

**International Student Orientation Workshop:
Idioms in Academic Speech**

Part 1. The purpose of this exercise is simply for you and us to find out which of the following idioms you know the meaning of already.

Circle the answer that best explains the metaphorical meaning of the idiom.

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|---|-------------------------------------|
| 1. <u>bottom line</u> | 5. <u>pick up on</u> |
| a.) an easy task | a.) to collect |
| b.) the main point | b.) to notice |
| c.) the best solution | c.) to choose |
| d.) a minor point | d.) to tease |
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| 2. <u>hand in hand</u> | 6. <u>play devil's advocate</u> |
| a.) on friendly terms | a.) argue the opposite point |
| b.) occurring together | b.) obtain or extract with effort |
| c.) working very quickly | c.) make fun of someone |
| d.) without effort | d.) understand something completely |
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| 3. <u>in a nutshell</u> | 7. <u>go off on a tangent</u> |
| a.) all at once | a.) talk about an unrelated topic |
| b.) in great detail | b.) have a mathematical discussion |
| c.) in a few words | c.) start an argument |
| d.) one by one | d.) to leave the room suddenly |
|
 | |
| 4. <u>split hairs</u> | 8. <u>get a handle on</u> |
| a.) to make something less complex | a.) to do a job well |
| b.) to present a certain interpretation | b.) to get a reward for |
| c.) to make trivial distinctions | c.) to bring to a conclusion |
| d.) to accept contradictions | d.) to get a clear understanding of |

Part B: Idioms in Context

Now, read the following excerpts from MICASE, and see if you can figure out the meaning from context.

1. armed with all of that information, how well can I predict who retires in the next year? okay and I have three models for doing that, and **the bottom line** turns out to be that all three models do about equally well.
2. at the same time, **hand in hand** with good management and knowing how to sustain these populations over a long time period, was an understanding of their biology and ecology, so a lot of studies in wildlife ecology were going on at the same time.
3. their art their ideas their religion their politics, all of it sits on top of the organization of their way of making a living. that's really **in a nutshell**. it's it's more complicated than that but that's it **in a nutshell**...
4. if you pass it this week, it'll be even more useful, but, i don't want you guys to um, uh, **split any hairs** about it i don't want, um, i don't want it to be a major debate, it's more important that this gets passed in general
5. there has to be something going on in here that we haven't (quite) **picked up on**.
6. you know to **play to devil's ad-** i mean to take Berman's side

also, I- and I'm **playing devil's advocate** here [S1: mhm] <LAUGH> I don't actually agree with everything that I'm saying. [S1: okay <LAUGH>] <SS LAUGH>
7. as I said the Basques did adapt Latin as a language especially for religious purposes, starting around the third and fourth centuries, and the Basques by the way have been some in the history of Spain, if I may just **go off on a tangent** the Basques have been in Spanish history and Spanish religious history some of the most fervent Catholics. I mean one of the world's greatest...
8. I'm just trying to **get a handle on**... what strikes you, as areas where we're spending money as a university, on things that are geared toward people out-of-state

Part A.

Circle the answer that best explains the metaphorical meaning of the idiom.

9. the big picture

- a.) an general overview
- b.) a detailed image
- c.) a large illustration
- d.) an impressive display

10. draw the line between

- a.) make a connection
- b.) get to the point
- c.) argue for one side
- d.) make a distinction

11. get to the bottom of things

- a.) to get new ideas
- b.) to finish a project
- c.) to find the basic cause
- d.) to reach the lowest point

12. carrot and stick

- a.) reward and punishment
- b.) problems and solutions
- c.) good luck and bad luck
- d.) advantages and disadvantages

13. ivory tower

- a.) remote from everyday affairs
- b.) at the top of the hierarchy
- c.) unattainable goal
- d.) expensive and exotic place

14. shift gears

- a.) wait for a few minutes
- b.) end the discussion
- c.) move to a different topic
- d.) start an argument

15. thinking on my feet

- a.) considering all options
- b.) without advance planning
- c.) with careful preparation
- d.) not paying attention to details

16. come into play

- a.) become relevant
- b.) behave badly
- c.) have a good time
- d.) calm down

17. be on the same page

- a.) to have the same problem again
- b.) to understand or follow along
- c.) to be close to or like someone
- d.) to be where the action is

Part B: Idioms in Context

9. and i'm not going to load you up with examples. one thing to keep in mind as we go along even when we get into some of the technical things we're gonna talk about today, i really want to get across to you **the big picture** the more general issues. don't worry about the nitty-gritty, of the actual linguistic details that i'm going to uh, present obviously, you have to be presented with linguistic facts. but i'm more interested in you getting just the broad picture the general principles that uh, that are issued here
10. where is he **drawing the line then between**, not coming to the, market, and going onto the market and, aren't they already on the market...
11. you know psychological help, is about trying to understand hard feelings, understand what's going on, **get to the bottom of things**.
12. from the U.S. point of view it's more of a **carrot and stick**, combination of approaches for the North Koreans, the positive rewards are just seen merely as a prelude to the possible alternative of punishment.
13. I guess the first thing that we have to talk about is why agriculture at the University of Michigan. the University of Michigan is an, **ivory tower** school uh, it's not Michigan State we're not the cow college obviously, we really shouldn't be doing agriculture.
14. anything else about The American that we wanna **touch on**? well let me **shift gears** for a few minutes then to prep you for what we'll do next week.
15. . that's about as well as I can do kind of **thinking on my feet** about it but it certainly is true.
16. how easy it is (...) to trample all over the people who we're purporting to help and I think questions of respect **come into play** and I think those those can get, you know tricky like a lot of other things...

once this has happened, there are again some other factors that **come into play** that determine whether or not extensive growth will take place... extensive growth of metastases requires a couple things...
17. people seem to be lost and so we're trying to make this all a more effective, so everyone's kind of **on the same page**. and, like anything it's a learning process...