**Idioms** are expressions in general usage that reference a current or immediate situation, often by offering general advice, or traditional words of wisdom. Because idioms are often used in the middle of the situation they refer to, you will probably learn them mostly from conversations. Most are very imaginative, but make sense in context.

*Example:* Imagine that your neighbor is making a lot of noise in his back yard. Because a very high fence separates your yards, you are unable to see exactly what is going on. You begin to climb up the fence, and try to look over, but your mother stops you. She tells you, “Don’t be nosey. Curiosity killed the cat!” *She means that snooping around in other people’s business can be dangerous.*

The following list contains a few common idioms you may encounter in conversation, along with their meanings:

- **Actions speak louder than words** = What people do matters more than what they say
- **Back to the drawing board** = A conclusion or result is bad and the whole attempt or experiment must be redone
- **Ball is in your court** = The next move is up to you
- **Barking up the wrong tree** = Looking in the wrong place. Accusing the wrong person
- **Don’t beat around the bush** = Don’t avoid the subject/issue
- **Best of both worlds** = Having the best of everything
- **Bite off more than you can chew** = To be overwhelmed by too hard of a task
- **Blessing in disguise** = Something good that isn't recognized at first
- **Burn the midnight oil** = To work late into the night (in the past homes would be lit by candles or oil lamps)
- **Can't judge a book by its cover** = Cannot judge something primarily on appearance
- **Costs an arm and a leg** = This idiom is used when something is very expensive
- **Cross that bridge when you come to it** = Don’t anticipate a problem; deal with it when it happens
- **Curiosity killed the cat** = Being inquisitive can lead you into an unpleasant situation
- **Cut corners** = When something is done badly to save money
- **Devil’s Advocate** = To present a counter argument
- **Don’t count your chickens before the eggs have hatched** = Don't make plans for something that might not happen
- **Don't give up the day job** = No one would pay you to do that thing you aren’t good at.
- **Don't put all your eggs in one basket** = Don’t count too much on one thing, especially financially.
- **Desperate times call for desperate measures** = In this bad situation, we have to do whatever it takes
- **Every cloud has a silver lining** = Find the good in this situation
- **Feel a bit under the weather** = Feeling sick/ill
- **Give it the benefit of the doubt** = Until proven otherwise, try to think the best of a person, or situation
- **Hear it on the grapevine** = To hear a secret by popular report, or through gossip without revealing your source
- **Most Common Idioms and Their Meanings:**
LUC WRITING CENTER – “COMMON IDIOMS AND THEIR MEANINGS”

- Hitting the books = Studying hard
- Hitting the sack = Getting some sleep
- Hit the nail on the head = That is exactly right/correct
- Jump on the bandwagon = Follow whatever trend everyone else is following
- Kill two birds with one stone = to take care of two different things at the same time
- Last straw = The last problem in a series of problems that can be endured before someone snaps/goes crazy
- Let the cat out of the bag = To tell a secret that can’t be contained once revealed
- Once in a blue moon = something rarely happens
- Pull/put the wool over someone’s eyes = to fool someone, so they can’t see
- Quit cold turkey = to stop doing something completely
- Sit tight = don’t move, or don’t do anything; wait right where you are
- See eye to eye = This idiom is used to say that two (or more people) agree on something
- Sit on the fence = This is used when someone does not want to choose or make a decision
- Speak of the devil! = This expression is used when the person you have just been talking about arrives
- That’s/It’s a piece of cake = That/It is simple
- That cost an arm and a leg = Very expensive
- The pot calling the kettle black = don’t accuse someone of something when the same accusations are true of you
- To add insult to injury = To make a bad situation even worse
- To make a long story short = To leave out the details and just make the main point
- Tongue in cheek = to say something without meaning it seriously
- To take the bull by the horns = I’m going to take care of this matter/ take action
- Up in the air = uncertain
- Where there’s a will, there’s a way = if you want to do something, you will find a way

Exercise

Select an appropriate idiom for each situation described below (answers on next pg.):

1. You tell your father that if you can get the summer internship at Glendale Marketing and do really well there that maybe after you complete your marketing degree, they will hire you. Your father replies: “Be careful about making long-term plans around your internship. Don’t _________________________________.”

2. One of your friends asks you to lift a very heavy piece of furniture for him, but worries that the task will be too hard. Since you plan to bring other people to help you lift, you reassure him: “Don’t worry, it’ll be ________________________________.”

3. Accidentally, you tell your brother’s girlfriend that he is at the jewelry store. She figures out he is buying a wedding ring and planning to propose. When your brother finds out you told his secret, he becomes extremely angry and says to you: “Wow, you certainly have ________________________________!”
Answers:
1. Don’t put all your eggs in one basket.
2. A piece of cake.
3. Let the cat out of the bag!