

# 10 idioms you have to learn!

Understanding and knowing how to use idioms is a great way to show what a high level of English you've got. So, just to help you with that, here are some really useful idioms for you. Try using one a day so you start to remember them.

## 1 Drive you round the bend



If someone or something "drives you round the **bend**", it really annoys you or makes you angry.

**Example:** "That noise is driving me round the bend!"

## 2 Do your head in



If something "does your head in", it makes you feel angry or frustrated.

**Example:** "My friends have been staying at my house for over 4 weeks now and they never do any cleaning or buy any food. It's starting to do my head in."

## 3 Add fuel to the fire



If you "add **fuel** to the fire", you do something that makes a bad situation or argument even worse.

**Example:** "Arresting the leaders will only add fuel to the fire and could **turn** the protest **into** a full-scale **riot**."

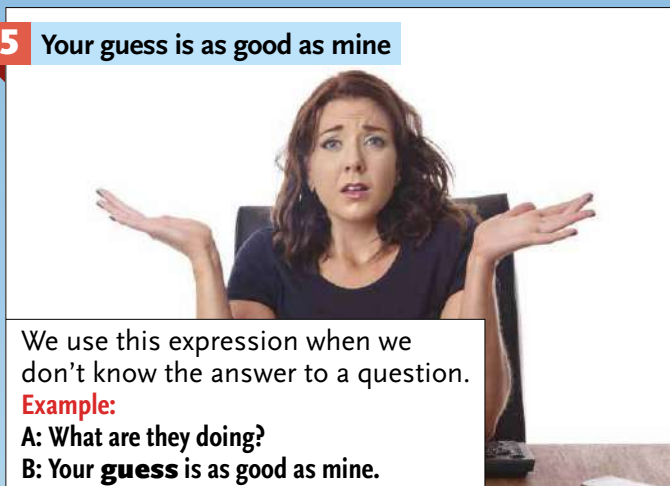
## 4 Get your head around something



If you "get your head around something", you start to understand it.

**Example:** "I didn't understand any of this at first, but I'm starting to get my head around it now."

## 5 Your guess is as good as mine



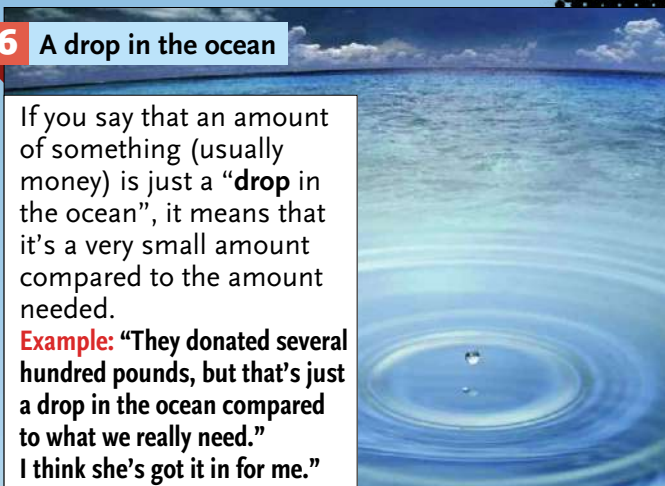
We use this expression when we don't know the answer to a question.

**Example:**

A: What are they doing?

B: Your **guess** is as good as mine.

## 6 A drop in the ocean



If you say that an amount of something (usually money) is just a "**drop** in the ocean", it means that it's a very small amount compared to the amount needed.

**Example:** "They donated several hundred pounds, but that's just a drop in the ocean compared to what we really need." I think she's got it in for me."

## 7 The ball is in their court



If “the ball is in someone’s **court**”, it’s their turn to act or do something so you can all progress, or before the situation can improve.

**Example:** “Well, we’ve done everything we can at this stage – the ball is in their court now.”

## 8 Step up your game



If you “step up your game”, you improve and become more skillful, often by learning some new techniques or practising a lot.

**Example:** “She really needs to step up her game if she wants to get into the basketball team.”

## 9 Bite off more than you can chew

If you “bite off more than you can **chew**”, you try to do too much, or you start doing something that you won’t be able to finish.

**Example:** “I told them I could fix the computer, but it’s a lot more complicated than I thought. I think I’ve bitten off more than I can chew.”



## 10 Can’t have your cake and eat it



If you “can’t have your cake and eat it”, you can’t have two things at the same time because it’s impossible – you have to choose one of them. For example, you either have your cake or you eat your cake, but you can’t have both things – logically, if you eat the cake, you won’t “have” it!

**Example:** “You can’t expect to pay less tax and have a great public health system – you can’t have your cake and eat it.”

In the UK, this expression has become associated with **Brexit**. During negotiations between the UK and the **EU**, Prime Minister Boris Johnson once said, “My policy on cake is **pro** having it and pro eating it.” This in reference to his desire to have all the best bits of EU membership that they like (free trade, zero **tariffs**, cheap mobile phones, etc.) and none of the bits they didn’t want (membership fees, free movement of people, etc.). In response, the EU said that Britain couldn’t “**cherry pick**”. If you “cherry pick”, you choose the best bits from something and (the ones you want) and leave the rest.

### Can’t have your cake and eat it in other languages:

Interestingly, other languages have their own version of this expression can’t have your cake and eat it.

**Here are a few of them.**

#### You can’t...

- ... have a swim and not get wet. **[Albanian]**
- ... have the wolf fed and the lamb intact. **[Bulgarian]**
- ... sit on two chairs at the same time. **[Czech]**
- ... have the butter and the money used to buy the butter. **[French]**
- ... dance at two weddings at the same time. **[German]**
- ... want the barrel full of wine and the wife drunk. **[Italian]**
- ... ride two horses with one backside. **[Hungarian]**



# 10 idioms you have to learn! Exercises!

Answers on page 48

## 1 Word choice

Choose the correct words to complete each sentence.

Can you remember what the expressions mean?

1. Doing that will just add **petrol / fuel** to the fire.
2. I'm starting to get my **brain / head** around the complex theory.
3. Well, the balls in your **field / court** now so we'll wait for your response.
4. He'll need to step up his **game / play** if he wants to play in this orchestra.
5. In this case, you'll have to make a decision – you can't have your **cake / biscuit** and eat it.



## 2 Gap fill

Complete each sentence with the correct words from below.

Can you remember what the expressions mean?

**drop** **head** **guess** **bend** **chew**

1. Stop doing that! It's driving me around the \_\_\_\_\_.
2. Their ridiculous attitude and stilly games are just doing my \_\_\_\_\_ in.
3. I think he's bitten off more than he can \_\_\_\_\_ by taking on that much responsibility.

4. I don't know. Your \_\_\_\_\_ is as good as mine
5. They contributed over \$20,000, but that's just a \_\_\_\_\_ in the ocean.



## 3 Memory challenge

Now see if you can remember the expressions without any help!

1. You can't have both things – you can't have your \_\_\_\_\_ and eat it.
2. You'll need to \_\_\_\_\_ up your game if you want to get into the team.
3. He's starting to get his \_\_\_\_\_ around the course material.
4. That beeping noise is driving me round the \_\_\_\_\_!
5. If you do that, you'll just add fuel to the \_\_\_\_\_.
6. That's very generous of you, but it's just a drop in the \_\_\_\_\_ compared to what we need.
7. I have no idea what the answer is. Your \_\_\_\_\_ is as good as mine
8. There isn't much we can do now because the ball is in their \_\_\_\_\_.
9. When people do things like that, it really does my \_\_\_\_\_ in.
10. By taking on that job, I think we've bitten off more than we can \_\_\_\_\_.

