

50 IDIOMS

FROM ENGLISH CONVERSATIONS

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Helping you Become a Confident English Speaker

Many IELTS students lack confidence in their speaking skills.

The Keith Speaking Academy helps you develop your speaking skills so you can face the examiner with confidence and ace the IELTS test.

This PDF is one of many that Keith has developed to help you do this.



Keith has been working in international education for over 20 years as a teacher, teacher trainer, and education manager.

He has helped over 40,000 students prepare for their IELTS Speaking test with his online courses.

Should I use idioms in IELTS speaking? This is a question many students struggle with.

An idiom by the way, is an expression that has a different meaning from the individual words.

For example,

- To **hang up your boots**

This doesn't mean to hang your boots on the wall, but rather it means **to retire or stop working**.

You've probably seen some idioms on YouTube videos, but you still may not be sure how common they really are and how many you should use in IELTS speaking.

This is partly because social media is confusing and often contradictory, but don't worry because here are the answers.



How common are idioms in spoken English?

I did a little research on this.

I listened to 100 minutes of natural conversations and discovered around 150 idioms.

You can probably do the maths which means that's about **1.5 idioms in 1 minute** of English spoken at a natural pace.

Let's say 3 idioms in 2 minutes.

If you're thinking in IELTS terms, that would be 3 idioms in your part 2 answer.

This was not a scientific experiment, it was a small one, but it can give us an approximate answer.

How many idioms should I use in IELTS speaking?

You are going to hate this answer, but...

...it really depends.

English is not maths, it's **not** about using a certain number of idioms.

It's about using them when they help you express your ideas better.

Yes, you need to use some to get a Band 7 in IELTS Speaking, or above. However, don't think too much about this in your exam, or else you will block.

Don't count them, and certainly don't structure your answers around idioms. At the end of the day, idioms are a small part of your final score.

Once you have learnt some idioms, practice them, and only use them when they pop into your mind naturally in the exam.



50 Idioms from English conversations

So, here are some (50) of the idioms I discovered.

They are from conversations from a popular radio drama, and they take place in everyday situations of common British folk.

Conversations in houses, the pub, on the farm, in shops and so on.

I have listed the idioms below by category.

- **Work**
- **Disagreeing**
- **Feelings**
- **Gossip**
- **Relationships**
- **Ideas**
- **Food**
- **Shopping**

Watch the full video of my explaining these idioms here:

https://youtu.be/_dh5LP4S7dI



Idioms about WORK

1. **A busman's holiday** = Free time spent doing what you usually do for work
2. **I got caught up in some work** = I became involved in a task or job, for longer than expected
3. **You really know your stuff / onions** = You are very knowledgeable in a particular subject
4. **I've hung up my boots** = I have retired or stopped working
5. **All your hard work has really paid off** = The effort put into a task has resulted in a successful outcome
6. **It turned out great** = It was successful, better than expected
7. **Don't worry, I'm on top of it** = I am fully in control of the situation or task
8. **I don't want to pull rank, but ...** = Said to assert your authority or seniority in a situation to take control
9. **I handed in my notice** = I resigned from my job



10. She has put blood, sweat, and tears into this place = She invested a lot of hard work into this task or project

11. Everything went pear-shaped = It all went wrong or badly, often unexpectedly

12. To boss me about = To give orders to control me

13. You've had a lot on [your plate] recently = You had to deal with a lot of responsibilities or challenges in your life

14. I will run everything by you first = I will seek your approval or input before making decisions

Idioms about DISAGREEING

15. They're going to kick up a stink = To kick up a fuss, to disagree and protest strongly about something

16. They're going to fight tooth and nail = To fight strongly for something

17. I beg to differ = I disagree

18. Let's not nitpick = Don't focus on small details or mistakes

19. You're splitting hairs = You are being overly critical about small and unimportant differences or details

20. You're not going to drop it, are you? = You won't stop discussing or raising a topic or issue

21. No can-do = I cannot do that, that's not possible.

Idioms about FEELINGS

22. I've had it up to here = I am extremely frustrated, annoyed, or fed up

23. What really bugs me = What really annoys me

24. I was over the moon = I was extremely happy or delighted

25. My nerves got the better of me = I was so nervous, I lost control

26. What possessed you? = Why did you do that? (unexpected or irrational action)

27. I'm sorry I got so worked up = I got overly emotional, excited, or agitated about something



Idioms about GOSSIP

28. Between you and me = Saying something that is confidential or secret statement...keep it secret

29. A little bird tells me = This is a playful or casual way to say you have information from a secret source - typically used when sharing gossip or news.

30. Word gets around = This expression means that information or rumours tend to spread among people.

31. Spill the beans = ask someone to reveal a secret or share information

Idioms about RELATIONSHIP

32. She can run rings round him = She can outperform or outsmart him easily

33. I think I've blown it with him = I've made a serious mistake and ruined a relationship or situation

34. He's a nightmare = He is very difficult to deal with or causes a lot of problems

35. I wasn't sure where I stood = I wasn't sure about my position or status in a particular situation or relationship

36. We have our moments = We have bad times as well as good ones

37. She's a hoot = She is very entertaining or funny

38. Let's just wipe the slate clean = Let's start fresh or anew



Idioms about IDEAS

39. I did toy with the idea of starting again = I considered or thought about starting again

40. Let's park that idea for the moment = Let's postpone or put that idea on the side

41. This idea has got legs = This idea has the potential to be successful

42. We need to push the envelope = It's necessary to go beyond existing limits

43. He's already written off the idea = He has given up on an idea because it won't work

44. That idea was totally off the cuff = That idea was spontaneous and unplanned

Idioms about FOOD

45. They lay on a great spread = They give a great selection of food and drinks for an event

46. It was a decent meal = It was a reasonable meal of quite good quality

47. Let me top up your glass = Let me refill your glass with a drink

Idioms about SHOPPING

48. I've got my eyes on something = I want to buy something

49. To fork out money for/on them = To spend too much money, often reluctantly

50. I bought it for a song = I bought it for a cheap price



There you are!

50 awesome idioms you can start practicing today.

If you would like to learn more idioms, then have a look at my online course

[150 Idioms for IELTS Speaking](#)

They are different from the ones in this PDF, and the course will also show you what they mean, when and how to use them, as well as how to pronounce them with perfect intonation.



Find out more information about IELTS Speaking here:

WWW.KEITHSPEAKINGACADEMY.COM

