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EVERYDAY ENGLISH IDIOMS AND EXPRESSIONS

Meanings and natural examples for B2-C1 learners

Organised into 10 practical topics - learn 10 at a time

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IDIOM OR EXPRESSION	MEANING	NATURAL EXAMPLE
Hit the nail on the head	say exactly the right thing about a situation	<i>You hit the nail on the head when you said the team needed clearer instructions.</i>
Know something inside out	know every detail of something	<i>After working here for ten years, she knows the system inside out.</i>
Miss the point	fail to understand the main idea	<i>You are focusing on the cost, but you are missing the point: the product is not safe.</i>
Make sense	be logical, reasonable or understandable	<i>Her explanation did not make sense at first, but I eventually understood it.</i>
Get straight to the point	begin talking about the main issue without delay	<i>I will get straight to the point: we cannot afford to continue the project.</i>
Keep it to yourself	not tell anyone else about something	<i>I am telling you this in confidence, so please keep it to yourself.</i>
Speak your mind	say honestly what you think	<i>Laura is never afraid to speak her mind during meetings.</i>
Beat around the bush	avoid talking directly about an uncomfortable subject	<i>Stop beating around the bush and tell me why you are leaving.</i>
Ring a bell	sound familiar, although you may not remember exactly why	<i>His name rings a bell, but I cannot remember where we met.</i>
Cross your mind	come into your thoughts briefly	<i>It never crossed my mind that she might refuse the offer.</i>

Tip: Write one personal example for each expression you want to remember.

IDIOM OR EXPRESSION	MEANING	NATURAL EXAMPLE
Be over the moon	be extremely happy	<i>Nadia was over the moon when she passed her driving test.</i>
Be down in the dumps	feel unhappy or discouraged	<i>He has been down in the dumps since his holiday was cancelled.</i>
Blow off steam	release stress, anger or strong emotion	<i>I usually go for a long walk after work to blow off steam.</i>
Be on edge	feel nervous, tense or unable to relax	<i>Everyone was on edge while we waited for the results.</i>
Lose your temper	suddenly become angry	<i>Try not to lose your temper when you speak to the manager.</i>
Cheer someone up	make someone feel happier	<i>I took my friend out for lunch to cheer her up.</i>
Be under the weather	feel slightly ill	<i>I am feeling under the weather, so I think I will stay at home today.</i>
Be full of beans	be lively and energetic	<i>The children were full of beans after spending the afternoon outdoors.</i>
Get on someone's nerves	repeatedly annoy someone	<i>The constant sound of drilling is beginning to get on my nerves.</i>
Blow something out of proportion	make a problem seem much more serious than it is	<i>It was a minor mistake, but he blew it completely out of proportion.</i>

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IDIOM OR EXPRESSION	MEANING	NATURAL EXAMPLE
Get along with someone	have a friendly relationship with someone	<i>I get along well with most of my colleagues.</i>
Break the ice	make people feel more relaxed when they first meet	<i>The teacher used a short game to break the ice on the first day.</i>
Hit it off	immediately like and understand one another	<i>We hit it off as soon as we started talking.</i>
Have a falling out	have an argument that damages a relationship	<i>The two brothers had a falling out over their parents' house.</i>
Be on the same wavelength	think about something in a similar way	<i>My business partner and I are usually on the same wavelength.</i>
A people person	someone who enjoys meeting and communicating with people	<i>She is a real people person, so she is well suited to customer service.</i>
A couch potato	someone who spends too much time sitting and watching television	<i>I became a complete couch potato during the winter holidays.</i>
A go-getter	an energetic and ambitious person	<i>The company is looking for a confident go-getter to lead the sales team.</i>
A pain in the neck	an annoying person, thing or situation	<i>Filling in all these forms is a real pain in the neck.</i>
Bury the hatchet	end an argument and become friendly again	<i>After years of disagreement, the two neighbours finally buried the hatchet.</i>

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Call it a day	stop working because you have done enough for the day	<i>We have made good progress, so let us call it a day.</i>
From time to time	occasionally	<i>I still speak to my former classmates from time to time.</i>
Around the clock	continuously throughout the day and night	<i>Medical teams worked around the clock after the earthquake.</i>
In no time	very quickly	<i>Once you understand the system, you will finish the task in no time.</i>
Once in a blue moon	extremely rarely	<i>We eat at expensive restaurants only once in a blue moon.</i>
In the nick of time	at the last possible moment	<i>We reached the station in the nick of time.</i>
On the go	constantly busy or active	<i>I have been on the go since six o'clock this morning.</i>
In the long run	after a long period of time	<i>Taking regular breaks will make you more productive in the long run.</i>
Burn the midnight oil	work or study late into the night	<i>She has been burning the midnight oil to finish her dissertation.</i>
Get a move on	hurry or begin moving more quickly	<i>We had better get a move on or we will miss the train.</i>

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IDIOM OR EXPRESSION	MEANING	NATURAL EXAMPLE
Give it a shot	try doing something	<i>I have never written a short story before, but I am going to give it a shot.</i>
Go the extra mile	make more effort than is normally expected	<i>A good teacher is often willing to go the extra mile for their students.</i>
Pull your weight	do your fair share of the work	<i>Everyone must pull their weight if we are going to meet the deadline.</i>
Bite the bullet	force yourself to do something difficult or unpleasant	<i>I dislike public speaking, but I will have to bite the bullet and give the presentation.</i>
Put your heart into something	do something with enthusiasm and commitment	<i>She put her heart into organising the charity event.</i>
Learn the ropes	learn how a job or activity is done	<i>It took him a few weeks to learn the ropes at his new company.</i>
Be on the ball	be alert, capable and quick to react	<i>Our new receptionist is efficient and really on the ball.</i>
Get the hang of something	gradually learn how to do something	<i>It took me several lessons to get the hang of using the new software.</i>
Hit the books	begin studying seriously	<i>My exams start next week, so it is time to hit the books.</i>
Think on your feet	react and make decisions quickly	<i>Tour guides often have to think on their feet when unexpected problems arise.</i>

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IDIOM OR EXPRESSION	MEANING	NATURAL EXAMPLE
Cost an arm and a leg	be extremely expensive	<i>Renting a flat in the city centre costs an arm and a leg.</i>
Money doesn't grow on trees	money is limited and should not be wasted	<i>You cannot buy a new phone every year - money does not grow on trees.</i>
Live from hand to mouth	have only enough money for basic daily needs	<i>After losing his job, he was forced to live from hand to mouth.</i>
A rip-off	something that costs much more than it is worth	<i>The meal was tiny and cost £40 - it was a complete rip-off.</i>
Be loaded	be very rich	<i>Her uncle is loaded, but he lives surprisingly modestly.</i>
Pick up the tab	pay a bill, especially in a restaurant	<i>It is your birthday, so I will pick up the tab.</i>
A stroke of luck	an unexpected piece of good fortune	<i>Finding an empty room at such short notice was a stroke of luck.</i>
Hit the jackpot	have great luck or achieve unexpected success	<i>The company hit the jackpot with its new product.</i>
Push your luck	take an unnecessary risk after already being fortunate	<i>The manager has forgiven you once, so do not push your luck.</i>
Miss the boat	lose an opportunity by acting too late	<i>I wanted to apply for the course, but I missed the boat.</i>

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IDIOM OR EXPRESSION	MEANING	NATURAL EXAMPLE
Be on the fence	be unable to decide between two choices	<i>I am still on the fence about whether to accept the job.</i>
Take it or leave it	accept an offer exactly as it is or reject it	<i>£200 is my final offer - you can take it or leave it.</i>
Be at a crossroads	face an important decision or turning point	<i>After graduating, she found herself at a crossroads in her life.</i>
Think twice	consider something carefully before acting	<i>You should think twice before sharing personal information online.</i>
Have second thoughts	begin to doubt a previous decision	<i>I am having second thoughts about moving abroad.</i>
Change your mind	make a different decision	<i>She changed her mind and decided to stay for another year.</i>
Turn over a new leaf	make a fresh start and improve your behaviour	<i>He has promised to turn over a new leaf and take his studies seriously.</i>
Out with the old, in with the new	replace old ideas or possessions with new ones	<i>We are completely redecorating the office - out with the old, in with the new.</i>
Go with the flow	accept events without trying to control everything	<i>We had no fixed plans and simply went with the flow.</i>
The best of both worlds	enjoy the advantages of two different situations	<i>Working from home gives her the best of both worlds: flexibility and a rewarding career.</i>

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IDIOM OR EXPRESSION	MEANING	NATURAL EXAMPLE
Be in hot water	be in trouble	<i>He is in hot water after missing three important deadlines.</i>
A storm in a teacup	a great deal of unnecessary excitement about a small problem	<i>The disagreement was merely a storm in a teacup.</i>
Mess something up	spoil something or make a mistake	<i>I was so nervous that I completely messed up the interview.</i>
Be back to square one	have to begin again after a plan has failed	<i>The experiment did not work, so we are back to square one.</i>
Be in a pickle	be in a difficult or awkward situation	<i>I am in a bit of a pickle because I have lost my passport.</i>
Drop the ball	make a careless mistake or fail to fulfil a responsibility	<i>The company dropped the ball by ignoring its customers' complaints.</i>
Let the cat out of the bag	accidentally reveal a secret	<i>Mark let the cat out of the bag about the surprise party.</i>
Sweep something under the carpet	hide or ignore a problem instead of dealing with it	<i>The organisation tried to sweep the scandal under the carpet.</i>
Add fuel to the fire	make an already difficult situation worse	<i>Criticising her in public only added fuel to the fire.</i>
The last straw	the final problem that makes a situation impossible to tolerate	<i>When he arrived late again, it was the last straw.</i>

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IDIOM OR EXPRESSION	MEANING	NATURAL EXAMPLE
Steal someone's thunder	take attention or praise away from another person	<i>He stole her thunder by announcing his promotion during her celebration.</i>
Call the shots	be the person who makes the important decisions	<i>The regional director calls the shots, although the whole team offers advice.</i>
Go out of your way	make a special effort to do something	<i>Our neighbours went out of their way to make us feel welcome.</i>
Out of the blue	suddenly and unexpectedly	<i>She contacted me out of the blue after more than ten years.</i>
Break the news	tell someone important, often unpleasant, information	<i>The doctor broke the news as gently as possible.</i>
Put in a good word for someone	recommend or praise someone to a person in authority	<i>I will put in a good word for you with the manager.</i>
Spill the beans	reveal secret information	<i>Come on, spill the beans - who is getting married?</i>
Talk the talk	speak confidently as though you are knowledgeable or capable	<i>He certainly talks the talk, but I am not sure he can deliver the results.</i>
Pull the wool over someone's eyes	deceive someone and prevent them from discovering the truth	<i>The salesman tried to pull the wool over my eyes.</i>
Keep an eye on something or someone	watch something carefully	<i>Could you keep an eye on my bag while I buy a ticket?</i>

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IDIOM OR EXPRESSION	MEANING	NATURAL EXAMPLE
Come rain or shine	regardless of the weather or other difficulties	<i>She cycles to work every day, come rain or shine.</i>
By chance	accidentally or without planning	<i>We met by chance at a bookshop in Edinburgh.</i>
Get the ball rolling	start an activity or process	<i>Let us get the ball rolling by deciding who will lead the project.</i>
Hit the road	leave a place or begin a journey	<i>We should hit the road before the traffic becomes heavy.</i>
Off the beaten track	away from popular or frequently visited places	<i>We stayed in a small village well off the beaten track.</i>
A breath of fresh air	someone or something pleasantly new and different	<i>Her practical approach was a breath of fresh air.</i>
Easier said than done	much more difficult to do than it sounds	<i>Staying calm during an exam is easier said than done.</i>
Practice makes perfect	regular practice helps you improve	<i>Keep using the new vocabulary - practice makes perfect.</i>
Actions speak louder than words	what people do is more important than what they say	<i>He keeps promising to help, but actions speak louder than words.</i>
Better late than never	doing something late is better than not doing it at all	<i>You have finally started exercising - better late than never!</i>

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