

SOME IDIOMS IN AMERICAN ENGLISH

It is said that American English is more than 50% idiomatic.

Here are some of the most common idioms,
plus sample sentences to put them in context.

EG/sm

- after all:** used to introduce a reason or explanation *immerhin*
Let's go to a movie. After all, it's Saturday night.
- all of a sudden:** suddenly, without warning *plötzlich*
All of a sudden, the lights went out.
- as well:** also, too *auch, noch dazu*
She speaks English, Arabic, and French as well.
- at all:** in the smallest amount *überhaupt (nicht)*
The doctor told him not to eat any sugar at all.
- at this point:** at this time *zur Zeit / zu diesem Zeitpunkt*
At this point, I've saved five hundred dollars for my vacation.
- be about to:** be ready to do something *vorhaben, zu...,
im Begriff sein etwas zu tun*
The phone rang just as I was about to leave.
- be better off:** be in a better situation *besser dran sein*
I will be better off when I move into my own apartment.
- be broke:** be without money *pleite sein, abgebrannt*
I paid all my bills and now I'm broke.
- be in charge of:** be responsible for *für etwas verantwortlich sein,
die Verantwortung haben*
My mother is in charge of the family's finances.
- be out of :** be without something one had before *nicht mehr (vorrätig) haben*
I can't make sandwiches because we're out of bread.
- be out of shape:** be in poor condition *nicht fit sein*
He is out of shape because he doesn't exercise.
- be to blame:** be responsible for something wrong *die Schuld an etwas haben*
He is to blame for his poor grades. He never studies.
- be touch and go:** be uncertain of a result *riskant, prekär sein,
auf des Messers Schneide
stehen*
It was touch and go, but the plane finally landed safely.

Some Idioms in American English

be up and about: be out of bed and active after an illness

*wohl auf sein,
wieder auf den Beinen sein*

She has been very sick. It will be a long time before she's up and about.

be up to someone: be one's decision or responsibility

jemandes Entscheidung

We can meet tomorrow or Wednesday. It's up to you.

be up to something: (secretly) planning something *etwas im Schilde führen*

I can't be sure, but I think he is up to something.

be used to: be accustomed to

*an etwas gewöhnt sein,
etwas gewohnt sein,
sich an etwas gewöhnen*

Juan is from Colombia, so he's used to hot weather.

(SEE ALSO: used to)

break into: enter by force

einbrechen

Burglars broke into the university and stole €20,000 worth of equipment.

brush up on: review, study again

etwas auffrischen

I need to brush up on all the facts before I take the test.

by heart: by memorizing

auswendig lernen

You have to learn those formulas by heart.

by the way: some added information

übrigens

The meeting will be next Tuesday. By the way, the new instructor will be there.

call off: cancel

absagen, stornieren

We called off our party because of the storm.

catch up: become "not behind"

*aufholen, nachholen,
jemanden einholen*

I missed two weeks of class. I'll have to work hard to catch up.

come up with: find an answer, idea, plan / furnish money or other need

*sich etwas ausdenken,
auf eine Lösung oder Idee
kommen, Geld aufbringen*

The instructor asked her students to come up with ideas for their presentations.

The students were asked to come up with the money for the books.

count on someone: depend on someone

*auf jemanden zählen,
sich auf jemanden verlassen*

He counts on his neighbor, who's also a student, to drive him to the university.

cut down on: reduce

*etwas einschränken,
sich einschränken*

I've had to cut down on eating in restaurants to save money.

Some Idioms in American English

do one's best: try as hard as possible <i>I do my best to finish my work.</i>	<i>das Beste geben</i>
do something over: do something again <i>The biologist couldn't believe the results of the blood test, so he did it over again to be sure.</i>	<i>noch einmal machen/tun, wiederholen</i>
do without: live without <i>We did without electricity and running water on our camping trip.</i>	<i>ohne etwas auskommen</i>
dress up (1): put on one's best clothes <i>We usually dress up for weddings and funerals.</i>	<i>sich schickmachen / feinmachen, sich schön anziehen</i>
dress up (2): put on a costume <i>We dress up in costumes for Halloween.</i>	<i>sich verkleiden</i>
drop off: take somewhere, deliver <i>I'll drop you off at the lecture hall on the way.</i>	<i>jemanden absetzen, etwas abgeben</i>
even so: nevertheless, however, but <i>She is overweight. Even so, she's very attractive.</i>	<i>(aber) trotzdem, nichtsdestotrotz</i>
every other (1): every alternate, every second thing in a series <i>I call my sister every other week.</i>	<i>jede zweite / alternierend</i>
every other (2): all other <i>She can't come, but every other person we invited will be there.</i>	<i>alle andere</i>
fall behind: do something more slowly than expected <i>When he fell behind in his studies, the instructor gave him extra help.</i>	<i>zurückfallen</i>
fall in love: begin to love <i>He fell in love with her soon after he met her.</i>	<i>sich in jemanden verlieben</i>
find fault with: criticize <i>Whenever he goes to a restaurant, he finds fault with the food and service.</i>	<i>kritisieren</i>
find out: learn or discover <i>He was very happy when he found out he got a good grade on the exam.</i>	<i>herausfinden</i>
foot the bill: pay <i>Our group footed the bill for the picnic.</i>	<i>bezahlen</i>
from now on: beginning now and continuing in the future <i>I promise to try to write you a letter every week from now on.</i>	<i>ab jetzt, von jetzt an</i>

Some Idioms in American English

get along with: have good relations (gut miteinander) auskommen
She asked the students to stop fighting and try to get along with each other.

get away with: do something wrong and not be caught entkommen mit,
mit etwas durchkommen
They never found the robber. He got away with his crime.

get in touch with: contact, communicate with Kontakt aufnehmen, jemanden
erreichen, sich in Verbindung
setzen
You can get in touch with me by telephone. My number is 0451 – 5 65 13.

get lost: lose one's way of direction sich verlaufen, sich verlieren
It's easy to get lost in a strange city. / He lost himself in his work.

(**NOTE:** "Get lost!" can also be an order als Befehl: Hau ab!,
Verschwinde! , als Fluch:
Verpiss dich!)

get over: become normal again after an illness or bad experience
etwas überwinden oder
überstehen, sich überwinden zu
She was bitten once and has never gotten over her fear of dogs.

get rid of: dispose of jemanden oder etwas
loswerden
My mom finally got rid of my brother's baby clothes last week. He's fourteen now.

get together: come together, meet (sich) treffen
I got together with my friends on my birthday.

give someone a hand: help someone jemandem helfen, jemandem
zu Hand gehen
Let me give you a hand with those packages.

give up: stop or abandon doing something. mit etwas aufhören
He had to give up swimming because of an ear infection.

go Dutch: a situation in which each person pays for his or her own food or
entertainment getrennte Kasse machen
I often eat lunch in a restaurant with my friends and we always go Dutch.

go out: go to parties, movies, restaurants, and other social activities ausgehen
She likes to go out and have a good time.

go to pieces: lose control of one's emotions durchdrehen,
die Kontrolle verlieren
He went to pieces when his computer crashed.

had better: should sollen
You had better listen when she is talking if you want to learn the material.

Some Idioms in American English

have got: have <i>We have got a lot of material to study.</i>	<i>haben.</i>
have on: be wearing <i>He felt strange because he had on a suit and the others had on jeans.</i>	<i>anhaben, tragen</i>
hold up (1): interrupt something someone is doing <i>I'm sorry I'm late. I got held up.</i>	<i>abhalten</i>
hold up (2): rob, using a weapon <i>Several men held up the passengers on the train.</i>	<i>überfallen</i>
how about: used to ask for information <i>How about fish for dinner?</i>	<i>wie wäre es mit...</i>
in advance: before <i>I made my appointment with the doctor two weeks in advance.</i>	<i>im Voraus, vorher</i>
in the long run: in the end, as a final result <i>In the long run, it's a good idea to save a little money every week.</i>	<i>letztendlich, langfristig, auf lange Sicht</i>
in time: soon enough <i>I like to get up in time to have a good breakfast before I leave for school.</i>	<i>rechtzeitig</i>
keep an eye on: watch, guard, take care of <i>She asked her roommate to keep an eye on the cake in the oven while she took a bath.</i>	<i>ein Auge auf etwas oder jemanden werfen, auf etwas oder jemanden aufpassen, bewachen</i>
keep someone company: stay with or accompany someone <i>Please come in the kitchen and keep me company while I cook dinner.</i>	<i>Gesellschaft leisten</i>
keep (verb + ing): continue doing something <i>I keep forgetting to buy shampoo. I must do it today.</i>	<i>etwas weiterhin tun, machen</i>
let go of: release something one is holding <i>She let go of the books and they fell to the floor.</i>	<i>etwas / jemanden loslassen</i>
let someone down: disappoint someone <i>He let me down when he didn't come to my party.</i>	<i>jemanden enttäuschen</i>
let someone know: inform someone <i>If you let me know what time your train arrives, I'll meet you at the station.</i>	<i>jemanden informieren</i>
look forward to: think about something in the future with pleasure <i>She's looking forward to going on vacation next month.</i>	<i>sich freuen auf</i>

Some Idioms in American English

lose one's temper : become very angry *wütend werden*
The technician lost his temper and shouted at them.

make ends meet: have enough money to live or to pay one's bills
genugend Geld (nur) zum überleben
She has to work at two jobs to make ends meet.

make friends: become friends *sich mit jemand anfreunden*
She makes friends everywhere she goes.

make fun of: laugh at, joke about *sich über jemand / etwas lustig machen*
Those guys make fun of anyone who doesn't think like they do.

make sense: be logical, be reasonable *Sinn machen, sinnvoll / vernünftig sein, Sinn ergeben*
It makes sense to buy a small car. You will save money on gas.

make up: become friends again after an argument or fight *sich (mit jemand) wieder vertragen*
They usually make up quickly after an argument.

make up one's mind: decide *entscheiden*
She made up her mind to study engineering.

mix up (verb): confuse *etwas durcheinander bringen, verworren machen, verwirren, konfus machen*
The mailman sometimes mixes up my neighbor's mail and mine.

(**NOTE:** to mix up is different than TO BE MIXED UP (adjective).
To be mixed up is to be confused. *verwirrt, konfus, wirr*
I'm all mixed up about how I feel about this.)

no wonder: it's not surprising that *kein Wunder*
You were at the beach all day. No wonder you are sunburned.

not to mention: in addition to *nicht zu vergessen*
I like to read biographies and mysteries, not to mention science fiction.

on purpose: as the result of a plan, intentionally *mit Absicht, etwas absichtlich tun*
They were very angry when they learned that he had done it on purpose.

on second thought: after thinking again *genau besehen*
On second thought, she decided not to join the club.

out of one's way: away from the direction in which one is going or normally goes
nicht auf jemand's Weg
I drove ten kilometers out of my way to take him home.

Some Idioms in American English

pick up: take away from a place <i>We'll pick you up after class.</i>	<i>etwas /jemanden abholen</i>
put off: postpone, change to a later date <i>I'll have to put off buying a new coat until I have more money.</i>	<i>verschieben, aufschieben, hinauszuögern</i>
quite a bit of: a lot of (=much) <i>We've prepared quite a bit of food for our guests.</i>	<i>(ziemlich) viel</i>
quite a few: many <i>There were quite a few people at the party.</i>	<i>(ziemlich) viel.</i>
right away: immediately <i>I couldn't see the doctor right away. I had to wait.</i>	<i>sofort.</i>
run into: meet by chance <i>I ran into an old friend on the bus this morning.</i>	<i>zufällig treffen</i>
see eye to eye: agree, have the same opinion <i>They see eye to eye on everything except politics.</i>	<i>gleiche Meinung haben</i>
show up: arrive, appear <i>The reporters were disappointed when he didn't show up for the interview.</i>	<i>erscheinen</i>
sleep on: postpone a decision, usually until the next day <i>The instructor asked them to sleep on the idea and to vote on it the next class.</i>	<i>schlafen erst einmal darüber, überschlafen die Sachen erst einmal</i>
stand out: be noticeable <i>Leonardo da Vinci stood out as an artistic and scientific genius.</i>	<i>auffallen, hervorstechen</i>
take advantage of: use for one's own benefit <i>We should take advantage of the course and learn all we can now.</i>	<i>etwas / jemand ausnutzen</i>
take after: be like someone in one's family in appearance or personality <i>Shea takes after her mother. They are both tall and thin.</i>	<i>ähneln, nachschlagen</i>
take it easy: relax, be calm <i>We like to take it easy on Sundays.</i>	<i>(sich) entspannen, (sich) ausruhen, sich beruhigen</i>
take one's time: do something slowly <i>I like to take my time when I prepare dinner for guests.</i>	<i>etwas langsam(er) tun</i>
take place: happen <i>The party is going to take place Saturday night beginning at 9.00 PM.</i>	<i>stattfinden</i>

Some Idioms in American English

take turns: alternate doing something with one or more people *abwechseln*
You have to take turns with each other when using that database.

tell apart: see or know the difference *jemanden / etwas auseinanderhalten*
She and her mother sound so much alike that I can't tell their voices apart.

think over: consider carefully *überlegen*
It's a good idea to spend some time thinking it over before you get married.

try on : test for fit *anprobieren*
You should try on shoes before you buy them.

used to (verb): something one did in the past, but not now *etwas früher oder mal getan*
He used to study law, but now he's studying information technology.

(**SEE ALSO:** be used to)

what's the matter: what's wrong? What's the problem? *Was ist los? Gibt's was?*
What's the matter with the car?

would rather: prefer to *lieber, eher*
I would rather go to the laboratory than to the lecture.