



Idiom	Definition	Example
Back to square one	To get back to from where it started	We went back to square one after wasting two full days.
Back to the drawing board	To start from the beginning, all over again	We went back to the drawing board after our plan was rejected.
Back-room boys	People who do important work but aren't visible to general public	He resented being a backroom boy when Dave took all the credit.
Ball park figure	A rough estimate	Can you give me a ballpark figure as to what this project will cost?
Bang for the buck	Something that gives you more value than the money you spent	Online ads provide more bang for the buck than TV commercials.
Blue-collar	Someone who does manual labor work	Joe is a blue-collar worker at the company warehouse.
Bottom line	The final total of the account or the ultimate deciding factor	I don't need any details. All I care about is the bottom line.
Brain drain	Loss of an educated workforce to other geographic locations	France suffered a brain drain during the economic crisis.
Break even	To have no profit or loss at the end of a business activity	It took us two years just to break even.
Busman's holiday	Spending your time doing the same thing you do at work	The painter spent busman's holiday painting his own house.
By the book	Strictly according to the rules	Rules are not to be broken - Barb does everything by the book.
Call it a day	To stop working and go home	Let's call it a day and go home.
Call the shots	To make the important decisions	Who calls the shots when the boss is out of town?
Cash cow		

	A consistently profitable business or product	That line of leather shoes is a real cash cow.
Cave in	To agree to something, you didn't want to accept previously	The management caved in to the demands of the union.
Climb the corporate ladder	Work your way up to higher positions in a company	He quickly climbed the corporate ladder to become CEO.
Cold call	A call made without an appointment to sell something	Sales people were handed a list of numbers to cold-call.
Cook the books	Alter facts or figures dishonestly or illegally	The mafia boss forced the accountants to cook the books.
Corner a market	To dominate a market or business	She cornered the market and put two competitors out of business.
Crack the whip	Threatening people to make them work harder	Joe's father had to crack the whip to make him study harder.
Cream of the crop	The best person in a group	Google hires the cream of the crop graduates.
Crunch the numbers	Do a lot of math calculations to make a decision	They crunched the numbers before buying that new property.
Cut a deal	To reach an agreement	Her agent cut a deal giving her 30% of the profits.
Cut corners	Skip certain steps in order to do something as easily or cheaply	Don't hurry. You cannot cut corners if you want to do a perfect job.
Cut to the chase	Get to the point quickly	Joan was very busy, so I cut to the chase and told her the fact.
Cut-throat	Very fierce and intense	There is a cut-throat competition to gain the market share.
Dead end job	A job where there is no chance of promotion	I am in a dead-end job and looking for a new opportunity.
Dead wood	Someone or something that is no longer useful	She cleared out the dead wood as soon as she took over.
Elephant in the room		

	A huge problem that no one wants to talk about	Debt crises is the elephant in the room that no one is talking about.
Eleventh hour	The last minute	Eric always waits until the eleventh hour before starting a project.
Fine print	Important details usually printed in tiny letters in a contract	Read the fine print before you sign the contract.
Foot in the door	The first step toward a goal by gaining entry into an organization	She got her foot in the door working as a researcher on a TV show.
From the ground up	Starting from the very beginning	Let's start working on the project from the ground up.
Game plan	Plan of action or a strategy	We need a new game plan for the upcoming season.
Get down to business	Start doing things that need to be done	Let's get down to business first; we can eat lunch later.
Get The ball rolling	To begin an activity or a process	She tried to get the ball rolling by asking a few questions.
Glass ceiling	An unofficial or social barrier to advancement in a profession	She crushed the glass ceiling to be the first woman president.
Go Through the Roof	To increase much more than expected	He is rich now because his commissions have gone through the roof.
Golden handcuffs	Special benefits offered to keep an employee from leaving	They hired her with a pair of golden handcuffs.
Golden handshake	A large amount paid as an incentive for early retirement	The new owners offered all employees a golden handshake.
Golden parachute	An employment contract that guarantees great benefits if fired	She is not afraid of getting fired because of the golden parachute.
Gray area	A situation in which it is difficult to distinguish between right & wrong	At the moment, the law on compensation is very much a grey area.
Have your work cut out	Accomplish a difficult task in a short time	He will have his work cut out to get into the team.
Headhunt	To recruit the best people for top-level positions	A rival company headhunted her.

Heads up	To inform or warn about something beforehand	Please give me a heads up if there is any change.
Hit the nail on the head	To give a perfectly correct answer	Tom hit the nail on the head when analyzing the problem.
Hot water	In deep trouble	The company is in hot water because of the declining sales
In a nutshell	A brief summary or in a few words	Tell me in a nutshell what happened in the meeting.
In the black	A person/organization that is making a profit	We're in the black but we aren't making much money yet.
In the nick of time	To arrive just in time	I got to the meeting just in the nick of time.
In the red	A person/organization that is losing money	We were in the red for two whole years.
In the works	In development; coming soon	Our new product is in the works.
Jack of all trades	Someone who can do many different jobs	We need someone who is the jack of all trades for this position.
Last straw	Final annoyance that causes you to get angry	He got fired because he skipped the meeting; it was the last straw.
Learn the ropes	Learn how to do a job or activity	It takes a while to learn the ropes in a new job.
Learning curve	The amount of time it takes to learn a new skill	It was a steep learning curve for him as he had no prior experience.
Long shot	Very slim chance of succeeding	I know it's a long shot, but it's worth trying.
Long-haul	Prolonged time and effort	It's going to be a long-haul before the company becomes profitable.
Movers and shakers	People with a lot of power and influence in a particular field	All the movers and shakers of the industry have their offices here.
No brainer		

	An easy decision that doesn't require much thought	Buying this product at such a discount is a complete no brainer.
No strings attached	No special conditions or restrictions	The investment offers 15% interest with no strings attached.
Off the top of your head	From memory without much careful consideration	Off the top of my head, the cost was pretty reasonable.
On the back burner	A low priority matter that is put aside for the time being	It's not an urgent issue, lets put it on the back burner for now.
On the same page	Agree with someone on a specific issue	Regarding the offer both partners are on the same page.
Out of the loop	Unaware of the information or an event	I am always out of the loop of the office gossip.
Pencil someone in	To make a tentative appointment	I'll pencil you in for Friday afternoon at 2:00 pm.
Pick brain	Ask for ideas and opinions	I was picking her brain about which computer to buy.
Play hardball	Firm and ruthless in getting what you want	He's a nice guy, but he can play hardball when he needs to.
Play second fiddle	To be less important or in a weaker position than someone else	I'm not prepared to play second fiddle to Joe anymore.
Plum job	An easy job that pays well	Joe found a plum job using his family connections.
Pull the plug	To stop or to discontinue	The management pulled the plug on long lunch breaks.
Read between the lines	Look for the meaning that was suggested indirectly	Reading between the lines is necessary for complex negotiations.
Red tape	Excessive rules/regulations that make it hard to do business	Those new laws just create a lot of red tapes.
Rock the boat	To disrupt a situation or cause problems	Don't rock the boat until the negotiations have ended.
Round the clock	24 hours a day	We were working round the clock during the exhibition.

Rule of thumb	A guiding principle based on experience and common sense.	As a rule of thumb, each client should have a separate file.
Safe Bet	Something that is very likely to happen	It is a safe bet that the current owners will not sell.
Same boat	To be in the same difficult situation	None of us has any money, so we're all in the same boat.
Second nature	A skill so ingrained that you do it without even thinking	Typing becomes second nature after a while.
Selling Like Hotcakes	Sell something very quickly that many people want to buy	I need another load of scanners because they are selling like hotcakes.
Set the record straight	Give the true version of events that have been reported incorrectly	Let me set the record straight about what really happened.
Sever Ties	To end a relationship or an agreement	The company severed ties with their supplier.
Shape up or ship out	A warning to perform well or leave	The management warned the employees to shape up or ship out.
Show the ropes	Show someone how to do a job or activity	Michael will take you around and show you the ropes.
Slack off	Perform unproductively and lazily	Employees tend to slack off on Fridays.
Small talk	Informal conversation about things that are not important	Guests stood with their drinks, making small talk about the weather.
Talk shop	Discuss work-related issues in off-work social situations	Let's not talk shop outside office hours.
Test the water	Try something out to see if it works or not	I'd like to test the water first before committing myself.
The ball is in your court	It's up to you to make the next move.	We answered all their questions, so now the ball is in their court
The big picture	To get an overview of the entire situation	Joe never loses sight of the big picture.
Think outside the box		

	Explore ideas that are different and non-traditional	He is trying to think outside the box to make this event a success.
Throw in the towel	To admit defeat	After struggling for years, the company finally threw in the towel.
Thrown in the deep end	Put into a difficult situation without any preparation	Lynda was thrown in the deep end right from the first day of her job.
Touch base	Make a brief contact to discuss something	Just wanted to touch base to make sure everything is fine.
Under the table	Something was done secretly and illegally	They offered him money under the table to change his mind.
Up in the air	Still not decided	The board meeting is still up in the air.
White-collar	Someone who does office work	Jane left the factory for a white-collar position in a local bank.
Win-win situation	A favorable outcome for everyone involved	The compromise was a win-win situation for everyone.
Word of mouth	Oral informal communication between people	Word of mouth is one of the best ways of getting business
Writing on the wall	Clear signs that something bad is about to happen	I can see the writing on the wall that this company is doomed.