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More English
idioms for
foreign students
with Exercises

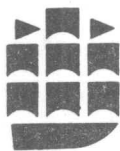
A J Worrall

revised by D G Sawyer

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revised



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Note

Most of the idioms in this book are in general use, i.e. they are used in all contexts and in all kinds of speaking and writing.

These have been marked with the letter **g**. There are some, however, which are more restricted in use, and these have been marked as follows:

- p** for **proverbs** and **proverbial expressions** (also used in most contexts);
- f** for **formal** idioms restricted to high-flown or literary speech and writing;
- c** for **colloquial** idioms used in rather informal speech and writing;
- s** for **slang** idioms used in extremely informal conversation, often by a particular class or group of people.

We advise students to avoid using idioms marked **s** and to exercise care in using those marked **c** and **f**.

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back down (from)	give up (a claim); withdraw (something one has said) He made several accusations but backed down when he was asked to prove them.
back out (of)	withdraw (from an action); refuse to continue (with someone) who agreed to do sth. The more timid of us backed out when things became dangerous.
back up	support I made several proposals to the meeting, but no one backed me up.
be about	be concerned with; deal with What's that book about? - It's about

Section I — Ask — Close

- ask after** g *ask for information about; ask about the health of*
Mr Jones has been **asking** after you; he's heard you've been ill.
- ask for trouble** c *behave so that trouble is likely, so (or ask for it) that one is likely to suffer*
You're **asking** for trouble if you go out in this rain without a coat.
- ask in** g *invite to enter (a house etc.)*
Don't leave him standing on the doorstep, **ask** him in!
- ask out** g *invite to an entertainment, meal etc.*
She's busy tonight; she's been **asked** out to dinner.
- ask round** g *invite to one's house*
We haven't seen them for ages; why don't we **ask** them round for lunch on Sunday?
- back down (from)** g *give up (a claim); withdraw (something one has said)*
He made several accusations but **backed** down when he was asked to prove them.
- back out (of)** c *withdraw (from an activity); refuse to continue (with something one has agreed to do)*
The more timid of us **backed** out when things became dangerous.
- back up** c *support*
I made several proposals to the meeting, but no one **backed** me up.
- be about** g *be concerned with; deal with*
What's that book **about**?—It's about

		mountaineering.
be about to	g	<i>be going to</i> I was just about to leave the house when the telephone rang.
be against	g	<i>not be in favour of, be opposed to</i> I am against the new road because I think it will cost too much.
be at one	f	<i>agree, be in harmony</i> The Government and the Opposition are at one on the issue.
be at one's wits' end	g	<i>not know what to do next</i> I've several bills to pay and no money till the end of the month; I'm at my wits' end.
be at the end of one's tether	g	<i>be unable to do any more because of tiredness, lack of patience etc.</i> The children have behaved terribly today; I'm at the end of my tether.
be away	g	<i>be absent</i> I leave tomorrow and shall be away for three weeks.
be back	g	<i>have returned</i> I'm going to the shops; I'll be back in half an hour.
be beside oneself	g	<i>be overwhelmed with sorrow, worry etc.</i> Both her children fell ill and the poor woman was beside herself .
it's beyond me	c	<i>I don't understand it</i> He has no job but never seems to lack money; it's beyond me .
be down	g	<i>a be decreased in price</i> Eggs are down this week.
	g	<i>b be deflated, have no air (in it, them)</i> The front tyre of your bicycle is down .
be down for	g	<i>have one's name on a list for</i>

She **is down for** pottery classes, but there may not be enough room for her.

be down on c *treat badly, be unkind to*
Leave your young brother alone!
Why **are** you always **down on** him?

be down with g *be ill with*
He **was down with** a sore throat all last week.

be for g *be in favour of, support*
You should tell us definitely whether you **are for** our plan or against it.

be from g *have been born in, come from*
His name is Patrick and he's **from** Ireland.

be in g a *be at home, in one's office etc.*
Is your mother **in**?—No, she's gone to the shops.

g b *(of a fire) be still burning*
This morning the kitchen fire **was** still **in**.

c c *be fashionable*
Leather coats **are in** this year.

g d) *be in season*
Apples will soon **be in** again.

be in for c *be going to experience, be going to receive*

If you are going to that party, you **are in for** a good time.
think the job will be easy.

be (well) in with c *be on friendly terms with, have the favour of*

He's well **in with** the most important people in the town.

be off c a *leave, go*
It's late, I must **be off**.
f b *(used in the imperative) go away!*

			Be off , young man, before I send for the police!
	c	c	<i>(of food) be bad</i>
			This meat is off . Throw it away!
	c	d	<i>be no longer available (at a restaurant)</i>
			The beef is off , but you can have fish or sausages.
	g	e	<i>be cancelled</i>
			The match is off because of rain.
be badly off	c	b	<i>be poor</i>
			You must be badly off if you can't even afford an evening at the cinema.
be well off	c	b	<i>be rich</i>
			Look at the car they've bought! They must be well off .
be on	g	a	<i>be showing at a cinema or theatre</i>
			What's on at the Regal this week?—'Ben Hur.'
	c	b	<i>agree to a suggestion</i>
			Shall we go for a walk?—All right, I'm on .
be on at	c	c	<i>criticize, scold, find fault with</i>
			His father is always on at him about his long hair.
be on to a good thing	s		<i>have discovered something profitable or pleasant</i>
			This flat looks very nice; I think we're on to a good thing , especially as it's so cheap.
be on the cards	c	b	<i>be possible, likely</i>
			It's on the cards that he will phone tonight.
be over	g	b	<i>be finished</i>
			The lesson is over you can go.
be out	g	a	<i>not be at home, in one's office etc.</i>
			The manager is out today, I'm afraid.

g b (of a fire) *be no longer burning*
The fire **was out** and the room was cold.

g c (of a book, film etc.) *be published, on show etc.*

My book will **be out** in January.

c d *be unfashionable*

Boots **are out** this year.

g e (of flowers) *be blooming*

The roses will soon **be out**.

be out for **c** *be trying to get*

He says he only wants the satisfaction of having done it, but he's really **out for** the money it will bring him.

be out of **c** *have no more of*

We're **out of** sugar, can you lend us half a pound?

be through **g a** *be connected by telephone*

You wanted 01-345 2021—you're **through** now.

g b *have finished doing something*

It has taken me a long time but I'm **through** now.

be through with **c*** *be tired; bored with; have had enough of*

I'm **through with** sightseeing; let's go to the beach.

be up **g a** *be out of bed*

It's nine o'clock. **Aren't** you **up** yet?

g b *have risen in price*

Tomatoes **are up** again, I see.

be up against **c** *be faced with*

The company **is up against** tremendous problems.

be up to **c a** *be capable of; be strong, clever*

*American

- etc. enough to do*
She feels better today but she **isn't**
up to getting out of bed yet.
- c** *b be doing (usually something mischievous)*
How did you get so dirty, children?
What have you **been up to**?
- g** *c be the responsibility, duty of*
It **is up to** you to earn your own living now; I cannot support you any longer.
- be up to no good** **c** *be doing something wrong*
Be careful of that child; he's always **up to no good**.
- it is all up with him** **c** *there is no hope for him*
The doctors seem to think it **is all up with him**.
- be with** **g** *a agree with*
Go ahead, I'm **with** you entirely.
- c** *b understand*
This is rather complicated. **Are** you still **with** me?
- be no more** **f** *be dead*
Poor James **is no more**; may his soul rest in peace.
- be somebody** **c** *be important*
He looks most uninteresting, but I believe he **is somebody** in his firm.
- be well-to-do** **c** *see be well off*
break away (from) **g** *go away (from), leave suddenly*
The prisoner **broke** away from his captors.
They **broke** away from the Party to form their own group.
- break down** **g** *a stop working, fail mechanically*
Our car **broke** down and we had to walk the rest of the way.
- g** *b fail, collapse*

The peace negotiations have **broken** down.

He worked too hard and his health **broke** down.

g c *analyse, classify*

These population figures must be **broken** down into totals for each part of the country.

break in **g** a *enter a building by force*

The thieves **broke** in through the window and stole the safe.

g b *interrupt*

I had almost finished telling the joke when he **broke** in to say he had heard it before.

g c *train, tame (an animal)*

Be careful of that horse; it isn't fully **broken** in yet.

break into **g** *enter by force*

Thieves had **broken** into the office during the night.

break into song **g** *start singing (or laughing, crying etc.) suddenly*

(or laughter, tears etc.) The soldiers **broke** into song as they were marching along.

break off **g** a *bring to a sudden end, terminate*

I hear John and Barbara have **broken** off their engagement.

g b *stop (doing something, talking etc.) suddenly*

She started to laugh but **broke** off when she saw his serious face.

The workmen **broke** off for a cup of tea.

break out **g** a *appear, start suddenly*

A fire **broke** out in one wing of the hospital.

Where were you the day war

- broke out?**
- g b escape**
Two criminals have **broken** out of the prison.
- break through g a make a way through, escape through**
Some of the demonstrators **broke** through the police cordon and reached the Embassy.
- g b (of the sun) appear through the clouds, begin to shine**
It was midday before the sun **broke** through.
- break up g a disperse, cause to separate**
A crowd of people had gathered but the police soon **broke** it up.
- g b destroy, break in pieces, demolish**
Old cars and ships are **broken** up and sold as scrap metal.
His family was **broken** up by divorce.
- g c (of school terms, meeting etc.) end; finish school**
The meeting **broke** up in confusion.
We **break** up at the end of next week.
- break with g have no more dealings with, quarrel with and separate from**
He was an old friend but he treated me badly and I **broke** with him.
- break a habit g free oneself of a habit**
Smoking is a habit that is hard to **break**.
- break a lance with someone f quarrel or argue with him in a friendly manner**
We are old friends, though I often **break** a lance with him.
- break the ice c get people to be sociable; overcome**

- an unfriendly atmosphere*
The party will go all right as soon as someone **breaks** the ice.
- break the news** g *announce something new for the first time*
When he got home, his wife **broke** the news that she was expecting a baby.
- bring about** g *cause to happen*
What **brought** about the accident?
- bring back** g *cause to be remembered*
This music **brings** back happy memories.
- bring down** g *a cause to fall*
The wind **brought** down several trees.
- g *b cause to decrease*
A cold wind **brought** down the temperature.
- bring the house down** c *cause great laughter or enthusiasm among an audience*
His amusing speech **brought** the house down.
- bring forward** g *a cause to be discussed, dealt with etc.*
Will you **bring** forward this matter at the next meeting please?
- g *b advance in date, make earlier*
The wedding was originally fixed for the 14th but has been **brought** forward to the 7th.
- bring in** g *a introduce*
We hope to **bring** in several new fashions this spring.
- g *b earn, produce as earnings or profit*
His writings only **bring** in a small income.
- bring off** g *achieve, manage to do*

- It was an almost impossible task but he **brought** it off.
- bring on** g a *cause, produce*
The cold weather **brought** on many attacks of influenza.
- g b *cause to develop, make progress*
The sun is **bringing** the tomatoes on very well.
- bring out** g a *cause (flowers etc.) to grow, blossom*
The warm weather has **brought** out the roses nicely.
- g b *publish*
We are **bringing** out two new titles next week.
- g c *cause to appear, be seen clearly*
The dark background **brings** out the figure well.
- bring over** g *persuade, convert to a way of thinking*
His forceful arguments **brought** me over to his views.
- bring round** g a *revive, cause to regain consciousness*
He fainted with the pain but a drop of brandy soon **brought** him round.
- g b *persuade*
I did not succeed in **bringing** him round to my way of thinking.
- bring through** g *save (someone who is ill), cure*
His illness was serious but the doctors managed to **bring** him through.
- bring to an end** g *end, stop*
A conjuring act **brought** the show to an end.
- bring to light** g *make known or seen*
The investigation **brought** several

bring to mind g new facts to light.

remind, make one think of (something)

His story **brings** to mind something that happened to me when I was a child.

bring someone to c *cause him to stop behaving foolishly*
his senses He is a wild boy, but a firm teacher will **bring** him to his senses.

bring something c *cause him to understand it clearly*
home to someone The policeman's words **brought** the seriousness of the affair home to me.

bring under g *control, subdue*
The rebellion received little popular support and was soon **brought** under.

bring up g *a rear, educate*

The young widow was left with three children to **bring** up.

g *b mention, draw attention to*
I shall **bring** this up at the next meeting.

g *c vomit*

The child was ill and **brought** up everything he ate.

call at g *a pay a short visit to, stop at*

Will you **call** at the grocer's on your way back from work?

g *b (of ships) stop at the port of*

This ship **calls** at Gibraltar on the way to Port Said.

call for g *a visit, stop at a place in order to collect (someone or something)*

I'll **call** for you at seven o'clock at your house.

g *b require, need*

The situation **calls** for careful planning.

call forth	f	<i>produce, cause to be used</i> Danger sometimes calls forth the best qualities in man.
call in	g	<i>a ask to come, summon</i> He is getting worse; we should call in the doctor.
	g	<i>b pay a short visit</i> The doctor called in to see how the patient was getting on.
	g	<i>c ask for the return of</i> The book was libellous, so the publishers had to call in all copies of it from the bookshops.
call off	g	<i>cancel, not proceed with</i> The strike was called off when the management agreed to negotiate.
call on	g	<i>a visit (someone) briefly</i> She called on her neighbour to congratulate her on the birth of a daughter.
	g	<i>b ask, invite</i> I now call on Mr Jones to address the meeting.
call out	g	<i>summon into action</i> The Government called out troops to control the demonstrators.
call up	g	<i>a telephone to</i> I'll call you up from the airport as soon as I land.
	g	<i>b summon for military service</i> As war seemed inevitable, the Government began calling up all the country's young men.
call a halt	g	<i>decide or say that it is time to stop</i> You've been working all day; why don't you call a halt?
call someone names	c	<i>insult him</i> He lost his temper and began