

some, sum  
sole, soul  
steel, steal  
suit, suite, soot  
stationery, stationary

sore, soar  
seer, sear  
sea, see  
some, sum  
son, sun

vain, vein  
vale, veil  
wave, waive  
waste, waist  
weak, week

## 1.7. IDIOMS AND PHRASES

**What is an Idiom ?** An idiom is a fixed group of words with a special meaning which is different from the meaning of the individual words in that group of words. For example, rat race. These two words come together. So they are called a term : 'rat race' as a term refers neither to rats nor of rats running in an open space. As used in a sentence: "There is a rat race for management education". Here, 'rat race' refers to the mindless craze among students for acquiring an MBA degree without taking into account whether they actually need it or whether they have aptitude for being managers. Here the term "rat race" has a single implied meaning : that a large number of students are opting for an MBA programme without examining whether they need it or not. Thus "rat race" is an idiom. It has a meaning quite different from its literal representation.

### What is a Phrase ?

When verbs come with some propositions and/or adverbs in such a manner that they form a fixed group of words with a special meaning they are called phrases. For examples :

- (a) The electricity supply went off. We do not say 'The electricity supply went out.' Therefore, "went off" is a phrase.
- (b) He swallowed his pride. We do not say : He ate his pride. Here, "to swallow pride" is a phrase.
- (c) He tipped the police off. Here "tip off" is a phrase. We don't say : He tipped the police on.
- (d) The committee fell back on an earlier plan. Here, "fell back on" is a phrase. We don't say "He went down on an earlier plan".

### Why do we use the terms 'idioms and phrases' together ?

There are certain differences between idioms and phrases. A phrase normally has a Verb + Preposition/Adverb structure. An idiom can be a term of any grammatical combination. Example : 'He is building castles in the air'. Here, "castles in the air" has Noun + Preposition + Article + Noun combination.

But there are basic similarities in the way in which idioms and phrases are used together. Some of these are :

Both idioms and phrases come in the same way, both in grammatical combination as well as in their meaning. For example, in the sentence "His promotion has stepped up the social status of his family," the term "stepped up" can't be replaced or substituted by "pushed up", "pressed up", or any other term. Similarly, in the sentence "they were asking for a lion's share in the company", the idiom "a lion's share" (Article + Noun + Noun) can't be replaced in meaning, feeling and tone by the words 'the greater' or 'major' share. For this reason, idioms and phrases are called **iron-cast terms**. Their grammatical forms can't be substituted by other words. It is for this similarity in grammatical structure that the terms idioms and phrases are used together.

41. **Look before you leap (advise somebody to think about the possible consequences of his/her actions)** : "You want to start your own business and resign from the job. Please look before you leap."
42. **Learn the hard way (to find out how to behave by learning from unpleasant experiences)** : He has learned the hard way not to interfere in the personal problems of his brother.
43. **A (new) lease of life (the chance to live longer with a better quality of life)** : His hip operation has given him a new lease of life.
44. **The Least I can do (I feel I should do more)** : It is the least I can do to help with money.
45. **At the very least (the lowest possible)** : It will take a year to build the flyover, at the very least.
46. **Left-handed compliment (grudging recognition)** : You know the nature of the Chief Boss, you can expect at the most a left-handed compliment for the excellent work you have done.
47. **At leisure (with no particular activity)** : Let's have lunch so we can talk at leisure.
48. **Lend an ear (to listen in a patient and sympathetic way)** : The Supreme Court lent an ear to the plea of the blind students that they be allowed to study engineering courses like IT and Computer Science.
49. **At length (for a long time and in great detail)** : We have already discussed this matter at great length.
50. **The next man (the average person)** : I can enjoy a joke as well as the next man, but this is going too far.
51. **The soft/easy option (a choice that involves less effort and gives the impression of incompetence in making that choice)** : The University is anxious that new B.A/B.Sc (Hons.) courses should not be seen as a soft option.

## 1.8. COMMON PHRASES

### (a) Verb + Preposition Phrases

take care (of)

take charge (of)

take control (of)

take heed (of)

take one's leave (of)

take down

take for

pick up

piece out

reach down

talk at

talk back

talk down

reach down

used to

come up

cash in (on)

cast a cold eye (on)

club together

hand in

hand off

hand on

enroll in

enshrined in

deceived in

deceive into

indulge in

work towards

work under

work up

### 1.7.1 Common Idioms

1. **At home** : Sit down and make yourself at home (comfortable).
2. **Caught napping** : To get an advantage over someone by taking him unawares.  
The abolition of import duty on garments by the developed countries has caught the Indian exporters napping; now they are doing their best to take advantage of the new situation.
3. **To leave in the lurch (to desert in difficulty)** : The company has been running at a loss for some time, but the top employees have not been left it in the lurch. I am sure that it will soon will make a modest profit.
4. **Nip in the bud (to check an ugly situation at the very beginning, before it grows)** : Indiscipline must be nipped in the bud, otherwise it destroys an organisation.
5. **Null and Void (cancelled)** : The court declared null and void the allotment of plots in the lottery.
6. **Once and for all (permanently)** : The recurring losses in the factory have led to its closure once and for all.
7. **On the spur of the moment (impulsively, without previous thought)** : On the spur of the moment he decided to buy the shares an IT company, which in due course brought him good returns.
8. **On the verge of (at the point of)** : He is on the verge of starting his own firm.
9. **To play second fiddle (to act as a subordinate)** : Because of his ego, he refused to play second fiddle as the Vice-President of the company. He wanted the job of CEO which was denied to him.
10. **Road Block (hurdle in an endeavour)** : Despite the new treaty on nuclear cooperation between India and USA, there are road blocks in the path of the Indo-American joint venture in nuclear energy.
11. **To save face (Avoid disgrace)**: The compromise announced by the brothers is a face saving device. The disagreements are too deep to be sorted out in one go.
12. **In the heat of the moment (angry and excited)**: In the heat of the moment he said a lot of things he regretted later.
13. **The heat of the day (a burning issue of the time)**: The Gandhian ideology was the heat of the day during the pre-independence period.
14. **Take to heart (to be upset by something)** : He took to heart the harsh remarks of his boss and decided to quit the company.
15. **Heart of the matter (the central issue in the problem which does not have an easy solution)** : The heart of the matter regarding the crisis in higher education in India is how to debureaucratize it from intrusive rules and regulations.
16. **Hedge your bets (to have several choices available in order to reduce the risk or making mistakes)** : Although he was always loyal to his boss, yet he hedged his bets by silently establishing a good rapport to the next in command and control.
17. **Hard on the heels (very close behind)** : News of rising unemployment followed hard on the heels of falling exports.
18. **Neither here nor there (irrelevant)** : What might have happened is neither here nor there.
19. **Hold good (to be true)** : The same argument does not hold good in every case.

20. **No holds barred (with no rules or limits)** : The Prime Minister gave a no holds barred interview to the press on the Indo-US Nuclear Treaty.
21. **Make a hole (spend a large amount of money)** : Tuitions fees make a big hole in the parent's income.
22. **On the horizon (likely to happen soon)** : There is trouble looming on the horizon.
23. **Straight from the horse's mouth (of information given by someone who is directly involved and therefore likely to be accurate)** : In the office, he got the information concerning his promotion straight from the horse's mouth.
24. **Hot on heels (following very closely)** : Further successes came hot on the heels of her first best-selling novel.
25. **The human touch (the ability to make ordinary people feel relaxed when they meet them)** : The public is always attracted to politicians who have the human touch.
26. **To break the ice (to say or to do something that makes people feel relaxed)** : There were some difficult decisions to be taken in the meeting, but the chairman broke the ice by taking a positive view regarding the prospect of profit in the company.
27. **Be implicated (to be involved in crime)** : Senior officials are implicated in the crime.
28. **Get in on (to be involved in something)** : I would like to be in on the plan as it holds out the promise of quick returns.
29. **In and out (going regularly to a place)** : He was in and out of jail for most of his life.
30. **The ins and outs (to know complicated details of something)** : He quickly learned the ins and outs of the job.
31. **Every inch (the whole of something)** : In his very first game, the young player looked every inch a winner.
32. **Not inconsiderable (large enough to be considered important)** : We have spent a not an inconsiderable amount of money on the project already.
33. **A friend in need (a true friend)** : A friend in need is a friend indeed.
34. **Under the influence (having had too much alcohol to drink)** : He was charged with driving under the influence of alcohol.
35. **And all that jazz (spoken informally implying things like that)** : How's it going ? You know.. love, life and all that jazz.
36. **The jewel in the crown (the most attractive or valuable part of something)** : India was the jewel in the crown that was the British Empire.
37. **Go for the jugular (to attack somebody's weakest point during a discussion in an aggressive way)** : The members of the opposition in the Parliament went for the jugular on the Government's failure to rehabilitate the flood victims.
38. **Jump the gun (to do something before the right time)** : The investors may not jump the gun of buying the shares of the Mutual Fund immediately after the presentation of the budget in the Parliament. They may follow the policy of wait and watch.
39. **The kiss of death (an event that seems good, but is certain make something else fail)** : An award can be the kiss of death for a writer.
40. **The knives are out (the situation has become so bad that people are preparing one person take the blame)** : The knives are out for the Chief Minister.

41. **Look before you leap (advise somebody to think about the possible consequences of his/her actions)** : "You want to start your own business and resign from the job. Please look before you leap."
42. **Learn the hard way (to find out how to behave by learning from unpleasant experiences)** : He has learned the hard way not to interfere in the personal problems of his brother.
43. **A (new) lease of life (the chance to live longer with a better quality of life)** : His hip operation has given him a new lease of life.
44. **The Least I can do (I feel I should do more)** : It is the least I can do to help with money.
45. **At the very least (the lowest possible)** : It will take a year to build the flyover, at the very least.
46. **Left-handed compliment (grudging recognition)** : You know the nature of the Chief Boss, you can expect at the most a left-handed compliment for the excellent work you have done.
47. **At leisure (with no particular activity)** : Let's have lunch so we can talk at leisure.
48. **Lend an ear (to listen in a patient and sympathetic way)** : The Supreme Court lent an ear to the plea of the blind students that they be allowed to study engineering courses like IT and Computer Science.
49. **At length (for a long time and in great detail)** : We have already discussed this matter at great length.
50. **The next man (the average person)** : I can enjoy a joke as well as the next man, but this is going too far.
51. **The soft/easy option (a choice that involves less effort and gives the impression of incompetence in making that choice)** : The University is anxious that new B.A/B.Sc (Hons.) courses should not be seen as a soft option.

## 1.8. COMMON PHRASES

### (a) Verb + Preposition Phrases

take care (of)

take charge (of)

take control (of)

take heed (of)

take one's leave (of)

take down

take for

pick up

piece out

reach down

talk at

talk back

talk down

reach down

used to

come up

cash in (on)

cast a cold eye (on)

club together

hand in

hand off

hand on

enroll in

enshrined in

deceived in

deceive into

indulge in

work towards

work under

work up

use up  
 cater to  
 caught up in  
 come from/of  
 come home to  
 flash at  
 flash back  
 flash into  
 live it up  
 live up to  
 live with  
 move in (on)  
 move into  
 buy in  
 buy oneself in/into  
 buy off  
 line up (against)  
 line up alongside/with  
 line up behind  
 let in for  
 let in/into  
 let in on  
 bring into (focus/force play)  
 take care of  
 take charge of  
 take control of  
 be at attention  
 be at a dead end  
 be at an end  
 be at a halt/stand still  
 be hard at it/work  
 take offence (at)  
 take umbrage (at)

wash up  
 washed up  
 fear for  
 fed up (with)  
 feed back (into/to)  
 rumour about/abroad  
 run about  
 run across  
 push over  
 push-over  
 burn up

drive in (v)  
 drive-in (n)  
 act for  
 act on/upon  
 convert into  
 work up (into)  
 build up/from  
 build (up) into

agree with  
 bring round (to))  
 be out of (action)  
 do with  
 do business with  
 keep in  
 keep in check  
 be at it  
 bet at pains to do  
 what be at  
 take it (at) face value  
 take a look (at)

### (b) Articles + Possessive and Negatives

have a **flair/gift** for  
 have no **fears/terrors**  
 (for)  
 lay one's **hand** on  
**never/not** lay a finger on  
 make a **note** (of)