers arranged to have some security guards *on hand* in case there were any problems during the performance.

### LESSON 33

**to kick (something) around:** to discuss informally (over a period of time) (S) (also: **to toss around**)

- At first my friends were reluctant to consider my suggestion, but they finally were willing to *kick it ground* for a while.
- Herb thought that we should *kick around* the idea of establishing a special fund for supporting needy members of the club.

**on the ball:** attentive, competent, alert

- Jim was the only one who caught that serious error in the bookkeeping statements. He's really *on the ball*.
- Ella was certainly *on the ball* when she remembered to reconfirm our fight arrangements. All the rest of us would have forgotten.

**to make up:** to meet or fulfill a missed obligation at a later time (S); to create, to invent (an idea) (S); to apply cosmetics to (S); to comprise, to be composed of

Note that all of the definitions are separable except the last one.

- The teacher allowed several students who missed the exam to *make it up* during the next class.
- The little boy *made up* a bad excuse for wearing his dirty shoes in the house, so his mother punished him.
- Dee was able to *make* her face *up* in half the normal time because she didn't use much makeup.
- Two separate bodies --- the House of Representatives and the Senate -- - *make up* the Congress of the United States.

**to make up with:** resolve differences with

This idiom is used for differences of opinion between friends and lovers.

- Gundula *made up with* her roommate after their serious misunderstanding about arrangements for the party.
- After the bad quarrel the two lovers kissed and *made up with* each other.

**to pull together:** to gather, to collect (information) (S); to gain control of one's emotions (S)

A reflexive pronoun must be used for the second definition.

- The reporter *pulled together* information from several sources in preparing the newspaper article.

## ESSENTIAL IDIOMS IN ENGLISH by ROBERT J. DIXSON

- Mr. Simpson was so frightened when he heard footsteps behind him on the lonely, dark street that it took several minutes to *pull himself together*.

**to be looking up:** to appear promising or optimistic, to be improving  
This idiom is used in a continuous tense, very often with the subject things.

- The board chairman is glad to report that things *are looking up* for the company after several years of declining sales.
- Prospects for building that new library in the downtown area *are looking up*.

**to kick the habit:** to stop a bad habit

- Once a child becomes accustomed to chewing his nails, it's difficult *kick the habit*.
- The doctor advised the heavy cigarette smoker that her heart had become damaged and that she should *kick the habit* right away.

**to cover up:** to conceal, to hide (S)

This idiom is used for events which are potentially embarrassing to one's reputation, as well as against the law. The noun **coverup** can be formed.

- The office worker tried to *cover up* his crimes, but everyone knew that he had been stealing office supplies all along.
- The political *coverup* of the bribery scandal failed and was reported by all the major media.

**to drop off:** to fall asleep; to take to a certain location (S); to decrease (for the third definition, also: **to fall off**)

- My mother *dropped off* during the boring television show; her head was nodding up and down.
- I don't mind *dropping you off* at the store on my way to work.
- Business has been *dropping off* rapidly recently, but fortunately it hasn't been *falling off* as quickly as for our competitors.

**to turn over:** to place upside down (S); to flip, to turn upside down; to pass or give control to someone (S)

- the teacher asked the students to *turn* the answer sheet *over* and to write a short essay on the back.
- The car was going too fast around the corner and *turned over* twice.
- Mr. Collins has decided to *turn over* his jewelry store to his son at the end of the year.

**to go through channels:** to send a request through the normal way

This idiom can be used with the adjective proper.

- If you *go through proper* channels in this company, it's sometimes impossible to get anything done quickly.
- The police told the important civic leader that even she had to *go through* channels in reporting the burglary of her house.

**last straw:** the final event in a series of unacceptable actions

This idiom is always used with the definite article *the*.

## ESSENTIAL IDIOMS IN ENGLISH by ROBERT J. DIXSON

- When John asked to borrow money from me for the fourth time, it was the *last straw*. I finally told him that I couldn't lend him any more.
- I can't believe that my roommate left the door to our department unlocked again. It's the *last straw*; I'm moving out.

### LESSON 34

**to get cold feet:** to become unable or afraid to do something

This idiom is usually used in the case of an important or dangerous action.

- Karl was supposed to marry Elaine this weekend, but at the last moment he *got cold feet*.
- Only one of the rock climbers *got cold feet* when the group reached the base of the hundred-meter cliff.

**to trade in:** to receive credit for the value of an old item towards the purchase of a new item (S)

This idiom is used to form the noun **trade-in**.

- The car dealership offered me \$1,000 for my old car if I *traded it in* for a new model.
- The appliance company was offering a \$50 *trade-in* during the special promotion for its new line of refrigerators.

**face-to-face:** direct, personal; directly, personally (written without hyphens)

This idiom can be used both as an adjective (the first definition) and as an adverb (the second definition).

- The workers' representatives had a *face-to-face* meeting with management to resolve the salary issue.
- The stepmother and her teenage son talked *face to face* about his troubles in school.

**to be with (someone):** to support, to back (also: **to go along with**); to understand or follow what someone is saying

- Although others thought that we shouldn't go along with Jerry, I told Jerry that I *was with* him on his proposal for reorganizing the staff.
- After turning left at the traffic light, go two blocks and turn right on Madison. After three more blocks, turn right again. *Are you still with me?*

**to be with it:** to be able to focus or concentrate on (also: **to get with it**)

*To be with it* in the negative has the same meaning as to feel out of it. The related form *get with it* is used in commands.

- Jack's really *with it* today. I've never seen him play such good soccer.
- You've done only a small amount of work in two hours. You're *not with it* today, are you?
- It's no excuse to say that you feel out of it. We need everyone's help on this, so *get with it!*

**to fall for:** to fall in love quickly; to be fooled or tricked by

- Samantha and Derek never expected to *fall for* each other like they did, but they got married within two weeks of having met.

## ESSENTIAL IDIOMS IN ENGLISH by ROBERT J. DIXSON

- The Masons wanted to believe their son, but unfortunately they had *fallen for* his lies too many times to be deceived once again.

**it figures:** it seems likely, reasonable, or typical

This idiom is either followed by a *that*-clause or by no other part of grammar.

- *It figures* that the children were willing to help with the yardwork only if they received a rewarded for doing so.
- When I told Evan that his secretary was unhappy about not getting a raise, he said that *it figured*.

**to fill (someone) in:** to inform, to give background information to (also: **to clue in**) (S)

This idiom is often followed by the preposition *on* and a noun phrase containing the pertinent information.

- Could you *fill me in* on what is going to be discussed at tomorrow's meeting?
- Not having been to the convention, my associate asked me to *clue him in* on the proceedings.

**to make (someone) tick:** to motivate to behave or act in a certain way (S)

This idiom is used within a *what*-clause.

- If a salesperson knows what *makes* a customer *tick*, he will be able to sell a lot of merchandise.
- It's been impossible for us to figure out what *makes* our new boss *tick*. One moment she seems pleasant and then the next moment she's upset.

**to cover for:** to take someone's place temporarily, to substitute for; to protect someone by lying or deceiving

- Go ahead and take your coffee break. I'll *cover for* you until you return.
- The criminal made his wife *cover for* him when the police asked if the man had been home all day. She swore that he had been there.

**to give (someone) a break:** to provide a person with another opportunity or chance (S); not to expect too much work from (S); not to expect someone to believe (S)

Command forms are most common with this idiom. For the third definition, the pronoun *me* must be used.

- The driver pleaded with the police officer to *give him a break* and not issue him a ticket for speeding.
- When the students heard how much homework the teacher wanted them to do over the holiday, they begged, "*Give us a break*, Professor Doyle!"
- Oh, Jim, *give me a break!* That's a terrible excuse for being late.

**to bow out:** to stop doing as a regular activity, to remove oneself from a situation

The related idiom **to want out** indicates that someone desires *to bow out*.

- She *bowed out* as the school's registrar after sixteen years of service.
- One of the two partners *wanted out* of the deal because they couldn't agree on the terms of the contract.

**LESSON 35**

**to pin on:** to find guilty of a crime or offense (**S**) (also: **to hang on**)

This idiom is divided by a noun phrase containing the crime or offense. The accused person is mentioned after the preposition on.

- The prosecuting attorney tried to *pin* the murder *on* the victim's husband, but the jury returned a verdict of "not guilty."
- I wasn't anywhere near the window when it got broken. You can't *pin* that *on* me.

**to get a rise out of:** to provoke a response from

This idiom is usually used when someone is teased into responding in anger or annoyance.

- You can kid me all day about my mistake, but you won't *get a rise out of* me.
- I *got a rise out of* Marvin when I teased him about his weight. Marvin weighs over two-hundred pounds.

**to stick around:** to stay or remain where one is, to wait

This idiom is used when someone is waiting for something to happen or for someone to arrive

- Todd had to *stick around* the house all day until the new furniture was finally delivered in the late afternoon.
- Why don't you *stick around* for a while and see if Sarah eventually shows up?

**to pick up the tab:** to pay the cost or bill

This idiom applies when someone pays for the cost of another person's meal, tickets, etc.

- The advertising manger is flying to Puerto Rico for a conference, and her firm is *picking up the tab*.
- The government *picked up the tab* for the visiting dignitary. It paid for all of the lodging and meals, as well as transportation, during his stay.

**by the way:** incidentally

This idiom is used when someone thinks of something further in the course of a conversation.

- Movies are my favorite form of entertainment. Oh, *by the way*, have you seen the new picture that's playing at the Bijou?
- Vera's been divorced for three years now. She told me, *by the way*, that she never plans to remarry.

**to go to town:** to do something with enthusiasm and thoroughness

- Our interior decorator really *went to town* in remodeling our living room. I'm afraid to ask how much it's going to cost.
- Charlie really *went to town* on his research project. He consulted over forty reference works and wrote a ninety-page report.

**to let slide:** to neglect a duty (**S**); to ignore a situation (**S**)

## ESSENTIAL IDIOMS IN ENGLISH by ROBERT J. DIXSON

- Terry knew that she should have paid the electric bill on time instead of *letting it slide*. Now the utility company has turned off her service.
- When he tried to get a rise out of me by mentioning my failure to receive a promotion at work, I just *let it slide*.

**search me:** I don't know (also: **beats me**)

This idiom is used informally, usually as a command form.

- When Elmer asked his wife if she knew why the new neighbors left their garage door open all night, she responded, "*Search me*."
- When I asked Dereck why his girlfriend wasn't at the party yet, he said, "*Beats me*. I expected her an hour ago."

**to get off one's chest:** to express one's true feelings (S)

This idiom is used when someone has long waited to express themselves.

- Ellen felt a lot better when she finally talked to a counselor and *got the problem off her chest*.
- Faye hasn't shared her concern about her marriage with her husband yet. I think that she should *get it off her chest* soon.

**to live it up:** to spend money freely, to live luxuriously

- Kyle and Eric saved up money for two years so that they could travel to Europe and *live it up*.
- After receiving a large inheritance from a rich aunt, I was able to *live it up* for years.

**to liven up:** to energize, to make more active (also: **to pick up**)

- The teacher occasionally took the class on field trips just to *liven things up* a bit.
- The animals in the zoo began to *liven up* when evening came and the temperatures dropped.
- Many people have to drink coffee every morning just to *pick themselves up*.

**to have a voice in:** to share involvement in

- The new vice-president was promised that she would *have a voice in* developing the company's international expansion.
- The students are trying to *have a voice in* college affairs by gaining representation on administrative committees.

## LESSON 36

**to check in:** to register at a hotel or motel; to leave or deposit for transporting or safekeeping (S)

The adjective form *check-in* derives from this idiom.

- Courtney arrived in town at mid-day and promptly *checked in* at the Plaza Hotel. The hotel permitted an early *check-in* time.
- There dozens of people at the airline counters waiting to *check* their bags *in* for their flights.



## ESSENTIAL IDIOMS IN ENGLISH by ROBERT J. DIXSON

**to check out:** to pay the bill at a hotel or motel and then leave; to investigate, to examine (S)

The adjective form *check-out* derives from this idiom.

- The latest you should *check out* of the hotel is 12 noon. However, in your case, we can set a special check-out time of 2:00 P.M.
- The police received a call from someone claiming to have witnessed a murder. The police sent two detectives to *check* the call *out* right away.

**to take at one's word:** to accept what one says as true, to believe

- When he offered to be responsible for the fund raiser, I took him at his word. Now he's saying that he's not available to do it.
- You should be careful about taking her at her word. She's been known to say one thing but to do another.

**to serve (the/one's) purpose:** to be useful, to suit one's needs or requirements

- I don't have a screwdriver to open this, but I think that a knife will *serve the purpose*.
- Jane prefers working to studying, so it *served her purpose* to drop out of school and take that job.

**in the worst way:** very much, greatly

- Jim and Claudia want to have children *in the worst way*. They are trying very hard to conceive.
- Because Umer has relatives in Turkey, he wants to visit there *in the worst way*.

**to cop out:** to avoid one's responsibility, to quit

This idiom is an informal version of the second definition *to back out* (lesson 29). The noun form copout means *an excuse for avoiding responsibility*.

- Evelyn had agreed to help us with arrangements for the party, but she *copped out* at the last minute.
- I can't believe that Cindy offered such an explanation for failing to show up. What a poor *copout*!

**to line up:** to form a line; to arrange to have, to manage to obtain (S)

- The moviegoers *lined up* in front of the theater showing the most popular film of the summer.
- Rob is going to schedule the famous author to speak at the convention if he can *line her up* in time.

**to lose one's cool:** to get excited, angry, or flustered

- Despite the boos from some in the audience, the actors on stage never *lost their cool*.
- Although the group of skiers were in danger from an apparent avalanche, their ski guide never *lost his cool*.

**to leave open:** to delay making a decision on (S)

- In making up the job announcement, the firm decided to *leave* the salary *open* until a qualified candidate was found.

## ESSENTIAL IDIOMS IN ENGLISH by ROBERT J. DIXSON

- We know that the annual summer camp will be held in August, but let's *leave* the exact dates *open* for now.

**to turn on:** to interest greatly, to excite (S)

The idiom with the opposite meaning is to turn off. These idioms are used to form the nouns **turnon** and **turnoff**.

- Does great art *turn* you *on*? I find going to a museum and viewing classic works of art a real *turnon*.
- Going to a bar and having silly conversation with strangers really *turns* me *off*. In fact, most bar scenes are really *turnoffs* to me.

**to miss the boat:** to lose an opportunity, to fail in some undertaking

- The precious metals market was looking up several months ago, but unfortunately most investors *missed the boat*.
- Mr. Vlastic's new business went bankrupt within a short time. He really *missed the boat* by opening a tanning salon near the beach.

**to think up:** to invent, to create (also: **to dream up**)

This idiom is often used for an unusual or foolish thought.

- Who *thought up* the idea of painting the living room walls bright red?
- When asked by the teacher why she was late, the student *dreamed up* a plausible excuse.

## LESSON 37

**to throw (someone) a curve:** to introduce an unexpected topic, causing embarrassment (S)

- The first week of class was going very well until a student *threw* the teacher *a curve* by suggesting that the textbook was too difficult.
- The director asked us in advance to stick to the meeting agenda and not to *throw* him *any curves*.

**to make waves:** to create a disturbance, usually by complaining

This idiom is similar in meaning to the previous idiom, but the emphasis is on the aspect of complaining rather than causing embarrassment.

- In most companies, an employee who *makes waves* is not appreciated.
- The meeting was going smoothly until one of the participants *made waves* about the newly revised compensation package.

**to carry on:** to continue as before; to conduct, to engage in; to behave in an immature manner

- Even in the face of disaster, the inhabitants *carried on* as though nothing had happened.
- The business associates decided to *carry on* their discussion in the hotel bar instead of the conference room.
- I can't believe that John *carried on* so much just because his dog died. He looked depressed and cried for weeks after it happened.

**not on your life:** absolutely not (also: **no way**)

This idiom is used as a kind of exclamation by itself.

## ESSENTIAL IDIOMS IN ENGLISH by ROBERT J. DIXSON

- You're asking me to invest in that poorly rated company just because you know the son of the president? *Not on your life!*
- When a friend tried to get Mark to jump out of a plane with a parachute, he immediately responded, "*No way!*"

**to cover ground:** to be extensive, to discuss much material

Forms such as *a lot of*, *too much*, *too little* are used before the noun ground.

- That national commission's report on urban ghettos *covers a lot of ground*. Many of the recommendations are too costly to implement.
- In his first lecture on Greek philosophers, I thought that our professor covered *too little ground*.

**to mind the store:** to be responsible for an office while others are gone

- It seems that all of our employees are taking a lunch break at the same time. I wonder who's *mind the store*.
- Lynne agreed to *mind the store* while the others went outside to watch the parade passing by.

**to throw the book at:** to punish with full penalty, to be harsh on

- Because the criminal was a repeat offender, the judge *threw the book at* him with heavy fines and a long prison term.
- My boss *threw the book at* me when he discovered that I had been using company time for personal business. I was severely reprimanded and forced to make up the lost time.

**to put one's foot in:** to say or do the wrong thing

This idiom is used with the noun phrase *one's mouth* or the pronoun *it*.

- Fred really *put his foot in his mouth* when he called his supervisor by the wrong name.
- I really *put my foot in it* when I forgot my girlfriend's birthday and didn't buy her anything. She almost lost her cool.

**to be up for grabs:** to become available to others

this idiom is used when something is highly desirable to many other people.

- When one of the full-time contract instructors stepped down, her nice office overlooking the river *was up for grabs*.
- Did you know that Senator Stone is retiring and that her Senate seat *is up for grabs*?

**to show off:** to display one's ability in order to attract attention (**S**); to let others see, to expose to public view (**S**)

This idiom can form the noun showoff for the first definition.

- Elizabeth is an excellent swimmer, but I don't like the way she *shows off* in front of everyone. It's very obvious that she enjoys being a *showoff*.
- Jacquie *showed* her large wedding ring *off* to all her friends.

**to learn the ropes:** to become familiar with routine procedures at work or school

- The job applicant didn't have much previous experience or knowledge, but she seemed intelligent enough to *learn the ropes* quickly.

## ESSENTIAL IDIOMS IN ENGLISH by ROBERT J. DIXSON

- It took the new schoolteacher a year to *learn the ropes* regarding administrative and curricular matters.

**to keep one's fingers crossed:** to hope to have good results, to hope that nothing bad will happen

This idiom reflects the way people cross their fingers to hope for good luck.

- Let's *keep our fingers crossed* that we got passing grades on that college entrance exam.
- Jerry *kept his fingers crossed* that the good weather would hold up for the picnic he was planning for the coming weekend.

### LESSON 38

**to land on one's feet:** to recover safely from an unpleasant or dangerous situation

- After a series of personal and professional difficulties, it's amazing that George has *landed on his feet* so quickly.
- Some young adults get into so much trouble at school that they are never able to *land on their feet* again. They drop out before graduating.

**to dish out:** to distribute in large quantity (**S**); to speak of others in a critical manner (**S**)

- Mary's mom *dished out* two or three scoops of ice cream for each child at the birthday party.
- Larry can't seem to take any criticism of his actions but he certainly likes to *dish it out*.

**to get through to:** to communicate with, to make someone understand (also: **to break through to**)

This idiom has the meaning of *to make someone "catch on"* (Lesson 29, eighth idiom, the first definition)

- Some of the students in my reading class understand English so poorly that it is difficult to *get through to* them.
- The doctors have never succeeded in *breaking through to* Mr. Ames, who is a silent and secretive patient.

**to keep one's word:** to fulfill a promise, to be responsible

An idiom with the opposite meaning is **to break one's word**.

- Suzanne *kept her word* to me not to let on to others that I intend to step down next month.
- Thomas always intends to keep his word, but invariably the end result is that he *breaks his word*. He just isn't capable of being a responsible person.

**to be over one's head:** to be very busy, to have too much to do (also: **to be up to one's ears**); to be beyond one's ability to understand

- I'd love to take a week off for a hiking trip, but at the moment I *am over my head* in work. Maybe next week when I'm only up to my ears!
- It was impossible for the tutor to get through to Bill about the physics problem because the subject matter *was over Bill's head*.

## ESSENTIAL IDIOMS IN ENGLISH by ROBERT J. DIXSON

**to ask for:** to deserve, to receive a just punishment (also: **to bring upon**)

- If you drink alcohol and then drive a car, you're only *asking for* trouble.
- Don't complain about your cut in salary. You *asked for* it by refusing to heed our repeated warnings not to be late and inefficient.

**to be a far cry from:** to be very different from

- I enjoyed visiting Seattle, but it *was a far cry from* the ideal vacation spot I expected.
- Ned is enjoying his new job, but his responsibilities *are a far cry from* what he was told they would be.

**by all means:** certainly, definitely, naturally (also: **of course**); using any possible way or method

- If the Johnsons invite us for dinner, then by all means we have to return the invitation. *Of course*, we don't have to invite their children, too.
- In order to ensure its survival, the ailing company has to obtain an infusion of cash *by all means*.

**to get out from under:** to restore one's financial security, to resolve a difficult financial obligation

- After years of struggling to get ahead, the young couple *finally got out from under* their debts.
- The ailing company, succeeding in obtaining the necessary cash, was able to *get out from under* its financial burdens.

**to take the bull by the horns:** to handle a difficult situation with determination

This idiom is usually used when someone has been postponing an action for some time and finally wants or needs to resolve it.

- After three years of faithful service, Jake decided to take the *bull by the horns* and ask his boss for a raise.
- Vic has been engaged to Laura for a long time now, and I know that he loves her. He should *take the bull by the horns* and ask her to marry him.

**to give (someone) a hand:** to assist, to aid, to help (also: **to lend someone a hand**) (S)

- Would you *give me a hand* lifting this heavy box?
- When Terry's car broke down at night on the highway, no one would stop to *lend her a hand*.

**to give (someone) a big hand:** to clap one's hands in applause, to applaud (S)

- After the talented new vocalist had sung her number, the audience *gave her a big hand*.
- Should we *give a big hand* to each beauty contestant as she is introduced, or should we wait until all the introductions are finished?

LESSON 39

**to goof off:** to waste time, to be idle

- Some of the workers in our office always *goof off* when the boss is out.
- On Saturday afternoons, I like to go to a movie or just *goof off* at home.

**to talk back to:** to answer in a rude manner, to speak to disrespectfully

- Billy, if you *talk back* to me like that once more, you're going to spend the rest of the day in your room.
- The school principal had to reprimand the child for *talking back* to her teacher.

**to be in:** to be popular or fashionable; to be available at one's work or home

- Most young people tend to want anything that *is in* at the time, but a few don't care about current trends.
- Could you please tell me when Mrs. Zachary will *be in*? I'd like to talk to her soon.

**to be out:** to be unpopular or no longer in fashion; to be away from one's work or home

- These days, designer jeans are in and long skirts *are out*.
- I'm sorry, Mr. Jensen *is out* at the moment. Could I take a message?

**to draw the line at:** to determine to be unacceptable, to refuse to consider

- I don't mind helping him with his homework, but I *draw the line at* writing a term paper for him.
- The conference organizers tried to accommodate the needs of the various interest groups, but they *drew the line at* extending the conference by two days.

**to get out of line:** to disobey or ignore normal procedures or rules (also: **to step out of line**)

- When a child *gets out of line* in that teacher's class, she uses the old-fashioned method of making the child sit in the corner of the room.
- Any employee who *steps out of line* by coming to work in an unacceptable condition will be fired.

**dry run:** rehearsal, practice session

- The college president requested a *dry run* of the graduation ceremony in order to ensure that all aspects went smoothly.
- Before the manager presented the reorganizational plans to the board of directors, he did several *dry runs* of his presentation.

**to play by ear:** to play music that one has heard but never read (**S**); to proceed without plan, to do spontaneously (**S**)

The pronoun *it* is often used with the second definition.

- That pianist can *play* most popular *music by ear*. She never needs to read sheet music.
- My husband wanted to plan our trip carefully, but I argued that it was more fun if we *played it by ear*.

## ESSENTIAL IDIOMS IN ENGLISH by ROBERT J. DIXSON

**to be in (someone's) shoes:** to be in another person's position, to face the same situation as another person

- If I *were in your shoes*, I wouldn't take too many classes this semester.
- When his boss finds out about that accounting error, I wouldn't want to *be in his shoes*.

**to keep after:** to remind constantly, to nag

- Lynn always has to *keep after* her children about cleaning up their rooms and doing chores around the house.
- Lon is so forgetful that it's necessary to *keep after* him about every little thing.

**to fix up:** to repair or put back in good condition (**S**); to arrange a date or an engagement for another person (**S**)

- Instead of buying an expensive new home, we decided to buy an older home and fix it up ourselves.
- Since my visiting friend didn't have a date for dinner, I fixed her up with a male friend of mine. They got along very well together.

**to be had:** to be victimized or cheated

- When the jeweler confirmed that the diamonds that the woman had purchased abroad were really fake, she exclaimed, "*I've been had!*"
- The angry customer complained about being overcharged at the store, asserting that this was the third time that he *had been had*.