

American Idiomatic Expressions

1. 24/7 –Twenty-four hours of the day. The drug store is open 24/7.
2. A blessing in disguise – What appears to be a misfortune instead is a blessing, a benefit.
3. A gut feeling – A feeling deep in the gut or belly
4. A postage stamp – Something very small. There's no room in Mary's kitchen – it's a postage stamp.
5. Ace a test – To get an A on a test.
6. Back atcha! – Back at you. – Same to you.
7. Back stabbing – Betrayal
8. Be at the end of your rope – To be desperate.
9. Break a leg – To wish someone luck in a big effort.
10. Broke – to be completely out of money. Many farmers went broke.
11. Bummed, Bummed out – Sad, Depressed
12. Call it a day – Say good night
13. Cliffhanger– Very challenging, hanging on the edge of a cliff
14. Cold turkey – suddenly and abruptly
15. Confessions are good for the soul, but not much good for anything else. Means revealing your secrets may help you internally, but externally it may hurt you in society.
16. Cool – Wonderful, Great, Fantastic
17. Costs an arm and a leg. – Something that's very expensive, a high price to pay in money or suffering. Ex: How much does an arm and a leg actually cost? No one knows.
18. Cram – To study very hard, to shove, push information into the brain.
19. Crash – To go to sleep
20. Cross that bridge when you get to it. - Don't worry about it now. Wait till you get to it.
21. Cross your fingers – To wish for something.
22. Dead end - A situation that is unlikely to be successful, or a road that leads nowhere. We had several promising ideas, but they all turned out to be dead ends.
23. Designated driver- A person chosen to abstain from drinking, to drive others home safely.
24. Ditto - The same, me too, I agree.
25. Don't knock it until you've tried it - You should try something before criticizing it.
26. Don't breathe a word. – Do not reveal a secret. Keep utterly quiet. "Promise not to breathe a word of what I'm telling you."
27. Don't put all your eggs in one basket - Do not concentrate all efforts and resources in one area, as one could lose everything. Mike diversifies his investments in many areas to avoid putting all his eggs in one basket.
28. Dough – Money
29. Easy as pie - Very easy. As simple and pleasurable as eating pie.
30. Elephant in the room - A big issue everyone is aware of, is being ignored, because it is uncomfortable.
31. Eye-opener - An event that is unexpectedly enlightening and surprising.
32. Fat chance! – That's extremely unlikely!
33. Finding/looking for a needle in a haystack – Almost impossible to find a sewing needle in a haystack (a tall pile of dry grass).
34. Finger food – Party food that can be eaten with the fingers.
35. For the birds – Useless, An unnecessary waste of time.

36. Freak out – To panic
37. From scratch – From nothing, from the very beginning, without anything pre-made. "Jack built his company from scratch"
38. Get some Z's – Go to sleep. Zzzzzz refers to snoring in comic books.
39. Give it a shot – To try to do something. To make an attempt.
40. Give it your all – To do something wholeheartedly
41. Gone up in smoke - If your plans or dreams go up in smoke, they are destroyed.
42. Gotcha – Ha Ha, I win. To playfully trick someone.
43. Grand – one thousand dollars
44. Hang by the skin of your teeth – To be very tense, holding on with your teeth afraid of falling.
45. Hit the books – To study
46. Hit the pillow – Fall into bed
47. Hold your horses – Slow down
48. Holy Mackerel! – An exclamation instead of saying Holy Mary's name disrespectfully. Mackerel is a common fish once sold on Sundays in England, called "holy fish".
49. Hook, line, and sinker - To emphasize that someone has been completely deceived or tricked. He fell for the story hook, line, and sinker.
50. How's it goin' – How is it going? How are you?
51. I'm all ears – I'm really listening – gossip or news.
52. Ice breaker - A game or activity to introduce people to feel more relaxed together. She started the training session with an amusing ice breaker game.
53. Icing on the cake – An extra treat. Paula enjoyed the concert and getting to meet the artist backstage after the show was the icing on the cake.
54. It takes guts – It requires courage. It takes guts for firemen to enter a burning building.
55. It's a breeze for you – It's easy for you.
56. Keep your eyes peeled – Keep your eyes open. Watch for something.
57. Killer – Extremely difficult or challenging. A killer exam.
58. Lighten up – To get happier.
59. Like clockwork - Very smoothly and easily.
60. Lotsa Luck – Good luck!
61. Mixed feelings. A partly positive and partly negative reaction to something. I have mixed feelings about this trip because I sometimes get sick on airplanes.
62. Never imagined in my wildest dreams – I'm very surprised and could not have imagined it.
63. No sweat – No problem, don't worry.
64. No way! – Congratulations and surprise!
65. Not in a million years - Something is extremely unlikely
66. Nothin' to it – It was no effort at all
67. One in a million – Chances are so low it makes something special, rare, extraordinary.
68. Out in the middle of nowhere - A place that is remote and isolated.
69. Out of the blue – By surprise, without warning, unexpectedly, out of the sky.
70. Piece of cake – Really easy, like eating a sweet.
71. Point the finger – Shift the blame to someone else.
72. Potluck - A meal or party to which each guest brings a dish
73. Pumped – Excited, filled with enthusiasm.

74. Raining cats and dogs - Raining so hard that the animals on the roof fall into the house.
75. Red tape - Excessive rules, formalities, or bureaucracy
76. Score – To finally get something you wanted.
77. Screw up – To make a big mistake
78. See ya – See you
79. See you on the flip-flop - Informal good-bye. See you pretty soon. Like the flip side of vinyl record.
80. Skeleton in the Closet – A dark secret about someone that they are hiding to avoid embarrassment.
81. Slow and steady wins the race. – Be calm and take one step at a time. Refers to Aesop’s Fable of the Tortoise and the Hare.
82. Smarts – Intelligence
83. Smells, or sounds fishy – Something is suspicious or shady
84. Spill the beans – To reveal a secret.
85. Split – To leave, to go away.
86. Stay the course – To continue on a plan to the end
87. Sure thing – Yes, or You’re welcome
88. Thanks a million – Thanks a lot.
89. The bottom line – the final number in a financial report, or the final outcome of an issue.
90. The cat’s out of the bag – a secret has been revealed.
91. The last straw or the straw that breaks the camel's back. – This is the last of a series of negative events and now you cannot accept it. Losing my job was bad enough but being evicted was the final straw.
92. The squeaky wheel gets the grease - The loudest problem gets attention.
93. To bark up the wrong tree – to pursue something erroneously. A dog barking up a tree when his quarry is hiding in the next tree.
94. To be (or put oneself) in another’s shoes - be (or put oneself) in another person's situation or predicament. "If I'd been in your shoes I'd have walked out."
95. To be between a rock and a hard place – to be faced with two equally impossible alternatives.
96. To be busted – To be bankrupt. Could also mean to be arrested.
97. To be down in the dumps. - In a gloomy or depressed mood: After losing the student election, Jack really felt down in the dumps.
98. To be in a bind, or a jam– to be in a difficult, threatening, or embarrassing position.
99. To be in the dark – Confused, Unable to see anything.
100. To be man enough - to be brave enough to do something: He was man enough to admit he had made a mistake.
101. To be messed up – to be confused, to be sick, to make a mistake, to be mentally ill.
102. To be on someone’s case – To continually criticize or harass someone. The teacher is on my case every day for forgetting my homework.
103. To be on the lookout - To constantly watch for something. John stood up on the mast of the boat, on the lookout for an approaching ship.
104. To be out of the woods – To be out of danger or difficulty. After a long time in therapy, Joe is finally out of the woods.

105. To be stuck – To be fixed tightly be unable to move. I'm stuck at home until my sister gets back with the car.
106. To be tied up - To be very busy, can't speak to anyone or go anywhere.
107. To bend over backwards - To try extremely hard to make great effort to help or to please someone. Richard bent over backwards to help his friend.
108. To bounce something off sb - To try or pitch a new idea to someone or a group.
109. To break sb's heart -To cause someone to feel great sorrow or sadness.
110. To burn one's bridges - To make negative comments that destroy one's connections. Even if you are dismissed from a job take care to not burn your bridges with unseemly comments, as you never know when you'll meet again.
111. To buy a story – To believe it, even if it might not be true.
112. To call someone's bluff - To expose their deception or lie. To challenge someone to carry out a threat.
113. To chill out - To calm down, to relax, take it easy instead of worrying.
114. To count on - To rely on someone or something. To depend on it.
115. To face the music – To have to accept the unpleasant consequences of one's actions.
116. To fall apart – To fall to pieces - break up, come apart, or disintegrate.
117. To feel beat – To be tired
118. To foot the bill- To pay for something, esp. something expensive. Her parents are going to foot the bill for Linda's graduation party.
119. To get a rush out of something – A good feeling, a buzz, a strong sense of enjoyment, an intense feeling of joy.
120. To get sacked – to be fired from a job
121. To get the picture – To see or understand a situation clearly.
122. To get up to speed - After her holiday, it took Kate a few hours to get back up to speed on the recent developments in her company.
123. To get wind of something – to hear about something. Once the school principal caught wind of the problem, she called a teachers' meeting.
124. To give someone a hand – to help with a project.
125. To give someone a lift- To take someone somewhere in your car. Do you need a lift home?
126. To go out of one's way – To make a special effort to do something. Jim went out of his way to be kind to his new neighbor.
127. To hang out- To spend a lot of relaxing time in a place or with someone: My sister and I used to hang out at the school cafeteria.
128. To have a clean slate – When you wipe a slate clean, you are starting anew. A slate is a writing stone.
129. To have better fish to fry - You should turn your attention to something more important.
130. To have cold feet - To be too fearful to finish something.
131. To have it made in the shade - To have a very easy life or to be in a very good situation. She had to work hard to achieve success, but now she has it made in the shade.
132. To have no leg to stand on – To have no basis or truth to a statement. It is invalid.
133. To have something in the bag. Almost total success, and you're certain to get it.
134. To have your eye on sb – To keep under careful observation.

135. To have your heart set on something - to want something very much, so that you would be very disappointed if you do not get it. She's got her heart set on dancing lessons.
136. To hear through the grapevine - To learn of something informally through gossip or rumor.
137. To hit rock bottom – To be in a very distressing place in life; the lowest point that one could go. Joe hit rock bottom after the loss of his mother.
138. To kill two birds with one stone - Achieve two aims at once.
139. To know something cold – To know it well, completely
140. To know something like the back of your hand – To know it completely.
141. To let the cat out of the bag – to reveal a secret
142. To make a splash - To attract a lot of attention, to launch a new product or idea publicly. Jane made quite a splash at the club with her new fashions.
143. To pass the buck - shift the responsibility to someone else. The politician passed the buck onto someone else instead of accepting responsibility for the problem.
144. To pick a bone with sb – To tell someone you want to argue or disagree about something.
145. To play catch-up - To try to reach the same level, score or position, after one has fallen behind.
146. To pull an all-nighter - To stay up all night studying
147. To pull someone's leg – To trick or to tell a lie to someone in a playful way.
148. To put one's best foot forward- To show oneself in the most positive way, to make a favorable impression.
149. To raise a few eyebrows - To cause others to react with surprise, mild disapproval, or suspicion. Sally's flippant attitude at the party raised a few eyebrows.
150. To see eye to eye - have similar views or attitudes to something; be in full agreement. Alan and I don't always see eye to eye.
151. To show the ropes - To teach or introduce someone to a new job or skill. Mary showed her younger sister the ropes, and now she's doing a great job.
152. To speak one's mind – To express one's feelings or opinions frankly. Timmy was afraid to speak his mind in front of his schoolmates.
153. To spill the beans – To reveal a secret.
154. To spread the word, or the word spread – Jim's friend spread the word about his new car. It took only an hour for word to spread around the office that John had been fired.
155. To stab in the back – To betray someone's trust, to hurt someone behind their back.
156. To stick to your guns – To hold firm and refuse to change, despite criticism.
157. To take a break – To pause
158. To take a rain check – To politely refuse an invitation, implying that I might accept it at a later date. "I can't make it tonight, but I'd like to take a rain check."
159. To take the plunge – To commit oneself to a new and risky course of action, to get married.
160. To tie the knot – To get married.
161. To turn the tables on someone - To make a change so that person is now at a disadvantage.

162. To twist somebody's arm - To persuade someone to do something they didn't want to do.
163. To walk away - To leave something, do nothing about it, or face no bad consequences from it.
164. Top-notch – Excellent, very good quality
165. Up in the air –Uncertain, unresolved, still unclear
166. Uptight – Worried, Tense, Upset
167. Walking papers - Notice of dismissal from a job. The reporter has been given his walking papers.
168. Warn out – Tired
169. Whiz – A genius, a very smart person
170. Word gets around – when news spreads
171. You can say that again – I agree completely!

Hand Gestures

1. “Quotes” - Quotation marks - Indicates the words in quotes may be false or sarcastic.
2. Blah blah – Fingers open and close. Someone is talking too much, empty words
3. Bye - wave fingers. Or casual "bye" folds fingers one at a time.
4. Call me - Thumb and index finger indicates phone at ear
5. Calm down - Both hand spreading out
6. Come here – index finger – receive a surprise
7. Come here whole hand. Hurry up if fast.
8. Crazy, or He's crazy - Rotate index finger beside ear
9. Cross fingers – Good luck
10. Cross fingers behind back – This is a lie, but it's ok
11. Cut it out! Stop! Don't do this!
12. Fingers walking – Walking, leaving
13. Hello? Is this real? Both hands stiffly up to sides. Exasperation, frustration
14. Here - index finger points to floor
15. High Five – Congratulations
16. I dunno. I don't know - Both hands empty to side, with shoulder shrug
17. I love you – Place one hand flat on heart
18. I love you – Two hands form a heart
19. I'm bored - Pretend to cover yawn
20. I'm watching you - Two fingers indicate my eyes, then point to you.
21. Indicate watch - Look at time. It's late
22. It's so hot - wave hands beside face
23. Me – point to chest
24. My lips are sealed - index finger and thumb indicate zipper mouth
25. OK, Perfect! - Index and thumb together
26. Salute – flat hand or two fingers to forehead. Can be respectful or sarcastic depending on context
27. Shhh – Be quiet, index finger in front of lips
28. Stop sign or “Wait” whole hand.
29. There - index finger points out there

30. Thumbs down- bad
31. Thumbs up - good
32. Time out - Make a "T" with two hands
33. Tut tut – Disapproval, Shake index finger, often with clicking sound of tongue at top of mouth.
34. V – Peace or Victory
35. You – hand toward you

Contractions

1. Ya - You
2. D'You - Do you?
3. D'Ya - Do you?
4. Ain't - Am/Is/Are not
5. Wanna - Want to
6. Gimme - Give me
7. Gotta - Got to
8. Kinda - Kind of
9. Lemme - Let me
10. Dunno - Don't know
11. Lotta - Lot of
12. Lotsa - Lots of
13. Whatcha - What do you?
14. Gonna - Going to
15. Watcha Gonna - What are you going to?
16. Whaddaya - What do you?
17. Didja - Did you?
18. Wheredja - Where did you?
19. Howja - How did you?
20. Gotcha - Got you.
21. Thatsa - That is a.