

ENGLISH IDIOMS

for the TOEFL

Magoosh

toefl.magoosh.com

What is Magoosh?

Magoosh is a test prep company made up of industry experts. Our mission is to design accessible content that helps students prepare for the GRE, GMAT, SAT, and of course, the TOEFL!

Our [online TOEFL prep](#) offers:

- expert video lessons for every section
- over 1300 *official* practice questions with explanations
- 4 *official* ETS full-length practice tests
- +4 point score increase guarantee
- graded writing and speaking tasks
- built-in AI tutor to explain questions and concepts
- personalized statistics based on performance
- access anytime, anywhere from an internet-connected device

Dashboard

Suggested Lessons

- Introduction
- [Overview of the TOEFL](#)
- [How the TOEFL is Scored](#)
- Reading
- [Reading Section - Structure and Timing](#)
- [Reading Task - Complete the Words](#)
- [Using Clues in "Complete the Words"](#)
- [Reading Task - Daily Life Passages](#)
- [Reading Task - Academic Passage](#)
- Listening
- [Listening Task - Choose a Response](#)
- [Choose a Response: Using Question Words](#)
- [Choose a Response: Content and Tone](#)
- [Listening Task - Daily Life Conversation](#)
- [Listening Task - Daily Life Announcement](#)
- Writing
- [Writing Task - Building Sentences](#)
- [Building Sentences: Using the Clues](#)

Practice

Practice Anything
You choose the type of question. Perfect for targeted practice or a short daily session.

Practice Section
Complete an official TOEFL section. Perfect for practicing pacing and seeing improvement.

Practice Test
Complete an official TOEFL test. Perfect for developing stamina and putting it all together.

Start a custom practice **Start a practice section** **Start a practice test**

Results Summary

	Reading	Listening	Writing	Speaking
Correct	53%	100%	30	0
Incorrect	47%	0	0	100%
Average Score	$\frac{3}{5}$			
Questions Answered:	72	2	30	0
Your Pace:	0:36	0:38	2:12	0:00
Others' Pace:	0:25	0:25	1:04	0:00

Your Notes [View all notes](#)

What will you learn in this eBook?

In this mini eBook, we'll teach you how to use idioms on the TOEFL in a natural and score-enhancing way. Happy studying!

Using Idioms on the TOEFL

“He offered me **a penny for my thoughts** on the new presidential election, but I just **beat around the bush**, because politics is a **real hot potato** with him.”

Buying someone's thoughts for one cent? Beating a bush? Hot potatoes? What in the world does that sentence above mean? Well, to a native English speaker, the meaning would be clear enough. To offer “a penny for (someone's) thoughts” means to ask them what their opinion is. To “beat around the bush” means to refuse to answer a question or refuse to speak directly about something. A “hot potato” is a topic, subject or idea that may make people angry or upset. Think about those meanings, reread the sentence above, and you'll probably understand it.

What is an idiom?

The phrases in bold in the first sentence on this page are a special unit of language called an *idiom*. Idioms are words that have been given a very different meaning than their common dictionary definition. Most idioms are phrases, such as “sweating bullets” (feeling very nervous or scared) or “pulling a fast one” (tricking someone). But occasionally, an idiom can be a single word. For instance, a “lemon” can refer to a car that doesn't work very well.

Should you use idioms on the TOEFL?

Idiom use can raise your TOEFL scores in Speaking and Writing— **if you are able to use idioms comfortably, naturally, and appropriately**. Idioms can actually hurt your score if you're not using them well. Don't overuse idioms. Too many idioms in one sentence can sound unnatural or make the meaning of the sentence hard to follow. (The first sentence in this post probably is an example

of this.) It's also possible to slightly misuse idioms in ways that makes your speech sound forced or unnatural.

But while idioms need to be used carefully, they can also be a lot of fun. We've seen many of our students really enjoy certain idioms.

When you find an idiom that really makes you smile, that really seems clever, it's easier to use it in a natural way. If you find idioms challenging but want to be able to get better at them and use them to boost your TOEFL score, pick just a few idioms and master them. Find between 5 and 10 idioms you really love, that you also think will "work" in your TOEFL Speaking responses.

Memorize your list of favorite idioms, and be prepared to use them on the TOEFL... but only if they really do work naturally in your response to the question. Using no idioms is better than using a "forced" idiom. And remember to use idioms less in Writing than you would in Speaking— idioms are very conversational.

List of Idioms

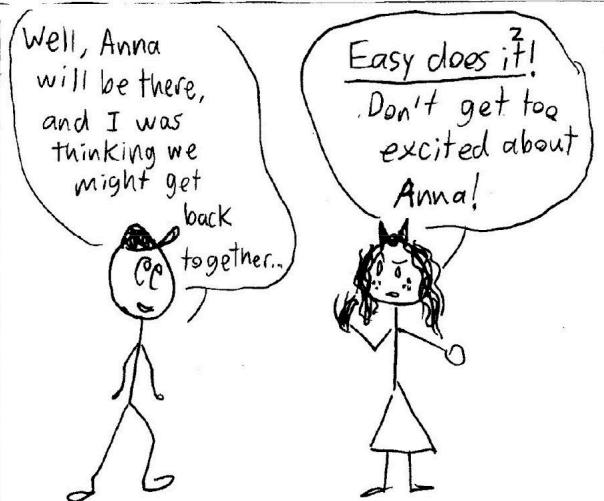
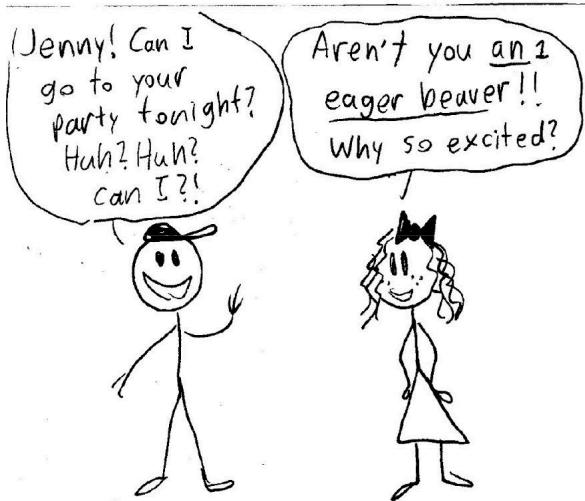
Illustrated with Magoosh Comics

Below, you'll find a list of idioms in 6 different parts; their definitions; and a comic strip that shows you how to use each idiom. Pay careful attention to how the idioms are used in conversation!

Part 1

The idioms:

- **dream on:** an ironic comment on the unlikely nature of a plan (ie, it's never going to happen)
- **easy does it:** be careful! / don't do anything too fast or too hard!
- **eager beaver:** a person who is always willing to volunteer or do extra work.
- **keep your chin up:** remain brave and confident in a difficult situation; don't despair or worry too much.
- **let sleeping dogs lie:** don't cause problems by doing something when it isn't necessary.
- **other fish in the sea:** other romantic partners or significant others to pursue.
- **until hell freezes over:** forever.



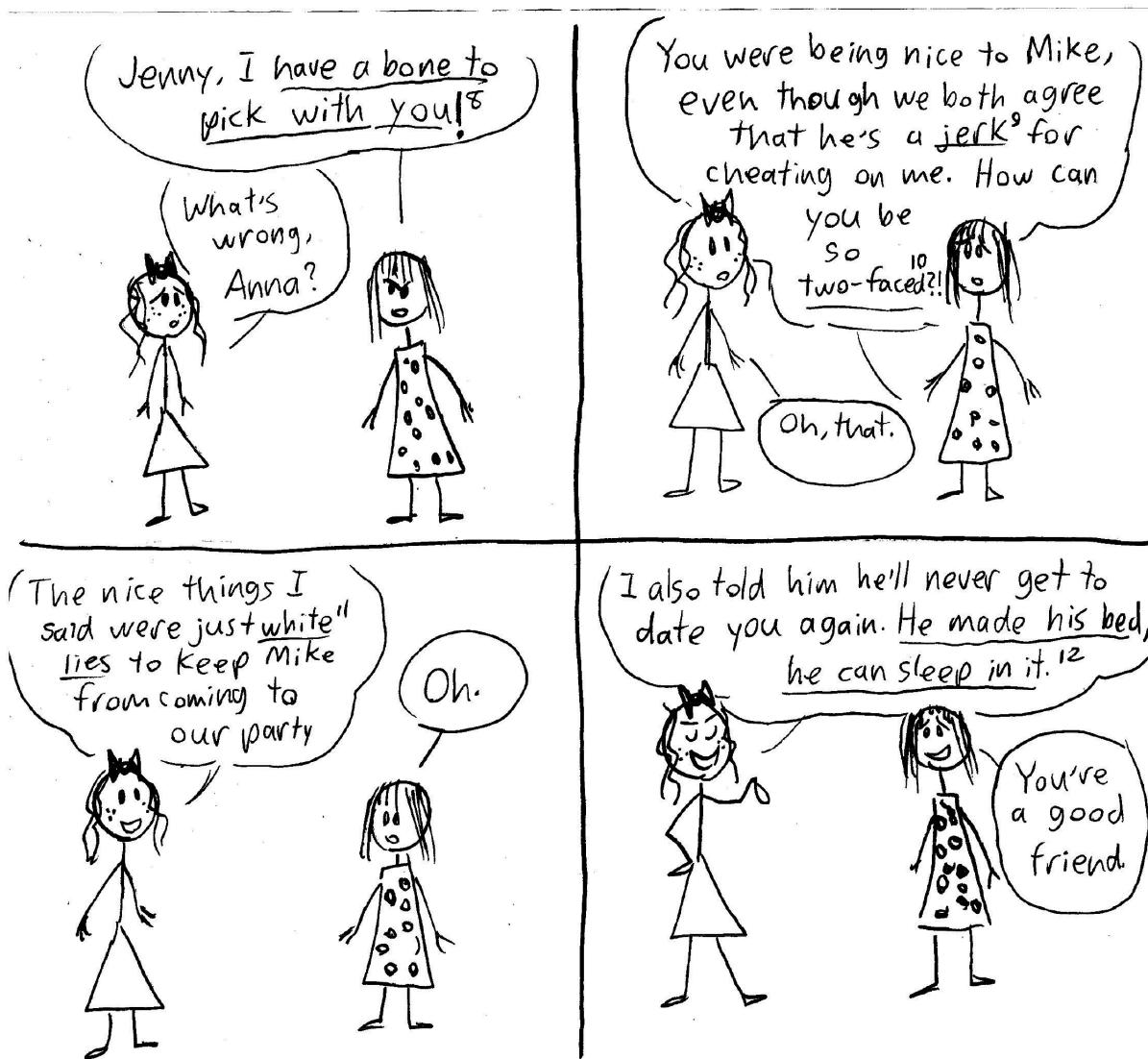
David Recine for Magoosh.com

Part 2

The idioms:

- **have a bone to pick:** to have something to argue about with someone
- **jerk:** a stupid or worthless person
- **someone's made his/her own bed, let him/her sleep in it:** someone has caused his/her own problems; he/she will have to solve them himself/herself.
- **two-faced:** deceitful; disloyal; someone who pretends to be a friend but isn't.
- **white lie:** a lie that is told to avoid offending someone or hurting his / her feelings.

Note: In the last comic, Mike was heartbroken over his ex-girlfriend Anna. Anna's best friend Jenny was there to reluctantly comfort him, but got angry when Mike tried to get her to go out with him. And now, the drama continues...



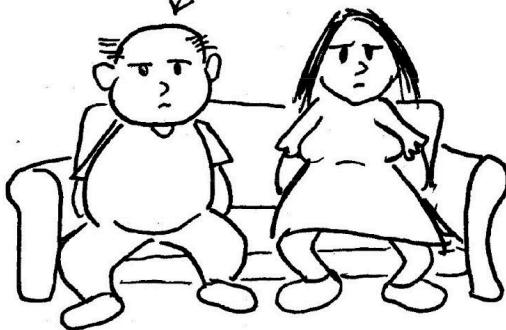
David Recine for Magoosh.com

Part 3

The idioms:

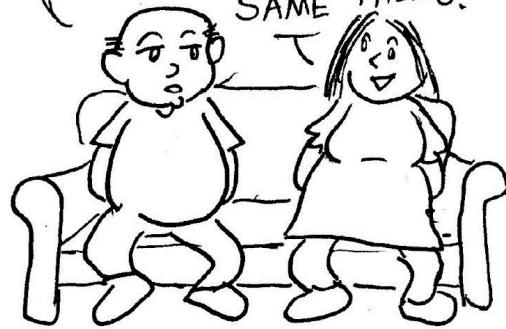
- **chow down:** eat.
- **couch potato:** someone who spends too much time watching TV.
- **pull someone's leg:** tease someone by trying to make her/him believe something that's exaggerated or untrue.
- **read someone's mind:** know what someone is thinking
- **take it easy:** relax.

TWO COUCH POTATOES



WE SHOULD EAT DINNER

YOU READ MY MIND! I WAS THINKING THE SAME THING.



LET'S COOK DINNER.

NO! COOKING IS SO MUCH WORK!



I'M PULLING YOUR LEG. OF COURSE WE WON'T COOK FOR OURSELVES



GOOD. LET'S TAKE IT EASY AND ORDER A PIZZA.



PIZZA'S FINALLY HERE.

LET'S CHOW DOWN.



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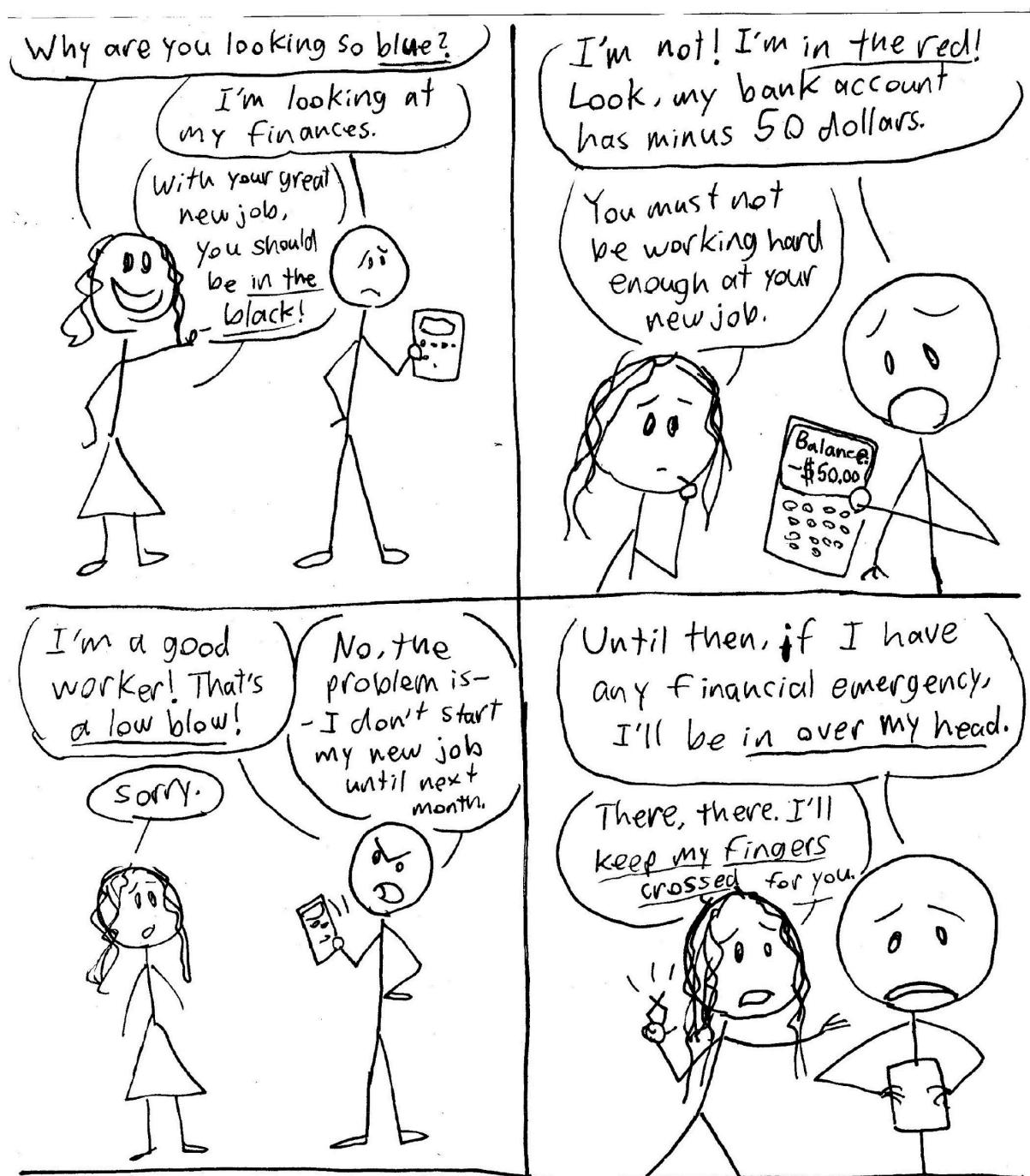
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Part 4

The idioms:

- **feeling blue:** feeling sad and depressed.
- **in over one's head:** in a situation that is too much / too difficult to manage
- **in the black:** profitable; not showing a financial loss
- **in the red:** unprofitable; showing a financial loss
- **keep one's fingers crossed:** hope for the best
- **low blow:** a big disappointment



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Part 5

The idioms:

- **be all ears:** be eager to hear what someone has to say
- **keep an eye on:** check something regularly.
- **lend someone a hand:** help someone.
- **there, there:** an expression of comfort.
- **until you're blue in the face:** forever.
- **was my face red:** I was very embarrassed.



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Part 6

The idioms:

- **be broke:** be without money.
- **bull-headed:** stubborn; inflexible.
- **hard feelings:** anger; animosity; bitter feelings.
- **make a mountain out of a molehill:** make something seem much more important than it really is.
- **not on your life:** absolutely not (a strong “no”)



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Additional Resources

We hope this eBook has shown you that studying for the TOEFL can be fun. If you want to keep your studies going, here are some more resources:

[TOEFL Vocabulary Flashcards](#)

[Vocabulary PDF](#)

[Best Free TOEFL Resources](#)

[Magoosh TOEFL Blog](#)

[Magoosh TOEFL Lessons](#)

Happy studying!