

Really Useful English Idioms



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PENGUIN QUICK GUIDES

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Big fish big fish • on board • mind's eye

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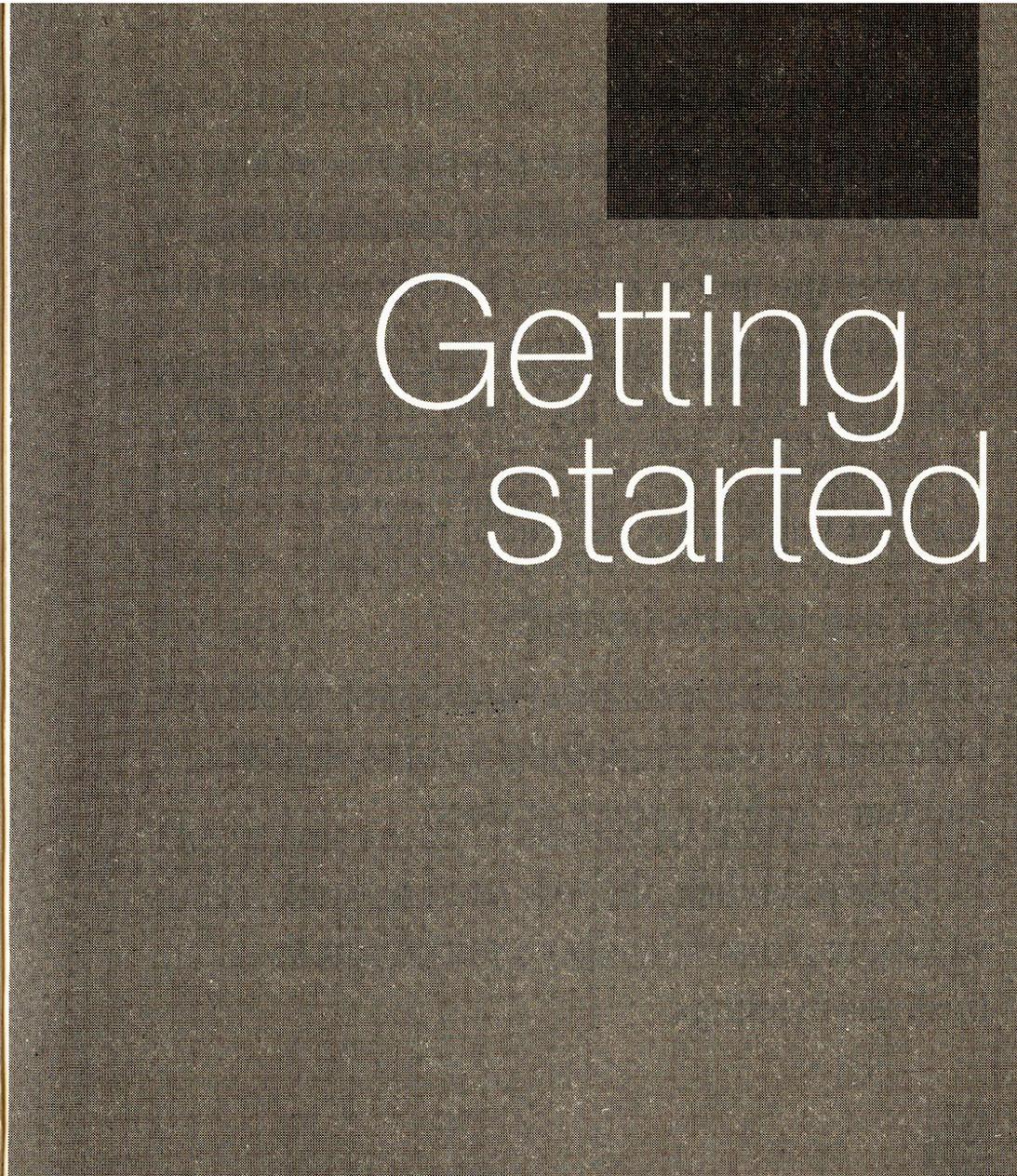
Kiss and tell kiss-and-tell • call the shots
days are numbered

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Answers

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Getting started

What is an idiom?

An idiom is a phrase with a special meaning, like **over the moon** or **pulling someone's leg**.

I'm over the moon means *I'm very pleased*.

I'm just pulling your leg means *I'm joking*.

When you see or hear an idiom, you may know all the words in it (*over, moon, pull* etc.) but you may not know what the idiom means.

Why are idioms useful?

Idioms are very common in spoken English and informal written English, so it is important – and fun – to learn some of them.

In spoken English, they are used in most situations, from friendly conversations to business meetings.

In written English, they are especially common in newspapers because the writers want to make the headlines and articles interesting and lively.

What will I learn from this book?

You will not learn old-fashioned idioms like **raining cats and dogs**! You will learn idioms that are frequently used in modern everyday English.

This book concentrates on about 130 of the most commonly used idioms.

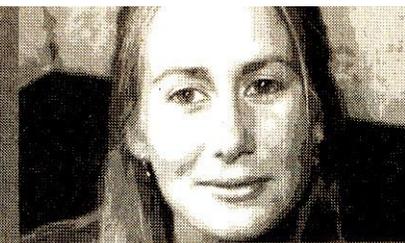
The idioms are all contained in short, entertaining texts, so that you can easily see the meaning of each idiom and how it is used.

The **Index** at the back lists the idioms in alphabetical order, with further examples, and provides space to write a translation in your own language.

How to use the book

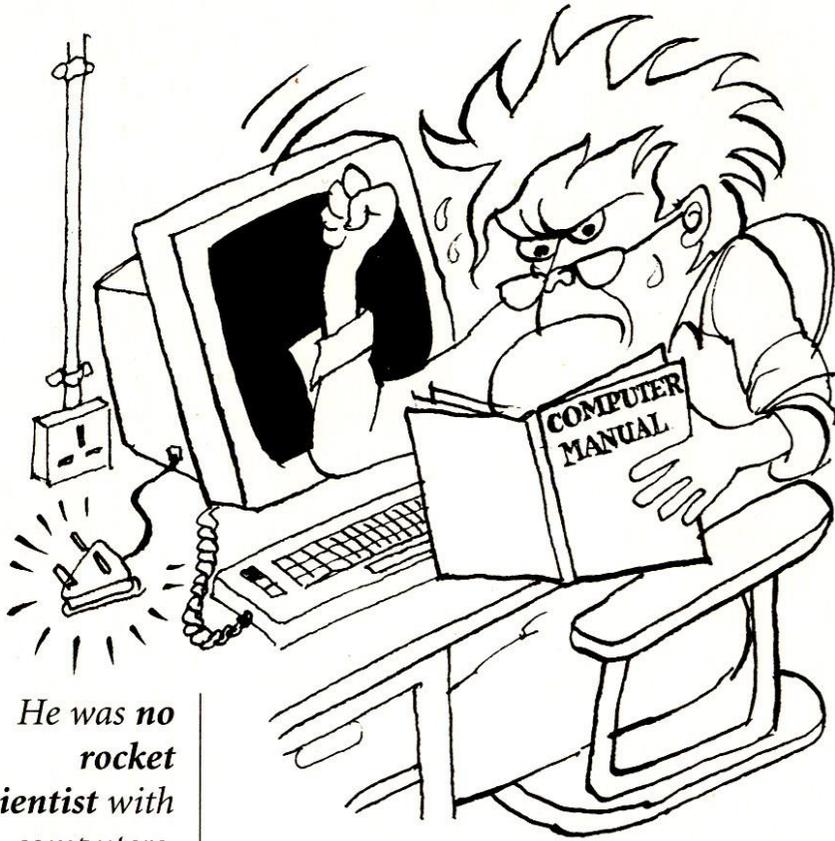
You can just read and enjoy the texts, learning as you read, or help yourself to remember the idioms like this:

- Read a text page and make sure you understand the three (or four) idioms on it.
- Find the idioms in the **Index** at the back of the book and translate them into your language. When you have finished a chapter, think about the review questions at the end of the chapter. You can check your answers in the **Answers** section at the back of the book.



People

Types of people



He was *no rocket scientist* with computers.

Does it matter if someone says you're **no rocket scientist**? Yes, it does! This phrase means *not very intelligent*.

What if a newspaper describes a politician as a **dark horse**? This means *nobody knows much about him*.

And a **party pooper**? This means a *person who spoils enjoyable activities by refusing to join in*. This idiom is also useful in apologies: 'I'm sorry to be a party pooper, but I have to go home now.'

no rocket scientist

not very intelligent person

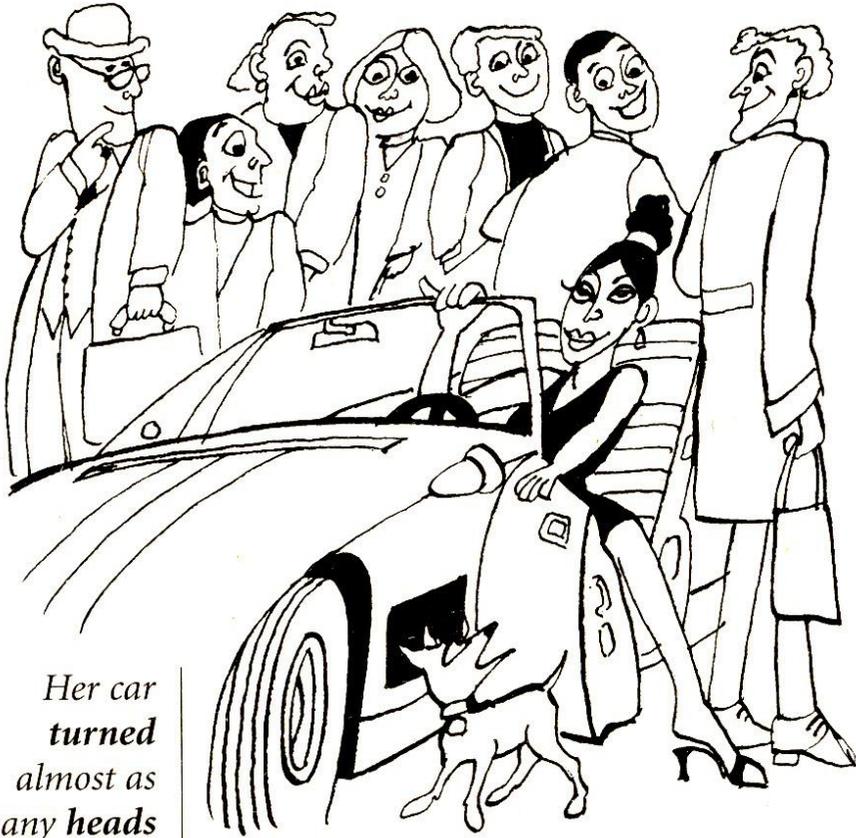
dark horse

secretive person

party pooper

person who spoils fun

Brains and beauty



Her car
turned
almost as
many **heads**
as she did.

A Hollywood actress once met the British philosopher, Bertrand Russell. Whereas he was quite ugly, she **turned heads** wherever she went. She was rather **full of herself** and said to Russell, 'They say I'm the most beautiful woman in the world, and I hear you're the smartest man. Imagine if we had a child with your brains and my beauty.'

Russell, who was never **lost for words**, replied, 'Imagine if it had my beauty and your brains.'

turn heads

attract a lot of attention

full of yourself

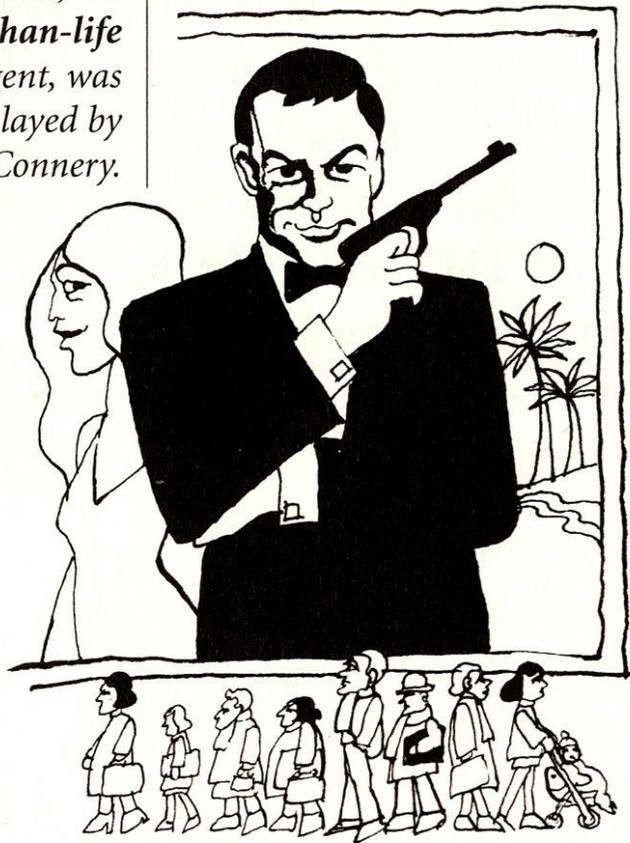
too pleased with yourself

lost for words

not knowing what to say

Larger than life

James Bond, the **larger-than-life** secret agent, was first played by Sean Connery.



Say 'Sean Connery' to **the man in the street** and he'll probably say 'James Bond'. The famous British secret agent, 007, has been played by six actors in the last forty years, but Connery was the original and probably the best. He was **larger than life** both on the screen and **in the flesh**. Even in his 60s, he was chosen by the readers of an international women's magazine as *The World's Most Attractive Man*.

the man in the street

an average person

larger than life

more exciting than normal

in the flesh

as a real person



Twins



Some twins are identical, but my brother and I are definitely not. He's a **couch potato** who watches television all weekend and thinks exercise is a **dirty word**, whereas I'm always **on the go**, playing sport, socialising, working and so on. He says I'm a **pain in the neck** because I never stop doing things and making a noise while he's trying to watch the TV or sleep.

couch potato
a lazy person

dirty word
something unpleasant

on the go
active

pain in the neck
a nuisance

Review 1

A Match the idioms with their meanings.

- | | |
|--------------------|-------------------|
| 1 larger than life | a) obscure person |
| 2 dark horse | b) exciting |
| 3 on the go | c) active, busy |

B Complete the idioms.

- 1 She was so surprised that she was lost
- 2 He's too full to be interested in us.
- 3 My little brother is a pain sometimes.
- 4 The man cares more about money than politics.

C Think about real people ...

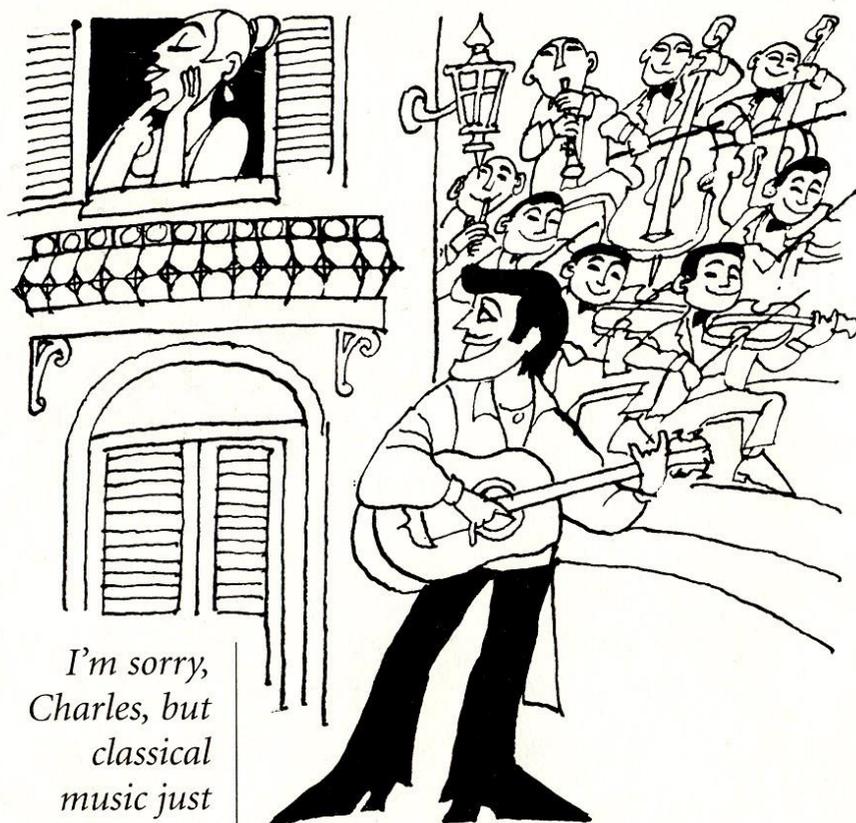
- 1 Is there a couch potato in your family?
- 2 Do you know someone who turns heads?
- 3 Have you ever seen a film star in the flesh?
- 4 Have you ever been a party pooper?



Emotions

2

All kinds



*I'm sorry,
Charles, but
classical
music just
leaves me cold.*

Anger, happiness, love, hate, fear, boredom – whatever you feel, there's an idiom to put it into words. And if something doesn't excite you at all, you can say, it **leaves me cold**.

You can express moderate feelings such as I'm **on edge** (which is how you might feel before making a speech or having a tooth out), or strong feelings, such as, I was **bored to death**. I was **worried to death**. I was **scared to death**.

leaves me cold

has no effect on me

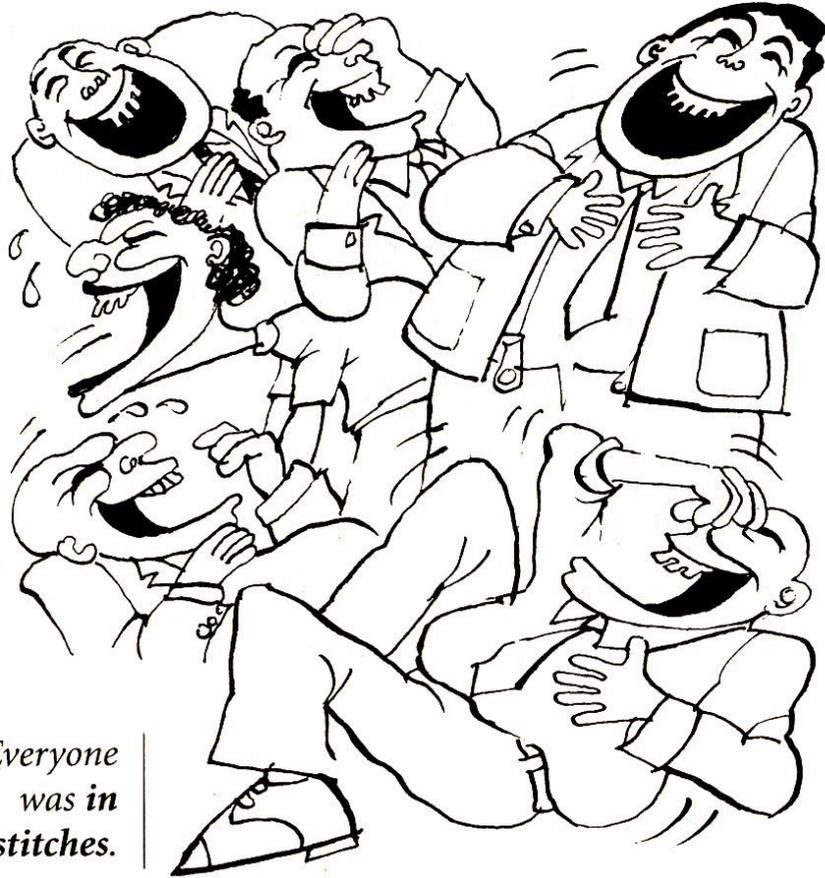
on edge

anxious

(-ed) to death

extremely (-ed)

Laughter



Everyone
was **in
stitches**.

Somebody told a very funny joke at the office yesterday, and we were all **in stitches** for five minutes afterwards. Then the boss came in. He was in a bad mood and started to talk about a work problem. I couldn't forget the joke and I couldn't **keep a straight face**. The boss asked me what I was smiling at. When I told him, he just looked at me and said nothing. I thought he was going to throw me out. But then he **burst out laughing!**

**in
stitches**

laughing a
lot

**keep a
straight
face**

not smile
or laugh

**burst out
laughing**

suddenly
laugh
loudly

Happiness



He was
*over the
moon.*

It's a beautiful day, and I feel **on top of the world!**

He's just had some good news. He's got the job that he wanted, and he's **over the moon** about it.

Getting my first job as an actor was so exciting. I was **on cloud nine** for weeks afterwards.

on top of the world

happy

over the moon

very pleased about something

on cloud nine

very happy because of something

Road rage



What's got
into him?

ROAD RAGE

As roads become busier, road rage is becoming more common. Ben Smith, 43, from London, was trying to park his car yesterday when another driver got in first. Smith **saw red**, jumped out, shouted at the other driver and started kicking the man's car, doing £800 worth of damage. Smith told police later, 'I don't know **what got into me**. I've never done anything like that before. I just **lost it**.'

see red

suddenly
feel
extreme
anger

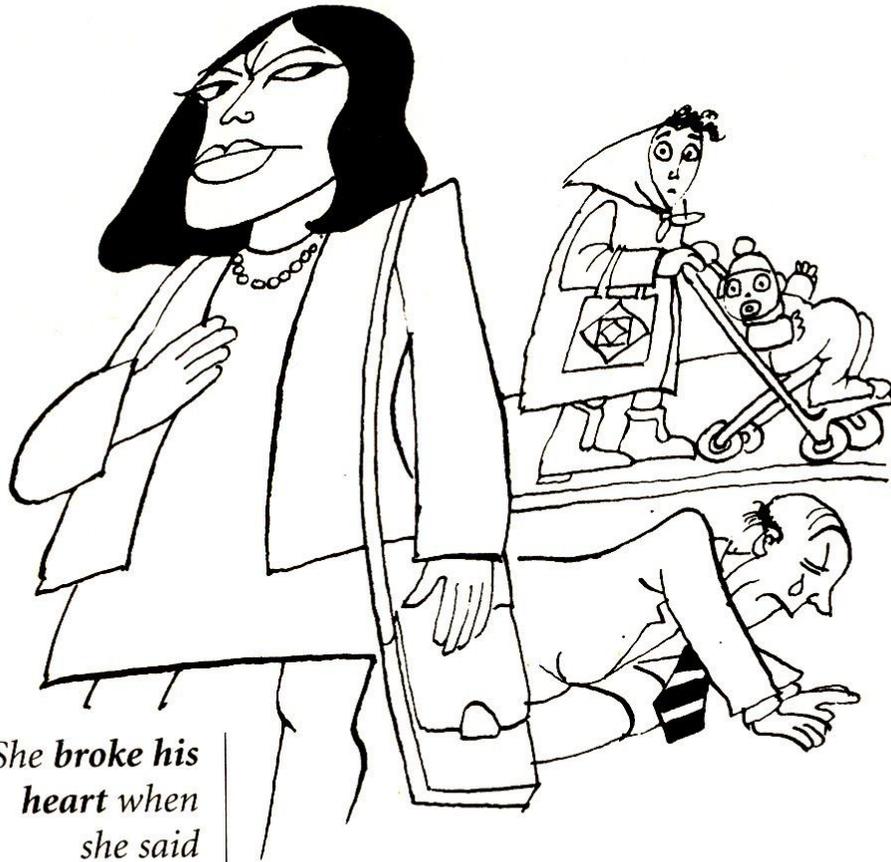
what got into him

why he
became so
extreme

lost it

lost control

Broken heart



She broke his heart when she said goodbye.

Almost as soon as he met her, he fell **head over heels** for her. They had six wonderful months together, and then she left. It **broke his heart**, and a year later he's only beginning to **pick up the pieces**.

head over heels

suddenly and deeply in love

break someone's heart

make someone very sad

pick up the pieces

rebuild something that was damaged

Review 2

A Match the idioms with their meanings.

- | | |
|---------------|----------------------|
| 1 on edge | a) laughing a lot |
| 2 in stitches | b) feel very angry |
| 3 lose it | c) anxious |
| 4 see red | d) be out of control |

B Complete the idioms.

- 1 I feel on top when the sun shines.
- 2 She burst when she saw me.
- 3 I'm on cloud whenever we're together.
- 4 He suddenly hit me. I don't know what him.

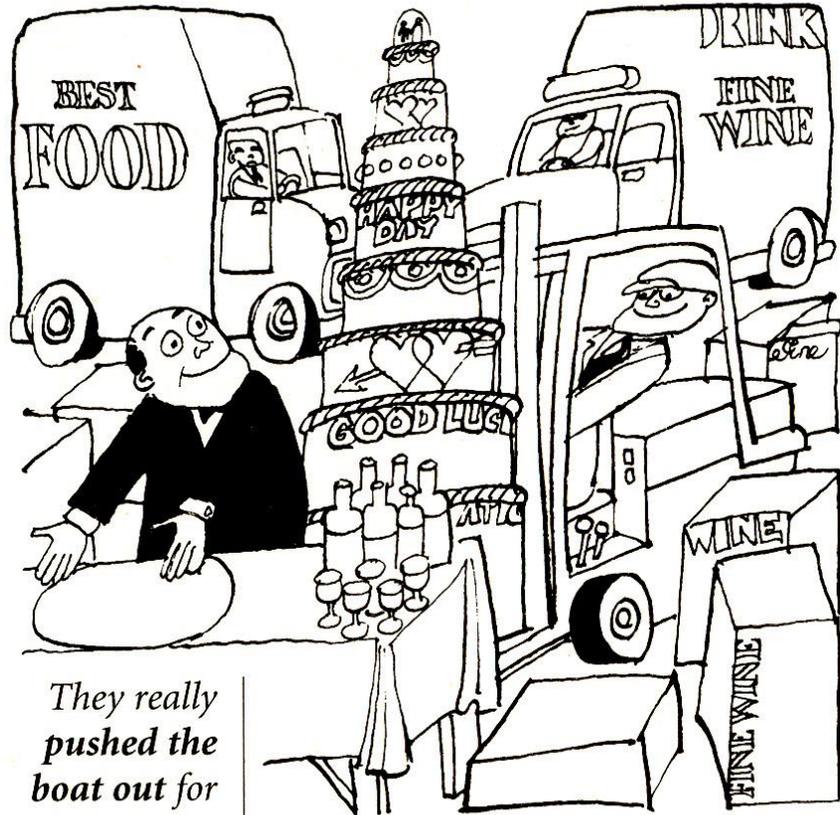
C Can you remember a time when you ...

- 1 were scared to death?
- 2 saw a film that left you cold?
- 3 couldn't keep a straight face?
- 4 were over the moon about something?



Social relations

Party!



They really **pushed the boat out** for their daughter's wedding.

January

6

*I went to a big party last night. The hosts were celebrating something so they'd decided to **push the boat out**: there was a really good band, fantastic food and lots of drink. I chatted to a few people for the first hour – just the usual **small talk**. Then I met this great guy. We got talking and we really **hit it off**. I'm seeing him tomorrow!*

push the boat out

spend more than usual

small talk

polite conversation about unimportant things

hit it off

like each other

A good friend



Even best friends don't see eye to eye on everything.

A good friend

- is someone who will always **be there for** you when you need them.
- is someone who **sees eye to eye** with you on most things.
- is not perfect and not the same as you, but is good at **give and take**.

be there for

be ready to help

see eye to eye

agree

give and take

compromise and cooperation

What to say



The
dinner's
on me.

How can you say 'no' to an invitation for now but keep the invitation open for another time?

- Can I **take a rain check**?

What can you say if someone invites you to an event that is dependent on something else, such as good weather.

- (Let's keep our) **Fingers crossed**.

And if someone offers to pay for drinks or a meal, but *you* want to pay?

- This is **on me**.

take a rain check

keep an invitation open

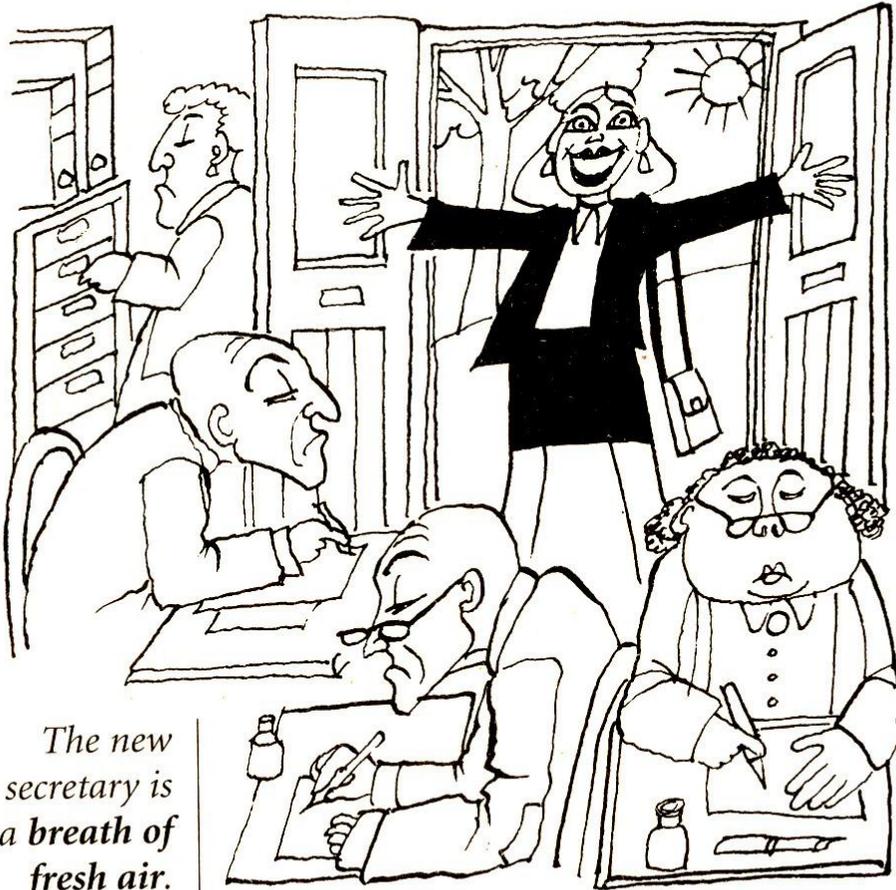
fingers crossed

let's hope for the best

on me

I'll pay

People at work



The new secretary is a **breath of fresh air**.

Old Mr Brown has been with the company for years. He's pretty useless, but he survives because the manager **has a soft spot for** him.

There are two bossy middle-aged women who are always **at each other's throats** about one thing or another.

There's a nice girl who started last week and is a **breath of fresh air**.

have a soft spot for

like, care about

at each other's throats

arguing

breath of fresh air

pleasantly different

Review 3

A Match the idioms with their meanings.

- | | |
|-------------------|--------------------|
| 1 see eye to eye | a) like each other |
| 2 it's on me | b) let's hope |
| 3 hit it off | c) I'll pay |
| 4 fingers crossed | d) agree |

B Complete the idioms.

- 1 The nice new secretary was a breath
- 2 No. You paid last time. This is on
- 3 I think he has a for you.
- 4 I can't come out tonight, but can I take?
- 5 Give is important in a good relationship.

C Think about your social life ...

- 1 Are you good at small talk?
- 2 Do you try to be there for your friends?
- 3 When did you last push the boat out?



Dating and romance

4

She likes me!



TOM: I think she likes me.

SAM: **In your dreams!**

TOM: No, really, I'm sure she does.

SAM: **No way!** She never even looks at you.

TOM: Exactly! That means one of two things: either she's embarrassed because she fancies me, or she's **playing hard to get.**

SAM: Tom, there is a third possibility ...

In your dreams.

it's a very unrealistic hope

no way
definitely not

play hard to get
pretend to be uninterested

Gossip



No, **he's history**. She's got a new boyfriend.

ETHEL: Have you heard about Jane's boyfriend?

MAVIS: The one she's been **going steady** with for about six months?

ETHEL: No. **He's history**. She's got a new one.

MAVIS: That's fast!

ETHEL: Yes. And he's younger than her! Oh! Hello, Jane.

JANE: Haven't you got anything better to do than gossip about other people? **Get a life!**

going steady

in a regular relationship

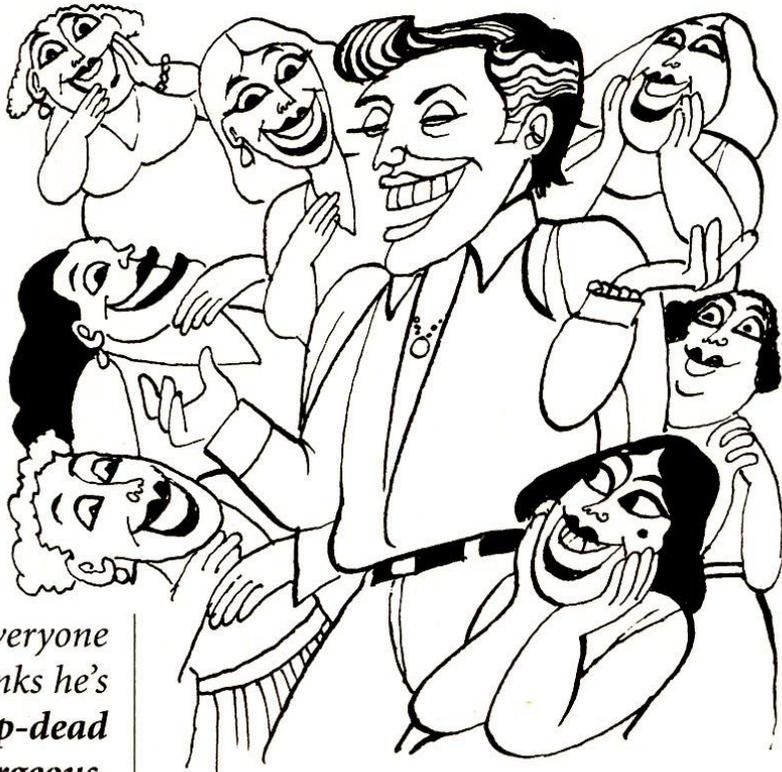
he/she's history

past, not important now

get a life

(not polite) do something interesting

Drop-dead gorgeous



Everyone
thinks he's
**drop-dead
gorgeous.**

Your letters

Dear Romance Magazine

My boyfriend is **drop-dead gorgeous**, kind and sensitive, and we have a great relationship. He's also very tall. (I **have a thing about** tall men, so that's important to me too!) The problem is that I want to get married and have children, but he doesn't. I love him, but I know he's never going to **pop the question**. What should I do?

Julie (London)

**drop-dead
gorgeous**

very
attractive

**have a
thing
about**

like very
much

**pop the
question**

ask 'Will you
marry me?'

Love at first sight



*It was love
at first
sight.*

There is a romantic story about the nineteenth-century revolutionary, Garibaldi. He was on his ship entering a port when he saw a beautiful woman standing on the shore. 'That is the woman I am going to marry,' he said. It was **love at first sight**. The woman, when she met him, was **swept off her feet** by his good looks and personality. They were married within days and **only had eyes for** each other for the rest of their lives.

love at first sight

falling in love immediately

sweep someone off their feet

make them fall in love quickly

only have eyes for

only be interested in

Dating dilemma



Do you
fancy
going
Dutch?

On a first date, who should pay for meals, drinks, tickets etc.? In the old days, the man would **pick up the tab**, but nowadays nobody is quite sure. Will the woman think he's a dinosaur if he pays? Or will she think he's mean if he doesn't? Will the man be grateful if the woman suggests they **go Dutch** or will he be insulted? There's no right answer. You just have to **play it by ear**. Be sensitive to your partner's feelings and you'll probably get it right.

pick up the tab

pay the total

go Dutch

share costs on a date

play it by ear

not follow a plan

Review 4

A Match the idioms with their meanings.

- | | |
|----------------|------------------------------|
| 1 no way | a) share costs |
| 2 go steady | b) definitely not |
| 3 he's history | c) in a regular relationship |
| 4 go Dutch | d) in the past |

B Complete the idioms.

- 1 As soon as they met it was love
- 2 He took out a ring and popped
- 3 Some people plan, others play it
- 4 He's in love and only has for her.

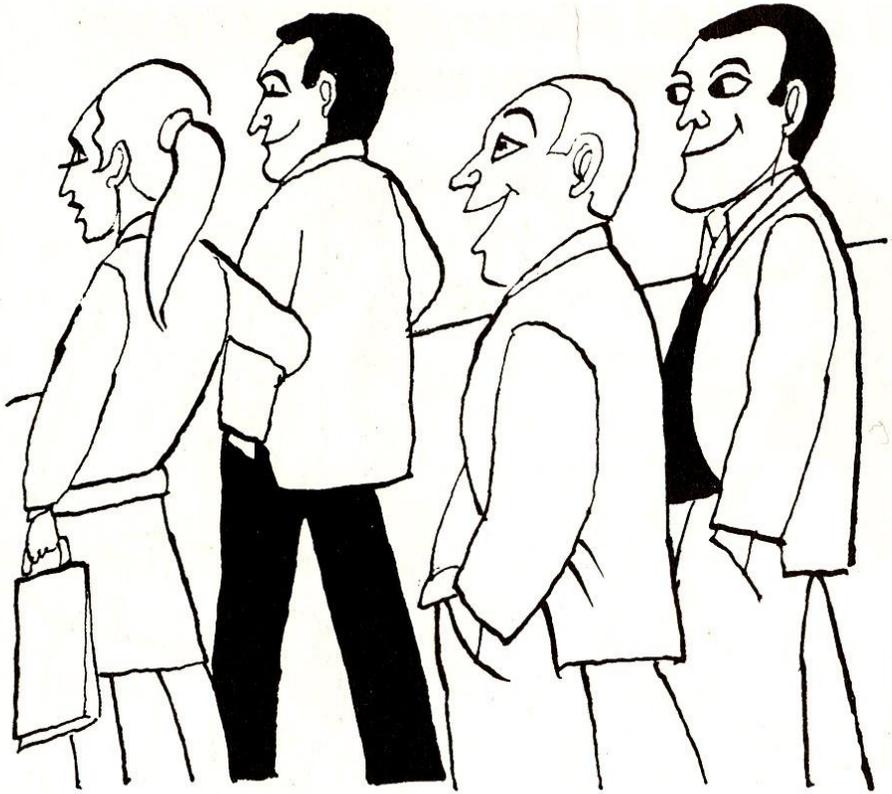
C Do you know someone who ...

- 1 is drop-dead gorgeous?
- 2 plays hard to get?
- 3 never picks up the tab?

D Look at the pictures on this and the next page. Complete the idioms.



- 1 Man: 'Come and have a drink with me.'
Woman: 'In!'



2 All Andy's girlfriends have had ponytails. I guess he has a ponytails.



Life situations

5

Lottie's diary



You'll find
Mr Right
one day,
dear.

January
6

*I finished reading 'Bridget Jones's Diary' by Helen Fielding today. It's a very popular book, and I loved it because Bridget and I are **in the same boat**: we're both looking for **Mr Right** (without success) and trying to become famous in our careers (without success), and we're both sure that we'll get there as soon as we can lose weight, get fit and generally **get our act together**.*

in the same boat

in the same situation

Mr Right

the ideal man

get your act together

prepare yourself for action

In hot water

hot water

trouble

in your shoes

in your situation

off the hook

out of trouble

MIKE: Tom's in **hot water**.

JAKE: Why? What's he done?

MIKE: He borrowed a company car without permission and smashed it up.

JAKE: Is he OK?

MIKE: Yes, he's fine, but I wouldn't like to be **in his shoes** when the boss finds out.

JAKE: Oh, he'll make up a good story and get **off the hook**. He always does.



Country life



*She was pleased to escape from the **rat race**.*

After five years of **life in the fast lane**, Janie decided to give up her well-paid city job and start a new life in a small country village. But although she was pleased to escape from the **rat race**, she felt like a **fish out of water** in the country. Now she's back in the city, wiser for her experience.

life in the fast lane

fast, high-pressure lifestyle

rat race

competitive working life

fish out of water

uncomfortable in a strange situation

Team on a roll

keep your head above water
survive

on a roll
enjoying continual success

put your feet up
relax

TEAM ON A ROLL

After a difficult start to the competition, when England did well to **keep their heads above water** in the match against the very strong Brazilian team (result: 1-1), the England team have been **on a roll**, winning every match including last night's spectacular game which ended in a 3-0 win. However, they can't afford to **put their feet up** because the next match will be the hardest yet.



England made the mistake of putting their feet up too early.

Review 5

A Match the idioms with their meanings.

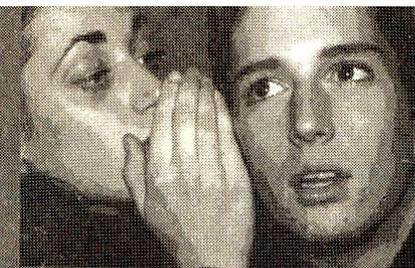
- | | |
|--------------------|-------------------|
| 1 Mr Right | a) relax |
| 2 hot water | b) trouble |
| 3 put your feet up | c) the ideal man |
| 4 off the hook | d) out of trouble |

B Complete the idioms.

- 1 We're in the, so let's help each other.
- 2 You need to get your and find a job.
- 3 He left the rat to work in the third world.
- 4 How would you feel if you were in my?

C Which of these is negative?

- 1 putting your feet up
- 2 feeling like a fish out of water
- 3 being on a roll



Conversation

6

A film scene



Hugh Grant
realises he
has **put his
foot in it**.

In the film *Four Weddings and a Funeral*, Hugh Grant meets an old friend, and asks him, 'How are you, and how's your girlfriend?'

The man replies, 'She's not my girlfriend any more.'

'That's good,' says Grant, 'You probably didn't know, but she was **two-timing** you with someone else.'

The man looks deeply shocked and says, 'She's my wife now.'

Hugh Grant realises he has **put his foot in it**, and he **kicks himself** for being so stupid.

two-timing

deceiving,
being
unfaithful

put your foot in it

unintentionally
upset
someone

kick yourself

feel angry
with yourself

Can you keep a secret?



*Don't let
the cat out
of the bag.*

A friend has just told you a secret. Then someone asks, 'What were you two talking about?' Do you ...

(a) smile and just say mysteriously, '**That would be telling**'?

or (b) **spill the beans**?

Your friends are planning a surprise party for someone. Do you ...

Do you ...

(a) keep your mouth shut until the party?

or (b) **let the cat out of the bag** the day before?

That would be telling.

it's a secret

spill the beans

reveal a secret

let the cat out of the bag

give secret information too early

Opinions



Is B agreeing or disagreeing?

A: He talks too much.

B: **You're telling me!** I sat next to him on the bus yesterday!

A: It's hot today, isn't it?

B: **You can say that again.**

A: He's an intelligent boy; the real problem is that he's lazy.

B: I think you've **hit the nail on the head.**

You're telling me.

I know that

You can say that again.

I agree strongly

hit the nail on the head

describe something accurately

Believe me!



*I'm not
pulling
your leg!*

SAM: Hello?

TOM: Sam! Help me!

SAM: What's the matter, Tom?

TOM: I'm hanging from this rock by one hand. I can't hold on much longer. Call the rescue service quickly!

SAM: Very funny, Tom. Why are you always **pulling my leg?**

TOM: Sam! I'm not **having you on.** It's true! Honestly!

SAM: **Pull the other one,** Tom!

pull someone's leg

teasing me

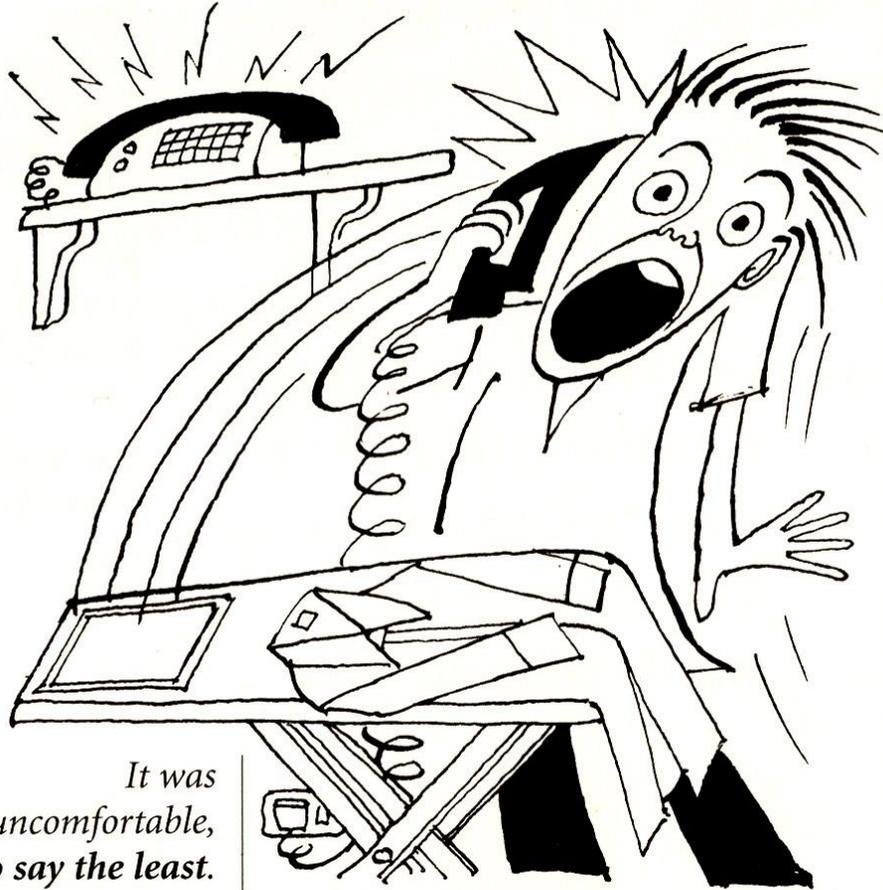
have someone on

say something untrue (for fun)

pull the other one

I don't believe you

Hot ears



It was uncomfortable, to say the least.

Have you heard this joke?

A: My ears got burnt!

B: How?

A: I was ironing when the phone rang. Instead of picking up the phone I picked up the iron.

B: That must've hurt!

A: **To say the least.**

B: Let's **get this straight**: you said you burnt both ears. Right?

A: Yes.

B: How **on Earth** did you burn the other ear?

A: The person called again.

to say the least
very much

get it straight
be clear about it

on Earth
I can't imagine

Review 6

A Match the idioms with their meanings.

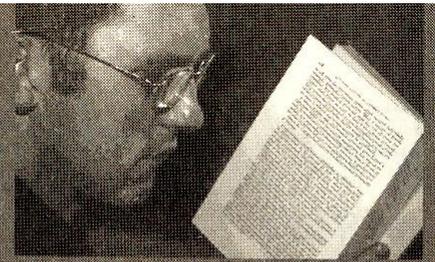
- | | |
|----------------------|--------------------|
| 1 two-time | a) reveal a secret |
| 2 spill the beans | b) be unfaithful |
| 3 You're telling me. | c) teasing me |
| 4 pulling my leg | d) I know that |

B Complete the idioms.

- 1 Look! A spider behind you! – Pull
- 2 What's the secret? – That would
- 3 This is difficult. – You can
- 4 It tastes like a Bordeaux. – You've hit

C Which feels the worst?

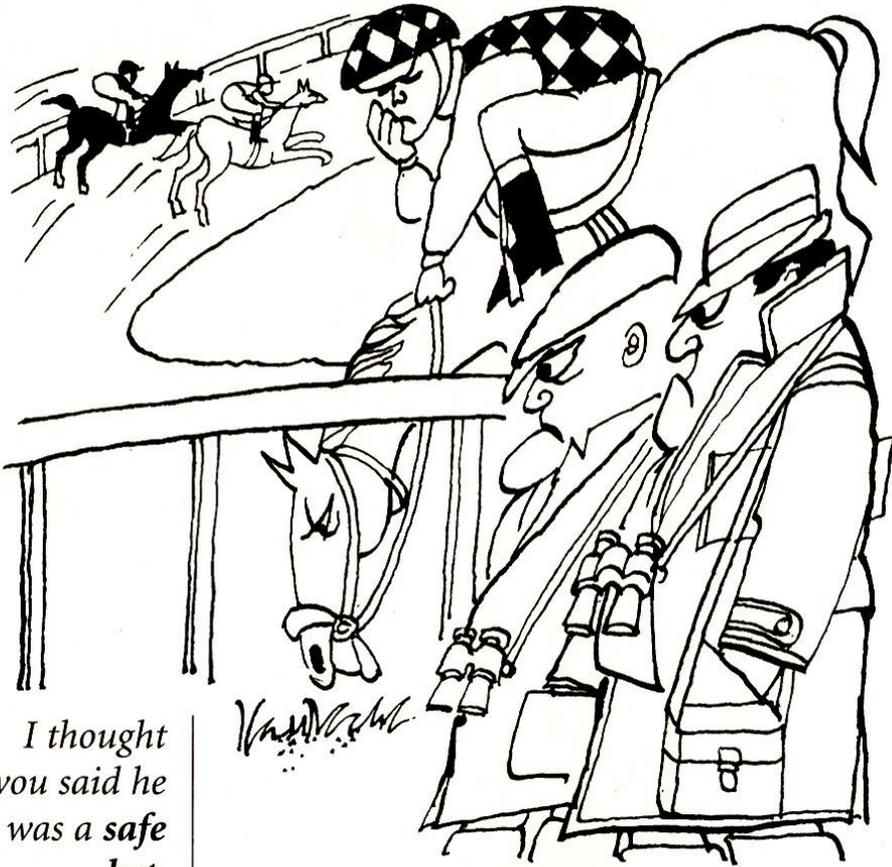
- 1 kicking yourself for forgetting something
- 2 putting your foot in it
- 3 realising that someone is having you on
- 4 letting the cat out of the bag by mistake



Thinking
and
learning

7

Predictions



I thought
you said he
was a **safe
bet.**

Who is most optimistic? Who is most pessimistic?

CHRIS: I think we might get a good pay rise this year.

SAM: **That'll be the day!**

TOM: I think it's **on the cards.**

HELEN: I think it's a **safe bet.** The company's made a big profit this year.

KATE: You're right, but it's still **touch and go** whether they'll share it with us.

that'll be the day

it would be very surprising

on the cards

likely

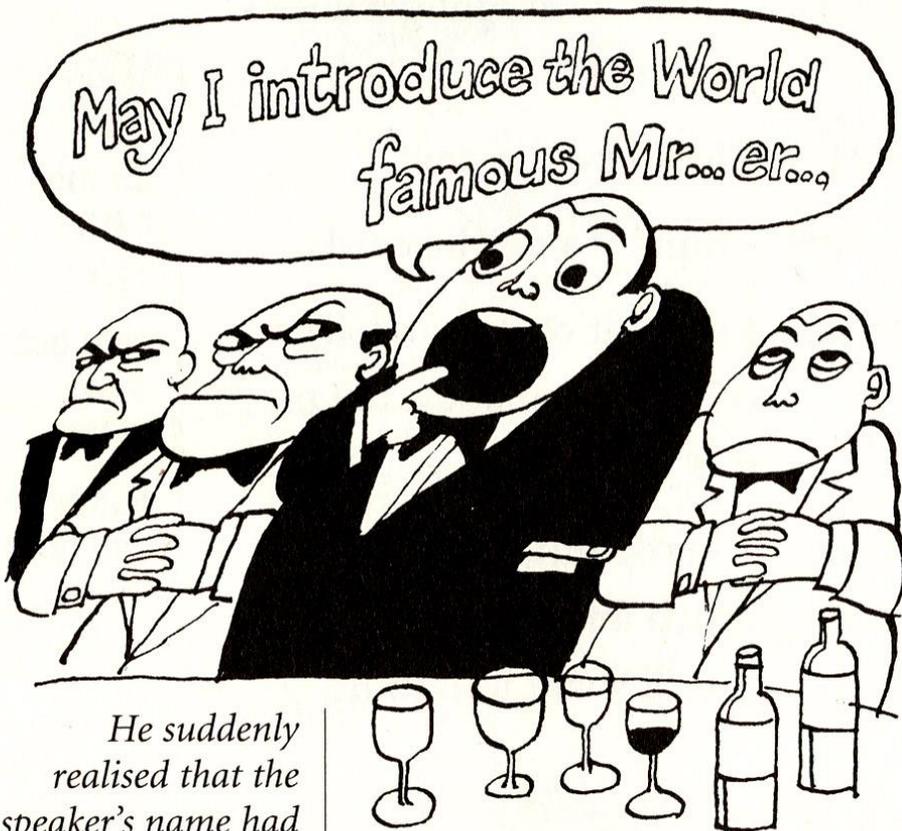
safe bet

almost certain

touch and go

unsure

Memory



He suddenly realised that the speaker's name had **slipped his mind**.

A woman was having dinner with a friend and her husband, when she noticed that her friend always called her husband loving names like *Honey, Darling, Sweetheart* etc. While her husband was out of the room, the woman said, 'It's 70 years since you two **tied the knot** but you still call him those pet names. That's wonderful. It must **take some doing** to keep romance alive for so long.' Her friend answered, 'The truth is that his name **slipped my mind** about ten years ago.'

tie the knot
get married

take some doing
not be easy

slip your mind
forget

Pronunciation



Boris thought he was **getting the hang of** the language until he tried ordering a cup of coffee.

A **golden rule** of pronunciation is: use word stress correctly.

You probably know that one part of a word is 'stressed' (= stronger than the other parts), for example: PHOtograph, phoTOgrapher, photoGRAPHic.

Listen for the stress in words. Then you'll **get the hang of** word stress and be able to use it more. If you can do this, your pronunciation will improve **just like that**.

golden rule
important rule

get the hang of
learn how to do/use something

just like that
quickly and easily

Listening



*I can't make
head nor
tail of it.*

Learners of English sometimes say, 'I don't listen to English on the radio because it's too fast and I can't **make head nor tail** of it.

But think about that. When you were a few months old, learning your own language **from scratch**, did you understand it all? No! But you listened and learned. Then you learned to speak and read and write. But listening came first. So even if you don't feel confident, **have a go** at it.

**(can't)
make
head nor
tail of**

(can't)
understand

**from
scratch**

from the
beginning

have a go
have a try

Fear of flying



*The steward's attempt to calm the passengers would have **carried more weight** if he had removed his parachute.*

Statistics prove that flying is a very safe method of transport, but this **cut no ice** with Jean Fellows, 60, and nobody could persuade her to try to overcome her lifelong fear. That was until her seven-year-old granddaughter told her to be brave and try. It is unusual for the words of a child to **carry more weight** than those of adults, but Jean **took them to heart** and finally bought an air ticket. 'It wasn't as bad as I thought,' she said after the flight.

cut no ice
have no influence

carry weight
have influence

take to heart
consider seriously

Review 7

A Match the idioms with their meanings.

- | | |
|----------------|----------------|
| 1 touch and go | a) unsure |
| 2 on the cards | b) get married |
| 3 tie the knot | c) try |
| 4 have a go | d) likely |

B Complete the idioms.

- 1 We'll have to start again from
- 2 Some people can memorise phrases just
- 3 A golden of learning is to practise regularly.
- 4 It's a safe that I'll forget some of these idioms.
- 5 I couldn't swim at the beginning of the course but now I'm getting

C Complete the idioms on this and the next page.



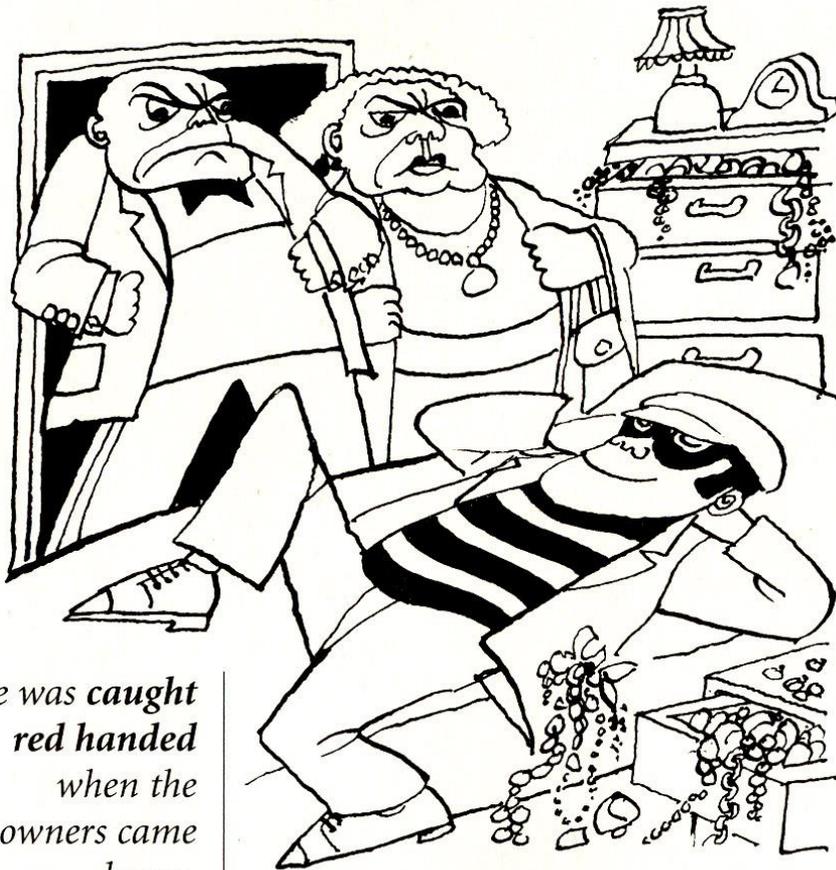
- 1 Mother: 'Is your room clean and tidy?'
Father: 'Ha ha! That'll be!'

2 I don't understand adults. I explained that I couldn't do the homework because of an important party last night, but it cut with him at all.



Action

Sleepy burglar



*He was caught
red handed
when the
owners came
home.*

This is a true story about a French burglar. After getting into an empty house easily through an open window, he probably thought his job was a **piece of cake**. He decided to **take his time** and went into the kitchen, where he found some champagne. After drinking the whole bottle, he went to look for jewellery in the bedroom but fell asleep on the bed. He did not wake up until the owners returned, **catching him red handed**.

**piece of
cake**

very easy

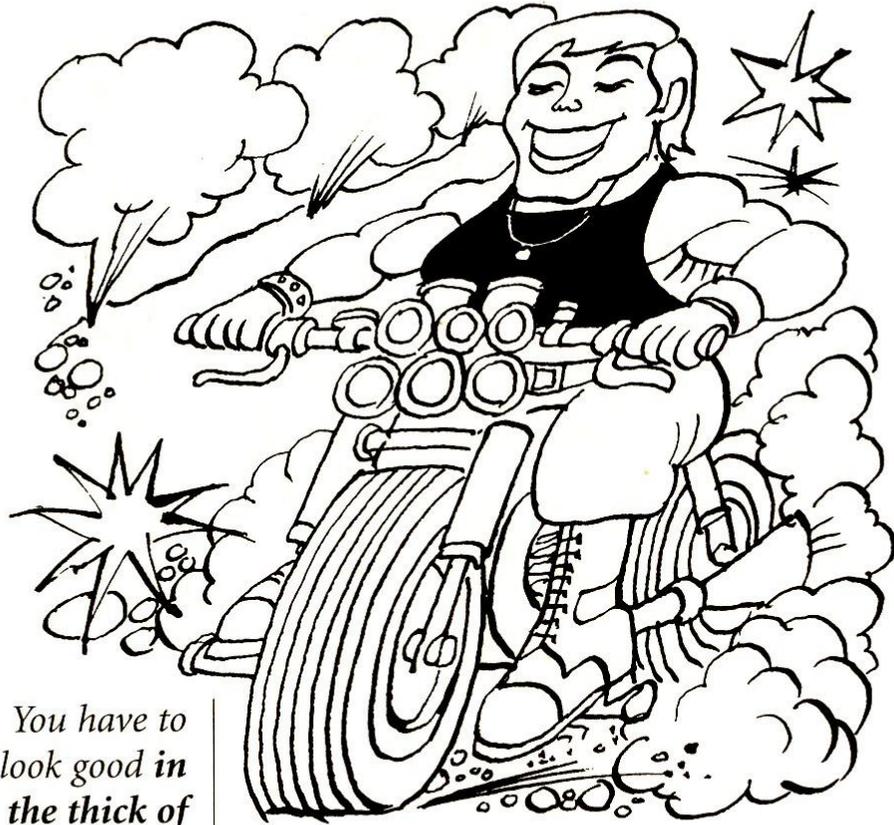
**take
your
time**

don't hurry

**catch
someone
red
handed**

catch
someone
doing
something
bad

Action hero



*You have to look good **in the thick of** the action.*

Action movie heroes may seem strong and independent, but they have to follow rules:

- 1 Never do things **by the book**.
Forget about correct procedures.
- 2 Always wait till the last possible moment before **turning the tables** on the bad guys.
- 3 When you're **in the thick of** the action, your hair and make-up still have to look good.

by the book

following the rules

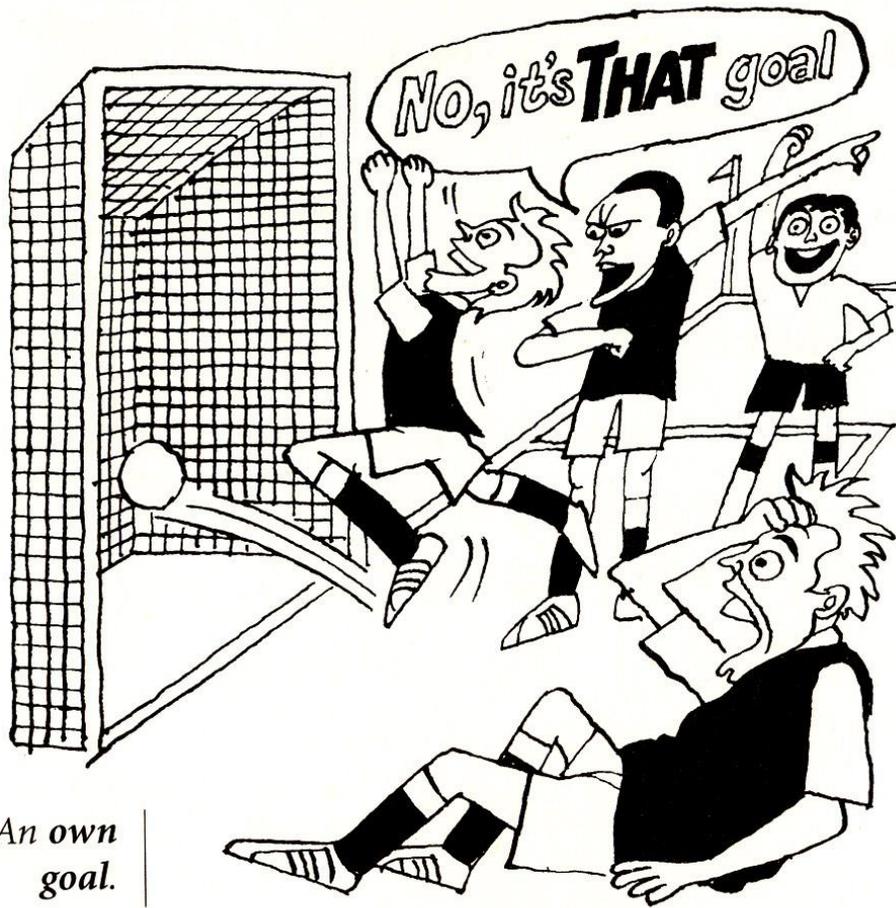
turn the tables

reverse the situation

in the thick of

in the most active part

Sports idioms



An own goal.

From British football:

The government has **scored an own goal** by reducing tax at a time when it needs extra money.

score an own goal

harm yourself

From American baseball:

It would be nice to exchange news. Let's **touch base** next week.

touch base

get in contact

From boxing:

The gloves are off in this political campaign, with both candidates using personal attacks and dirty tricks.

the gloves are off

the fight is very aggressive

Losing weight



Step
on it!

January
6

Today was going to be the day that I started to lose weight. Well, I went for a run in the park with Victoria. I thought that would **do the trick**, but it nearly killed me. She kept looking back and telling me to **step on it**. It's no good. I've left it too late. Once you're over 30, you've **missed the boat**. I'm just going to get fat and enjoy it. Now, where are those chocolates that I threw away?

**do the
trick**

solve the
problem

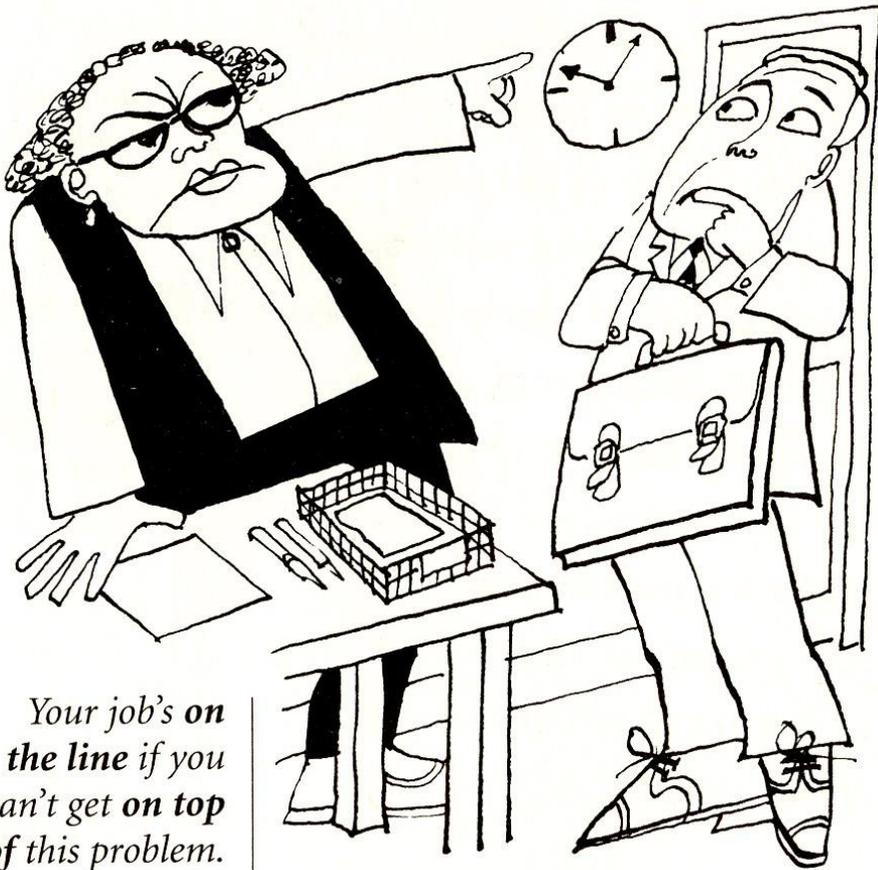
step on it

go faster

**miss the
boat**

be too late

Job on the line



*Your job's **on the line** if you can't get **on top of** this problem.*

Bill had a problem waking up in the mornings. One day his boss said angrily, 'You're late for work every day. You probably think I'm a **soft touch**, but I'm not, and your job's **on the line**.'

So Bill went to his doctor, who gave him a pill, which Bill took before he went to bed.

He slept well and woke up early. Arriving at work, he said, 'Boss, I'm **on top of** the problem!'

'That's fine,' said the boss, 'but where were you yesterday?'

soft touch

easy to get things from

on the line

at risk

on top of

in control of

Review 8

A Match the idioms with their meanings.

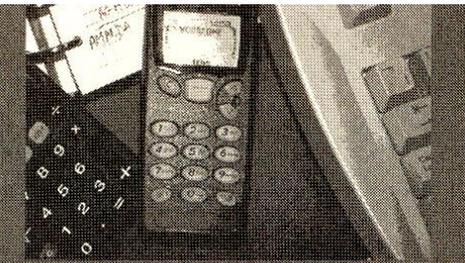
- | | |
|------------------|----------------|
| 1 piece of cake | a) go faster |
| 2 take your time | b) easy |
| 3 step on it | c) don't hurry |
| 4 miss the boat | d) be too late |

B Complete the idioms.

- 1 The police caught the thief red
- 2 The campaign has started, and the gloves
- 3 We made a mistake and scored
- 4 The doctor said, 'These pills will do

C Can you think of a film in which ...

- 1 the police don't do things by the book?
- 2 the hero turns the tables on the baddies?
- 3 the hero is always in the thick of the action but is never hurt?



Work
and
business

9

Business success



Joe made a killing when the spider-men visited Earth.

DOT.COM SUCCESS

Two young entrepreneurs, who started a new Internet business two years ago, have today sold the business for £3 million. Jenny Curtis, co-founder of Slimm.com, says, 'Everyone thinks we've **made a killing**, but it was hard work. For the first 18 months we couldn't **make ends meet** – I couldn't even buy a new pair of socks! When the business finally **got off the ground**, we worked 18 hours a day for six months.'

make a killing

make a big profit quickly

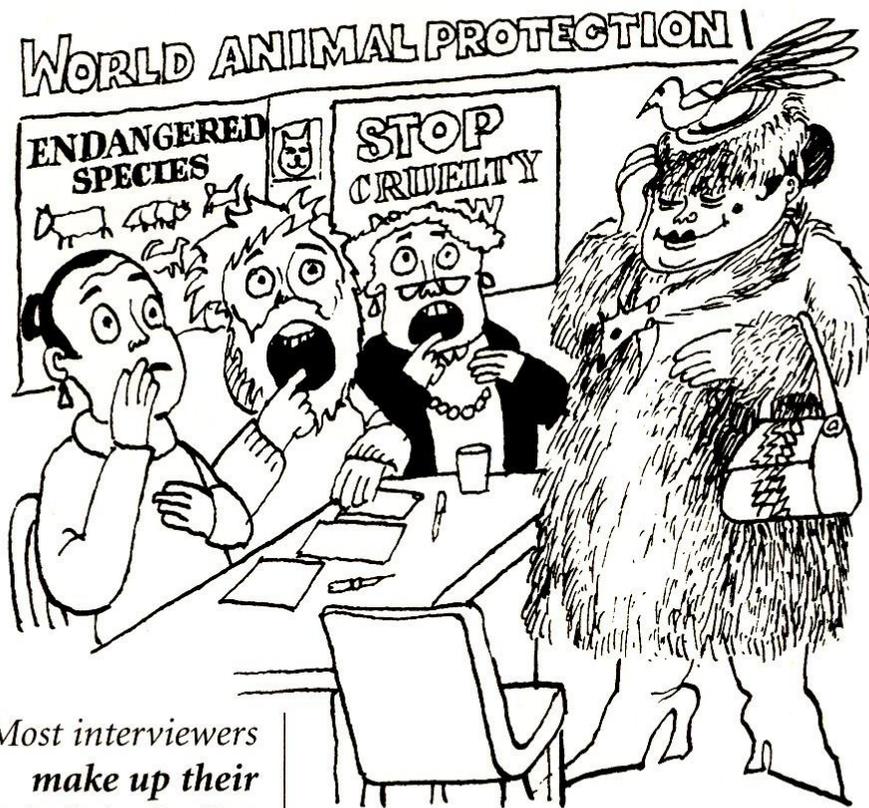
make ends meet

pay for necessities

get off the ground

start to be successful

Job interviews



*Most interviewers
make up their
minds in the first
30 seconds.*

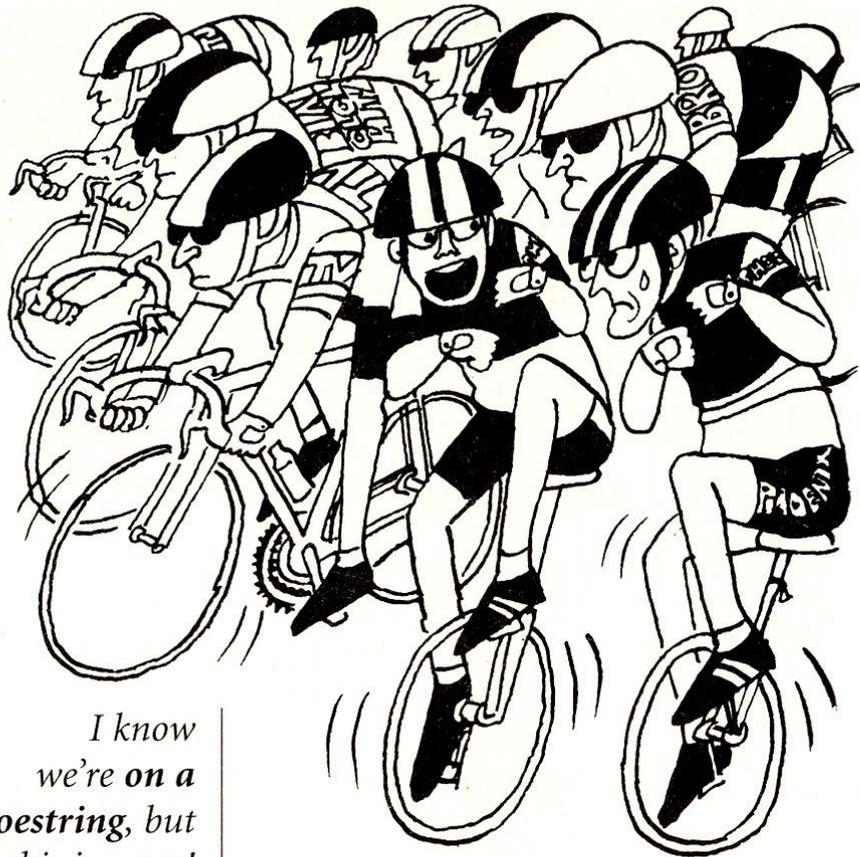
Interviewers always ask difficult questions that nobody could possibly answer **off the cuff**. So it's important to be prepared for them. But you can't prepare for everything, so sometimes you just have to **think on your feet**. Don't worry if you make a few mistakes. Just remember what the psychologists tell us: most interviewers **make up their minds** in the first 30 seconds anyway.

off the cuff
without
preparation

**think on
your feet**
think as you
go along

**make up
your mind**
make a
definite
decision

B.I.G. in the red



*I know
we're **on a
shoestring**, but
this is crazy!*

B.I.G. IN THE RED

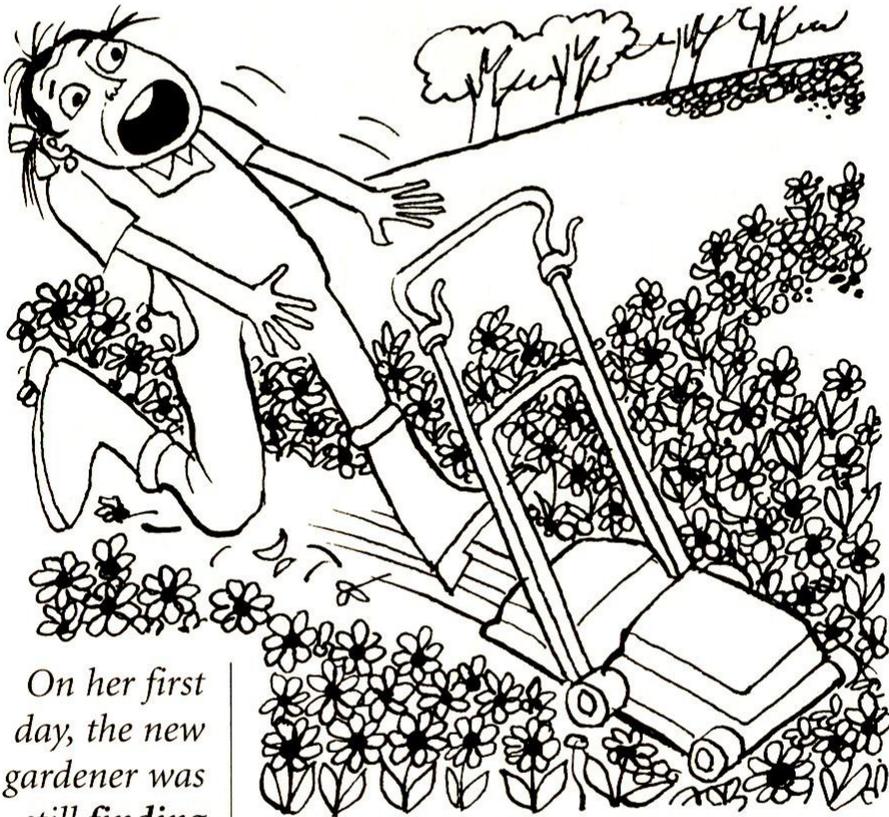
Profits are down this year for the multinational B.I.G. Co, and figures show the company is **in the red**. B.I.G.'s chief executive says, 'A slowdown in the world economy means that a lot of companies are **feeling the pinch**. Many are cutting their expenses and trying to operate **on a shoestring**, but we're big enough to keep going normally, and we'll be back **in the black** next year.'

in the red/black
in debt/credit

feel the pinch
begin to feel poor

on a shoestring
with little money to spend

A new job



On her first day, the new gardener was still **finding her feet**.

When you start a new job, it takes some time before you feel confident about what to do and how to do it. Ideally, an employer recognises this and allows you to **find your feet** before taking on anything too difficult. But life is not always ideal, so you may be thrown **in at the deep end** and have to **sink or swim**.

find your feet

get used to a new situation

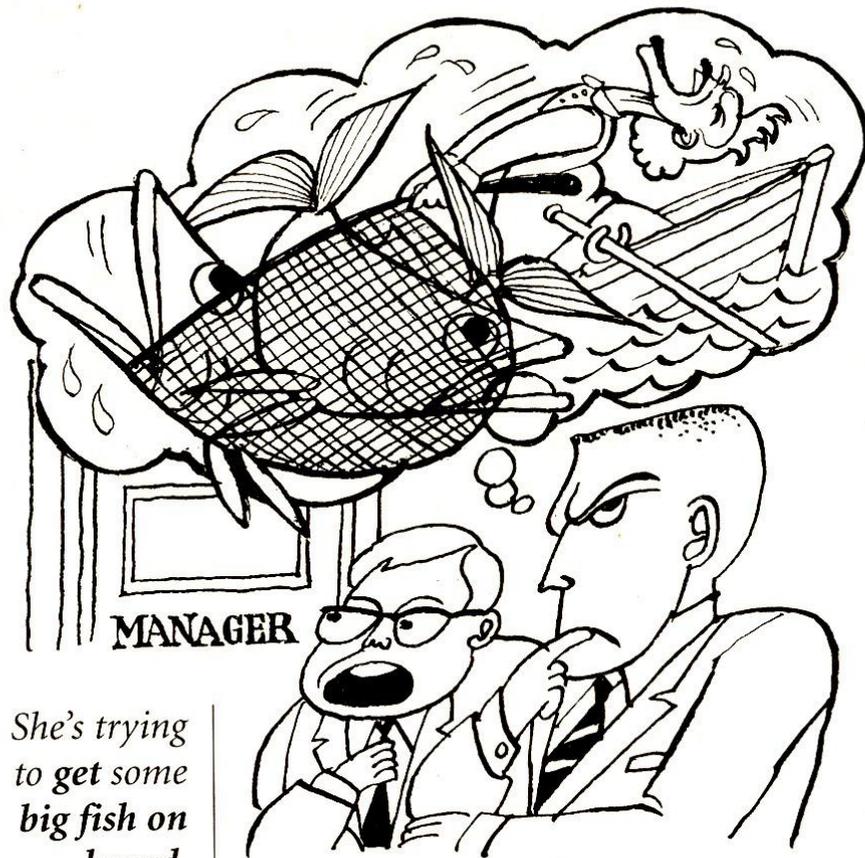
in at the deep end

directly into a difficult job

sink or swim

survive without help

Big fish



She's trying to get some big fish on board.

When Herman came to Britain to work, he spoke good English but did not know many idioms. One day at work someone said, 'Don't disturb the manager. She's meeting some **big fish** from New York.'

'Big fish?' Herman asked.

'Yes, she's got a new project and she wants to get them **on board**.'

As Herman reached for his dictionary of English idioms, an extraordinary picture formed in his **mind's eye**.

big fish
important people

on board
actively involved

mind's eye
imagination

Review 9

A Match the idioms with their meanings.

- | | |
|----------------|------------------------|
| 1 off the cuff | a) imagination |
| 2 in the red | b) without preparation |
| 3 big fish | c) owing money |
| 4 mind's eye | d) important person |

B Complete the idioms.

- 1 I must choose, but I just can't make up
- 2 He started the business at home on a
- 3 It takes a few days to find in a new job.
- 4 My salary is very low, and I can't make

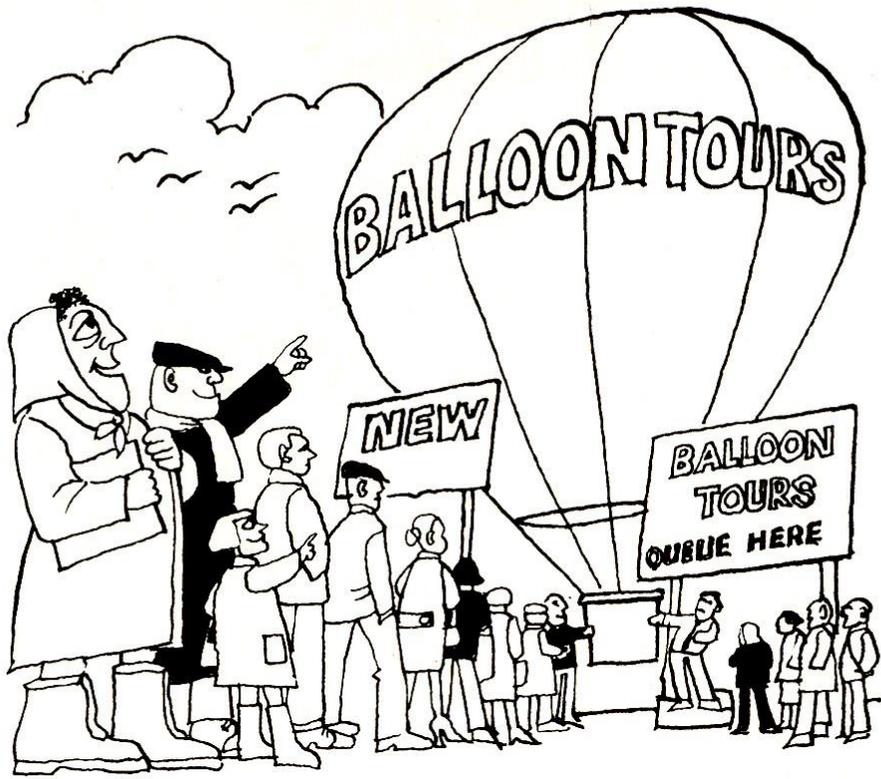
C Are these things good or bad for a business?

- 1 being in the black
- 2 feeling the pinch
- 3 making a killing

D Look at the pictures on this and the next page. Complete the idioms.



- 1 You've had the training. Now you have to



2 The new business got quickly.



That's
bad!

10

Bad things



*Mind your
own
business!*

We often use idioms when we react to bad things. For example, 'That's **below the belt**' means someone has said something unfair and cruel in an argument. Idioms can also show that a speaker does not like something: 'Bob's **sitting on the fence**' means Bob is refusing to give an opinion, which is not necessarily bad, but the speaker thinks it is. Some idioms are direct and impolite, such as '**Mind your own business!**' which means 'This is private. Keep your nose out of it.'

below the belt

unfair and cruel

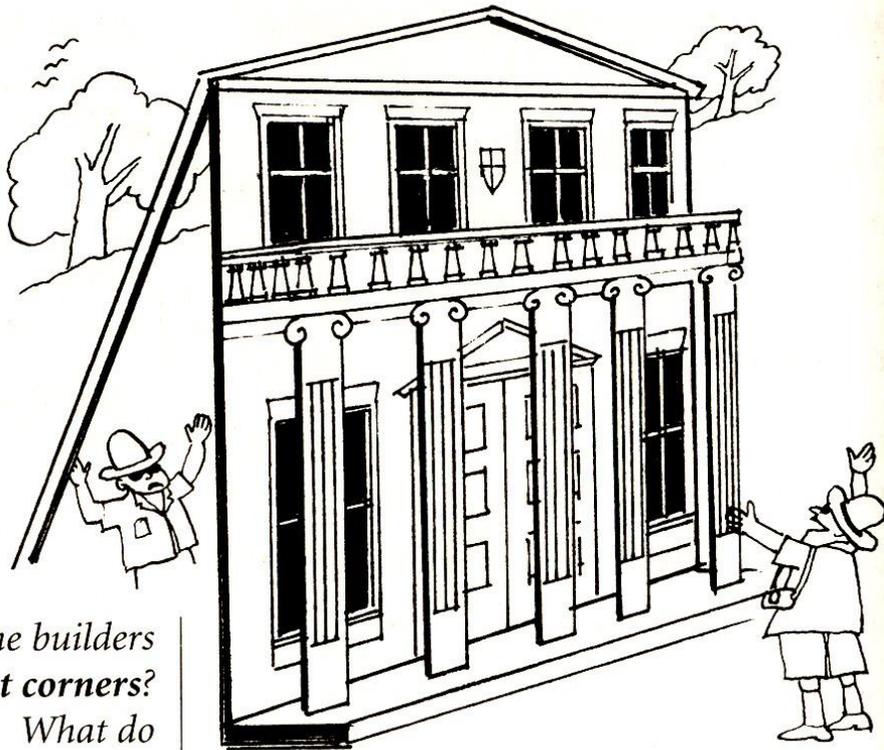
sit on the fence

be neutral

mind your own business

this is private

Bad or not?



The builders
cut corners?
What do
you mean?
It looks
great to me.

Your employer says you must finish some work by tomorrow. Is it OK to **cut corners**, or would you work **around the clock** to do the work properly?

What would you do if somebody offered to **pull strings** to help you get into a good university or to get a good job?

What if a friend of yours commits a crime? Would you tell the police or **turn a blind eye**?

cut corners
do incomplete work

around the clock
for 24 hours a day

pull strings
use influential friends

turn a blind eye
ignore it

Poison



The debate
began to
**get out of
hand.**

Winston Churchill was famous for, amongst other things, his quick wit. On one occasion in parliament, the opposition party was **up in arms** because Churchill's government had given the **thumbs down** to a proposed new law. The debate began to **get out of hand** and a woman shouted, 'If I were your wife, I'd give you poison.' Churchill instantly replied, 'If you were my wife, I would drink it.'

up in arms

protesting strongly

thumbs down

negative response

get out of hand

get out of control

Embarrassing!



All his usual jokes fell flat.

I was working as a tour guide and I was having a difficult time with a group of elderly ladies. None of my attempts to **break the ice** were working, and all my usual jokes were **falling flat**. I didn't know what to do to cheer them up.

A bit later I was getting out of the bus and I tripped and fell and tore my trousers. The ladies almost **split their sides** ... and after that, everything was fine!

break the ice

create a relaxed atmosphere

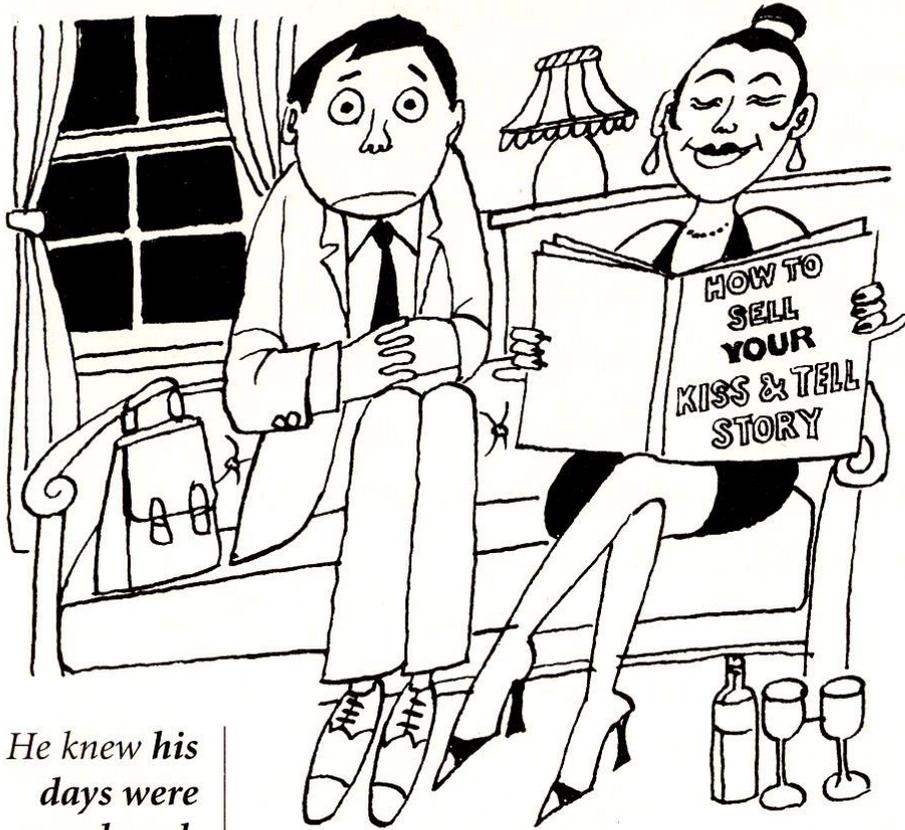
fall flat

fail

split their sides

laughed uncontrollably

Kiss and tell



He knew his
days were
numbered.

KISS AND TELL

The latest disaster for the government is the **kiss-and-tell** story in yesterday's *Sunday World* newspaper, in which a well-known actress told of her two-year affair with the Minister for the Family. As the man who **calls the shots** in the government's policy on family values, the Minister's **days are numbered**, and the government's credibility has been severely damaged.

kiss-and-tell

telling the details of a love affair

call the shots

to be the decision maker

days are numbered

survival is unlikely

Review 10

A Match the idioms with their meanings.

- | | |
|--------------------|------------------|
| 1 below the belt | a) ignore it |
| 2 up in arms | b) unfair, cruel |
| 3 turn a blind eye | c) protesting |
| 4 fall flat | d) fail |

B Complete the idioms.

- 1 Powerful people can get things by pulling
- 2 The plan got the thumbs from the director.
- 3 The country has a king, but he doesn't call
- 4 A friendly greeting helps to break

C Do you ...

- 1 express your opinions or sit on the fence?
- 2 gossip or mind your own business?
- 3 cut corners sometimes?
- 4 ever work around the clock?

D Look at the pictures on this and the next page. Complete the idioms.



- 1 They laughed so much, they almost

2 By 6 pm, the party was getting



Index

around the clock

Airports are open around the clock.

at each other's throats

What's that noise? Are they at each other's throats again?

below the belt

I know you were angry, but that comment was below the belt.

be there for

My parents are great. They've always been there for me.

big fish

He's a big fish now that his company's successful.

break someone's heart

Losing him broke her heart.

break the ice

He told a joke to break the ice at the beginning of his speech.

Your language

_____**breath of fresh air**

In an office full of boring people, she was like a breath of fresh air.

burst out laughing

He looked angry, but suddenly burst out laughing.

by the book

The police can't do whatever they want; they have to go by the book.

call the shots

Britain lost her empire long ago and no longer calls the shots.

carry weight

He is an expert, so his opinions carry a lot of weight.

catch someone red handed

The police caught him red handed inside the bank at midnight.

couch potato

Couch potatoes, who don't use their minds or bodies, risk ill health.

Your language

Your language

cut corners

We'll have to cut corners if we're going to finish the job in time.

cut no ice

I thought I had a good excuse, but it cut no ice with my boss.

dark horse

The new director is a dark horse. I wonder what he's like.

days are numbered

When the lion came towards him, he thought his days were numbered.

dirty word

Love became a dirty word during the Chinese cultural revolution.

do the trick

This medicine should do the trick.

drop-dead gorgeous

He's not just good-looking, he's drop-dead gorgeous.

Your language

fall flat

It's embarrassing if a joke falls flat.

feel the pinch

Sales are down and the company is feeling the pinch.

find your feet

It takes some time to find your feet in a new situation.

fingers crossed

Let's keep our fingers crossed that the weather will be good.

fish out of water

I'm like a fish out of water in my new job.

from scratch

We'll have to start again from scratch.

full of yourself

She's too full of herself to be interested in other people.

Your language

get a life

Why don't you do something exciting? Get a life!

get it straight

Let's get this straight. I'm in charge here. You follow me.

get off the ground

If we can get this idea off the ground, we'll be rich.

get out of hand

The demonstration got out of hand and twenty people were injured.

get the hang of

Keep practising and you'll soon get the hang of it.

get your act together

I must get my act together and find a good job.

give and take

If you want an agreement, you have to accept some give and take.

Your language

go Dutch

He offered to pay for the meal, but we had all agreed to go Dutch.

going steady

She's been going steady with her boyfriend for a year.

go to the wall

Supermarkets are everywhere, and village shops have gone to the wall.

golden rule

The golden rule of healthy exercise is not to overdo it.

have a go

You might not enjoy it, but it's worth having a go at it and finding out.

have a soft spot for

I have a soft spot for my little niece.

have a thing about

I've had a thing about her for years.

have someone on

You're not really a police officer, are you? You're having me on.

head over heels

She met him on holiday and fell head over heels for him.

he's/she's history

She used to go out with him, but he's history now.

hit it off

Mothers don't always hit it off with their son's girlfriends.

hit the nail on the head

'This wine tastes like a Bordeaux.'
– 'You've hit the nail on the head.'

hot water

His extreme opinions are always getting him into hot water.

in at the deep end

There was a crisis on my first day, so I was thrown in at the deep end.

in stitches

The speaker was so funny that the audience were in stitches.

in the flesh

I've seen him on TV, but not in the flesh.

in the red/black

I spent a lot last month and now I'm in the red.

in the same boat

I understand your problem because you and I are in the same boat.

in the thick of

He was in the thick of the fighting, but was not injured.

In your dreams.

'Can I borrow your motorcycle?'
– 'In your dreams.'

in your shoes

How would you feel if you were in my shoes?

Your language

just like that

I asked her and she said yes – just like that!

keep your head above water

The job is difficult, but I'm keeping my head above water.

keep a straight face

I wanted to laugh, but I managed to keep a straight face.

kick yourself

He kicked himself for forgetting her birthday.

kiss-and-tell

It is a kiss-and-tell book about her affair with the President.

larger than life

The characters in books and films are often larger than life.

leaves me cold

Everyone says it's a great film, but it left me cold.

Your language

let the cat out of the bag

The newspaper let the cat out of the bag before the president's speech.

life in the fast lane

Life in the fast lane is exciting but tiring.

lost for words

The news was so unexpected that he was lost for words.

lost it

Finally, he lost it and threw the computer out of the window.

love at first sight

Their eyes met and it was love at first sight.

make a killing

Umbrella shops make a killing in wet weather.

make ends meet

I can't make ends meet on my very low income.

make head nor tail of

I can't make head nor tail of this computer handbook.

make up your mind

You've looked at 12 pairs of shoes. It's time to make up your mind!

mind's eye

In my mind's eye I'm on a beach in Barbados.

mind your own business

*'How much do you earn?'
– 'Mind your own business.'*

miss the boat

She wanted to have children and was afraid of missing the boat.

Mr Right

'Will I ever find my Mr Right?' she wondered.

no rocket scientist

He can't understand the instructions – he's no rocket scientist.

no way

*'Do you think they could win?'
– 'No way.'*

off the cuff

I can't answer that question off the cuff.

off the hook

He got off the hook because the police lost the evidence.

on a roll

The company is on a roll. All their new products have done well.

on a shoestring

He started the business on a shoestring, working at home.

on board

He's starting a new company and he wants me on board.

on cloud nine

When she agreed to marry him, he was on cloud nine.

Your language

Your language

on Earth

*Where on Earth were you?
What on Earth are you doing?*

on edge

I'm always a bit on edge before an important meeting.

only have eyes for

I'm not interested in him – I only have eyes for you.

on me

Put your money away. The drinks are on me.

on the cards

We can't be sure that it'll happen, but it's on the cards.

on the go

You're always on the go. You should relax sometimes.

on the line

Fire officers sometimes put their lives on the line to save others.

Your language

on top of

We've had problems but we're getting on top of them now.

on top of the world

Yesterday I was on top of the world, but today I feel miserable.

over the moon

That's wonderful news! You must be over the moon about it.

pain in the neck

My little brother can be a pain in the neck.

party pooper

I'm sorry to be a party pooper, but I don't want to play this game.

pick up the pieces

After a very bad year, we're picking up the pieces.

pick up the tab

The taxpayer has to pick up the tab for the government's mistakes.

Your language

Your language

piece of cake

The test was a piece of cake. I got 100%.

play hard to get

Don't you like him or are you playing hard to get?

play it by ear

We don't know what will happen, so we'll have to play it by ear.

pop the question

He pulled out a ring and popped the question.

pull someone's leg

It's not really true. I'm just pulling your leg.

pull strings

He has important friends and can pull strings to get what he wants.

pull the other one

Pull the other one. I know that's not true.

Your language

push the boat out

People usually push the boat out when they get married.

put your feet up

When I've finished this work, I can put my feet up.

put your foot in it

I'm sorry. I've put my foot in it. I didn't want to upset you.

rat race

She dropped out of the rat race to become an artist.

safe bet

It's a safe bet that we won't win the Cup.

score an own goal

The company scored an own goal by angering environmentalists.

see eye to eye

We don't see eye to eye on politics so we try to avoid the subject.

Your language

see red

During an argument, she saw red and attacked him with a knife.

sink or swim

They gave me some training and then left me to sink or swim.

sit on the fence

If we sit on the fence, the bad guys might win.

slip your mind

I'm sorry. Your birthday just slipped my mind.

small talk

I don't like parties where I don't know anyone – I'm not good at small talk.

soft touch

I know I'm a soft touch. I just can't say 'No' to people.

spill the beans

Don't tell her, because she'll spill the beans to everybody.

Your language

split their sides

The film was so funny the audience were splitting their sides.

step on it

*Step on it!
We're late!*

sweep someone off their feet

He swept her off her feet. And now they're married.

take a rain check

Thanks. I can't come tonight, but can I take a rain check?

take some doing

It'll take some doing to carry that piano upstairs.

take to heart

He took the doctor's advice to heart and stopped smoking.

take your time

Take your time. There's no hurry.

Your language

That would be telling.

We could give you the answer, but that would be telling.

that'll be the day

*'Is your brother married?'
'That'll be the day!'*

the gloves are off

The gloves are off in the price war between the two supermarkets.

the man in the street

The man in the street wants a change of government.

think on your feet

A soldier has to think on his feet.

thumbs down

The government has given the thumbs down to a tax cut.

tie the knot

After living together for three years, they decided to tie the knot.

Your language

to death

What a terrible film. I was bored to death.

to say the least

Skydiving is not the safest sport, to say the least.

touch and go

We won in the end, but it was touch and go until the last minute.

touch base

Touch base with the police and find out if they've discovered anything.

turn a blind eye

Although it's illegal, the police often turn a blind eye to it.

turn heads

It's a fast, stylish car that turns heads.

turn the tables

He managed to get the gun and turn the tables on the robber.

two-timing

She's two-timing him. She's seeing someone else too.

up in arms

Lorry drivers are up in arms about the cost of fuel.

what got into him

I've never seen him so angry! What got into him?

You can say that again.

'It's cold, isn't it?'
– *'You can say that again.'*

You're telling me.

'This hotel is terrible.'
– *'You're telling me.'*

Your language

Answers

Review 1

- A 1 larger than life = b) exciting
2 dark horse = a) obscure person
3 on the go = c) active, busy
- B 1 She was so surprised that she was lost for words.
2 He's too full of himself to be interested in us.
3 My little brother is a pain in the neck sometimes.
4 The man in the street cares more about money than politics.
- C open answers

Review 2

- A 1 on edge = c) anxious
2 in stitches = a) laughing a lot
3 lose it = d) be out of control
4 see red = b) feel very angry
- B 1 I feel on top of the world when the sun shines.
2 She burst out laughing when she saw me.
3 I'm on cloud nine whenever we're together.
4 He suddenly hit me. I don't know what got into him.
- C open answers

Review 3

- A 1 see eye to eye = d) agree
2 it's on me = c) I'll pay
3 hit it off = a) like each other
4 fingers crossed = b) let's hope
- B 1 The nice new secretary was a breath of fresh air.
2 No. You paid last time. This is on me.
3 I think he has a soft spot for you.
4 I can't come out tonight, but can I take a rain check?
5 Give and take is important in a good relationship.
- C open answers

Review 4

- A 1 no way = b) definitely not
2 go steady = c) in a regular relationship
3 he's history = d) in the past
4 go Dutch = a) share costs
- B 1 As soon as they met it was love at first sight.
2 He took out a ring and popped the question.
3 Some people plan, others play it by ear.
4 He's in love and only has eyes for her.
- C open answers
- D 1 In your dreams!
2 ... a thing about ponytails.

Review 5

- A 1 Mr Right = c) the ideal man
2 hot water = b) trouble
3 put your feet up = a) relax
4 off the hook = d) out of trouble
- B 1 We're in the same boat, so let's help each other.
2 You need to get your act together and find a job.
3 He left the rat race to work in the third world.
4 How would you feel if you were in my shoes?
- C 2, feeling like a fish out of water

Review 6

- A 1 two-time = b) be unfaithful
2 spill the beans = a) reveal a secret
3 You're telling me. = d) I know that
4 pulling my leg = c) teasing me
- B 1 Look! A spider behind you! – Pull the other one.
2 What's the secret? – That would be telling.
3 This is difficult. – You can say that again.
4 It tastes like Bordeaux. – You've hit the nail on the head.
- C open answers

Review 7

- A 1 touch and go = a) unsure
2 on the cards = d) likely
3 tie the knot = b) get married
4 have a go = c) try
- B 1 We'll have to start again from scratch.
2 Some people can memorise phrases just like that.
3 A golden rule of learning is to practise regularly.
4 It's a safe bet that I'll forget some of these idioms.
5 I couldn't swim at the beginning of the course but now I'm getting the hang of it.
- C 1 That'll be the day!
2 ... it cut no ice with him at all.

Review 8

- A 1 piece of cake = b) easy
2 take your time = c) don't hurry
3 step on it = a) go faster
4 miss the boat = d) be too late
- B 1 The police caught the thief red handed.
2 The campaign has started, and the gloves are off.
3 We made a mistake and scored an own goal.
4 The doctor said, 'These pills will do the trick.'
- C open answers

Review 9

- A 1 off the cuff = b) without preparation
2 in the red = c) owing money
3 big fish = d) important person
4 mind's eye = a) imagination
- B 1 I must choose, but I just can't make up my mind.
2 He started the business at home on a shoestring.
3 It takes a few days to find your feet in a new job.
4 My salary is very low, and I can't make ends meet.
- C 1 good 2 bad 3 bad 4 good
- D 1 ... sink or swim.
2 ... got off the ground

Review 10

- A 1 below the belt = b) unfair, cruel
2 up in arms = c) protesting
3 turn a blind eye = a) ignore it
4 fall flat = d) fail
- B 1 Powerful people can get things by pulling strings.
2 The plan got the thumbs up/down from the director.
3 The country has a king, but he doesn't call the shots.
4 A friendly greeting helps to break the ice.
- C open answers
- D 1 They laughed so much they almost split their sides.
2 By 6 pm, the party was getting out of hand.



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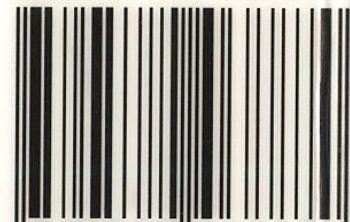
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