



# Handy Handouts®

Free informational handouts for educators, parents, and students

## Idioms—"As Easy as ABC"

by Kevin Stuckey, M.Ed., CCC-SLP and Julie A. Daymut, M.A., CCC-SLP

### What Are Idioms?

Idioms are a type of figurative language. They are expressions (words and phrases) that generally have a different meaning from the literal meanings of the words together that make them. Different cultures use different idioms; however, many well-known idioms are not specific to a particular culture. Knowing idioms is essential to understand spoken and written language and communicate effectively.

### Examples of Idioms

Direct instruction is the best way to teach many idioms. Some idioms can have more than one meaning. For example, to "give a hand" can mean to help someone or to applaud. Some idioms are easier to figure out than others. The following are several examples of idioms and their nonliteral interpretations:

- **hit the roof** – to become very angry, go into a rage  
— He *hit the roof* when he found out that his son had wrecked the family car.
- **raining cats and dogs** – to rain very hard  
— It has been *raining cats and dogs* all morning.
- **put on your thinking cap** – to think long and hard about something  
— I will *put on my thinking cap* and try to find a solution to the problem.



- **food for thought** – something worth thinking about  
— I do not agree with his proposal, but at least it is *food for thought*.
- **break a leg** – "Good luck." – generally said to performers before a show  
— I'm excited to see the play tonight. *Break a leg!*

### Why is it Important to Understand Idioms?

Idioms are a huge part of language, particularly spoken language. Idiomatic expressions can make up approximately two-thirds of the English language [Arnold and Hornett's article & Boatner and Gates book (as cited in Gorman-Gard, 2008, p. 81)]. Understanding idioms can help an individual communicate, understand the world around him/her, and socialize. You can find examples of



# Handy Handouts®

Free informational handouts for educators, parents, and students  
(cont.)

idioms by watching television and movies, reading newspapers and books, etc.

Many children, particularly those with language and learning disabilities, use a concrete form of communication with very literal interpretations. Idioms provide an opportunity to “think outside of the box” and expand comprehension skills. Without comprehension skills for figurative language, particularly idioms, individuals can become confused and miss out on conversations—They can miss the boat!

**Resources:**

Gorman-Gard, K. A. (2008). *Figurative language: A comprehensive program* (2nd ed.). Eau Claire, WI: Thinking Publications.



For more FREE Handy Handouts®, go to [www.handyhandouts.com](http://www.handyhandouts.com)