

# Proverbs and Idiomatic Expressions

## Proverbs

Proverbs are old, well-known and wise statements that often give advice. Here are a list of common proverbs and their meanings.

Proverb	Meaning
A rolling stone gathers no moss.	A person who does not settle down is not attached to anything or anyone.
Rome was not built in one day.	It takes a lot of time to achieve something important.
A rotten apple spoils the barrel.	A bad person influences everyone he or she comes into contact with, making them bad too.
A leopard cannot change its spots.	One cannot change the basic way one is.
A stitch in time saves nine.	If you fix a small problem right away, it will not become a bigger problem later.
Beauty is only skin-deep.	A person who looks beautiful may not have a pleasing personality; a person's good looks may not last.
Better the devil you know than the devil you don't know.	If you have to choose between a familiar but unpleasant situation and an unfamiliar situation, choose the familiar one because the unfamiliar situation may turn out to be worse.
Birds of a feather flock together.	Similar people tend to associate with each other.
Blood is thicker than water.	People who are related have stronger obligations to each other than to people outside the family.
A chain is no stronger than its weakest link.	A successful group or team relies on each member doing well.
Every cloud has a silver lining.	You can derive some benefit from every bad thing that happens to you.
Early to bed, early to rise, makes a man healthy, wealthy and wise.	Going to bed early and waking up early is good for success.
Give someone enough rope and he will hang himself.	If you give someone that you suspect of bad behavior the freedom to behave badly, eventually he or she will be caught and punished.
Honesty is the best policy.	You should always tell the truth, even when it seems as if it would be useful to tell a lie.
It's no use crying over spilt milk.	Do not be upset about making a mistake, since you cannot change that now.
An idle brain is the devil's workshop.	People who have nothing worthwhile to think about will usually think of something bad to do.
A new broom sweeps clean.	Someone who is new in a particular job will do a very good job at first, to prove how competent he or she is.
Make hay while the sun shines.	If you have an opportunity to do something, do it before the opportunity expires.

## Proverbs

Idiomatic expressions (or simply *idioms*) are familiar sentences or phrases that are used to describe things or situations. The real meanings of idioms are different to their literal meanings. For example, the idiom *The cat is out of the bag* does not mean that a cat is no longer in a bag. It means that a secret has been revealed.

You need to learn the meanings of idioms. Here is a list of common idioms and their meanings.

Idiom	Meaning
A fair-weather friend	Someone who is your friend only when things are going well for you
To put all your eggs in one basket	To make everything dependent on only one thing
It never rains but it pours.	Things always happen in large numbers all at once.
To be under the weather	To be ill
To tighten your belt	To spend less money
To add fuel to the flames	To make a difficult situation worse
To bite the hand that feeds you	To do harm to someone who cares for you
To burn your bridges	To do something that will be impossible to correct in the future
To dig your own grave	To do something that causes your own downfall
To give the shirt off your back	To be very generous and caring
To give a taste of someone's own medicine	To do the same bad thing to someone that they have often done to you, in order to show them how unpleasant it is
To keep your feet on the ground	To have a realistic understanding of your own ideas, actions and decisions
To make a mountain out of a molehill	To make a small problem seem like a serious problem
To kill two birds with one stone	To do two things at the same time
To rain cats and dogs	To rain very hard
Crocodile tears	False tears
A fish out of water	To be uncomfortable in an unfamiliar environment

## Exercise

Copy the following table into your and match the proverbs and idioms in the left-hand column with their correct meanings in the right-hand column.

Proverb / Idiom	Meaning
Don't count your chickens before they are hatched.	To hear something from someone who knows the facts
Don't judge a book by its cover.	Leave something alone if it might cause trouble.
It is always darkest before dawn.	Something you are waiting for will not happen while you are concentrating on it.
Let sleeping dogs lie.	Wait until a good thing happens before you make any plans about it.
It cost an arm and a leg.	Being curious can get you into trouble.
To cross a bridge when you come to it	The most difficult time is just before the problem is solved.
Curiosity killed the cat.	It was very expensive.
To hear something from the horse's mouth	Having something for certain is better than the possibility of getting something better.
A watched pot never boils.	Don't judge by appearances.
A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush.	To not worry about a problem until it happens