100 IDIOMS YOU MUST KNOW



Learning Idioms Made Easy

We often come across expressions like: '***It's raining cats and dogs***', '***Apple of my eye***', which don't seem to make any literal sense!

Such phrases are called **IDIOMS**. While their literal meanings may seem absurd, they have a metaphorical meaning and may even be written in an unusual grammatical structure.

In the **SSC CGL Tier II exam**, questions are asked from this category, every year. Though number of questions lies in the lower range, the topic remains important due to the nature of the questions asked. For instance:

Q. I don't think the assignment will take much time, it is a piece of cake.

(1) Familiar
(2) Easy or simple
(3) Something already done before
(4) Very informative

The questions are straight forward and answering them is only a matter of seconds if you know the meaning and usage. Also, if one knows the correct answer, there's little room for error.

These are just the type of questions that fetch you those brownie points and give you an edge over your competitors. In this e-book pdf, we've compiled a **list of 100 Must Know Idioms** to help you do just that!

100 Idioms for SSC CGL

1. A hot potato

Meaning: Something that is difficult or dangerous to deal with.

Example: Terrorism is a political hot potato in Afghanistan.

2. A penny for your thoughts

Meaning: Way of asking what someone is thinking.

Example: After several minutes of silence he finally looked at her and said, "A penny for your thoughts, Lily."

3. Actions speak louder than words

Meaning: What you do is more significant than what you say.

Example: He: I am sorry. I'll try to be a better person henceforth.
She: Actions speak louder than words.

4. Add insult to injury

Meaning: To make a bad situation worse.

Example: Their basement was flooded, and then, to add insult to injury, a pipe burst in the kitchen.

5. An arm and a leg

Meaning: A lot of money.

Example: It's the best cruise in the world, but it will cost you an arm and a leg.

6. At the drop of a hat

Meaning: Immediately; without any hesitation

Example: Ellie was always ready to go shopping at the drop of a hat.

7. ***Back to the drawing board***

Meaning: Start something all over again.

Example: I failed this semester, but now I am back to the drawing board.

8. ***Ball is in your court.***

Meaning: It is up to you to take the next step

Example: I've made my decision, now the ball is in your court.

9. ***Barking up the wrong tree***

Meaning: Looking in the wrong place; accusing the wrong person.

Example: He did not commit the crime, you're barking up the wrong tree.

10. ***Be glad to see the back of***

Meaning: Be glad to see someone leave.

Example: I never liked her. I'll be glad to see the back of her.

11. ***Beat around the bush***

Meaning: Avoid answering a question; not speaking directly about the issue.

Example: Tell me what the problem is, stop beating around the bush.

12. ***Best of both the worlds***

Meaning: Situation wherein one can enjoy two different opportunities.

Example: She had the privilege of a professor and freedom of a student. She had the best of both worlds.

13. ***Best thing since sliced bread***

Meaning: A good idea or plan; an excellent new invention.

Example: I love your idea. It's the best thing since sliced bread.

14. Bite off more than you can chew

Meaning: To take on a task that is way too big.

Example: Our boss bit off more than she could chew when she promised the client we'd have the project ready by next week.

15. Blessing in disguise

Meaning: Something good that isn't recognized at first.

Example: Ashok's losing his job was a blessing in disguise; it gave him an opportunity to pursue higher studies.

16. Burn the midnight oil

Meaning: To stay up working, especially studying, late at night.

Example: She's been burning the midnight oil for the last few months; her hard work will definitely pay off in the coming exams.

17. Don't judge a book by its cover

Meaning: Don't judge something primarily by its appearance.

Example:
She: He doesn't look intelligent.
He: You can't judge a book by its cover.

18. Caught between two stools.

Meaning: When someone finds it difficult to choose between two alternatives.

Example: He had committed to both and now he's caught between two stools.

19. Cross that bridge when you come to it.

Meaning: Deal with a problem if and when it becomes necessary.

Example: He: I think I need to hire a lawyer.
She: Cross that bridge when you come to it.

20. ***Cry over spilled milk***

Meaning: To be unhappy about something that cannot be undone.

Example: It can't he helped, don't cry over spilled milk.

21. ***Curiosity killed the cat***

Meaning: Being too curious can get you into trouble.

Example: Don't ask about his divorce-curiosity killed the cat!

22. ***Cut corners***

Meaning: To take shortcuts; when something is done badly to save money.

Example: They always put quality first; they won't cut corners just to save money.

23. ***Cut the mustard***

Meaning: Perform satisfactorily; to succeed.

Example: We need a better catcher; this one just doesn't cut the mustard.

24. ***Devil's advocate***

Meaning: To present a counter argument

Example: The teacher always played devil's advocate to provoke discussion in the classroom.

25. ***Don't count your chickens before the eggs have hatched.***

Meaning: Don't make plans for something that might not happen.

Example: You might not win the prize and you've already spent the money? Don't count your chickens before the eggs have hatched.

26. Don't give up the day job

Meaning: You're not very good at something. You could definitely not do it professionally.

Example: Why did you invest in business even after failing in it in the past? Don't give up the day job!

27. Don't put all your eggs in one basket

Meaning: Don't focus all of your attention on one thing or one area.

Example: I know you love Harvard, but don't put all your eggs in one basket. Apply to other colleges too.

28. Drastic times call for drastic measures

Meaning: When you're extremely desperate you need to take drastic actions.

Example: Yes we had to let go of five of our workers! Drastic times call for drastic measures.

29. Elvis has left the building

Meaning: The show has come to an end. It's all over.

Example: We waited for another performance by the band but it looked like Elvis had left the building.

30. Every cloud has a silver lining

Meaning: Be optimistic, even difficult times will lead to better days.

Example: I'm sorry your business is going badly, but remember every cloud has a silver lining.

31. Far cry from

Meaning: A thing that is very different from something else.

Example: What you did was a far cry from what you said you were going to do.

32. ***Feel a bit under the weather***

Meaning: Feeling sick or unhealthy.

Example: I'm not coming to office today, I'm feeling a bit under the weather.

33. ***Give the benefit of doubt***

Meaning: Believe someone's statement without proof.

Example: I knew him since the past 5 years, so I gave him the benefit of doubt.

34. ***Hear through the grapevine***

Meaning: To hear news from someone who heard that news from someone else

Example: I heard through the grapevine that she's pregnant.

35. ***Hit the nail on the head***

Meaning: To do or say exactly the right thing.

Example: You've spotted the flaw, Robert. You've hit the nail on the head.

36. ***Hit the sack/sheets/hay***

Meaning: To go to bed.

Example: I'm exhausted. I think I'll just hit the sack.

37. ***In the heat of the moment***

Meaning: Overwhelmed by what's happening at the moment.

Example: He doesn't hate you. He just said that in the heat of the moment.

38. ***It takes two to tango***

Meaning: Both people involved in a bad situation are responsible for it.

Example: He blamed her for his lack of attention; well it takes two to tango.

39. Jump on the bandwagon

Meaning: Join a popular trend or activity.

Example: So many people are playing that game that I might as well jump on the bandwagon and check it out.

40. Keep something at bay

Meaning: Keep something away

Example: A good way to keep your anxiety at bay is through meditation.

41. Kill two birds with one stone

Meaning: To solve two problems at a time with just one action

Example: John practiced his words while peeling the potatoes. He was killing two birds with one stone.

42. Last straw

Meaning: The final problem in a series of problems

Example: This is the last straw. I'm calling the police.

43. Let sleeping dogs lie

Meaning: Leave something alone if it might cause trouble.
Example: I thought I would ask him if he wanted me to pay him back right away, but then I decided to let the sleeping dogs lie.

44. Let the cat out of the bag

Meaning: To reveal a secret / To share information that was previously concealed.

Example: It's our secret. Don't let the cat out of the bag.

45. Make a long story short

Meaning: Come to the point – leave out the details.

Example: And – to make the long story short – I never got back the money I lent him.

46. Method in the madness

Meaning: A purpose in what one is doing, even though it seems to be crazy.

Example: What I'm doing might seem strange, but there is method in my madness.

47. Miss the boat

Meaning: To miss out on something.

Example: Pay attention, John, or you'll miss the boat and never learn algebra.

48. Not a spark of decency

Meaning: A person who has no manners

Example: Her brother has not a spark of decency. I don't like the way he acts in public.

49. Not playing with the full deck

Meaning: Someone who is mentally, psychologically or intellectually deficient.

Example: He's an intelligent guy, but with all that crazy things he does, I wonder if he's not playing with the full deck.

50. On the ball

Meaning: When someone understands a situation well; attentive.

Example: If you were on the ball, this wouldn't have happened.

51. Off the record

Meaning: Not made as an official or attributable statement; unofficial; confidential

Example: He accepted his fault off the record and hence it could not be used by the prosecutor in the court.

52. ***Oldest trick in the book***

Meaning: A well known and much used trick/method

Example: Oldest trick in the book to treat cold and cough is drinking turmeric milk.

53. ***Off the cuff***

Meaning: Without preparation; spontaneous

Example: She has a reputation of handling off the cuff interviews very well.

54. ***Old habits die hard***

Meaning: People find it difficult to change their accustomed behavior.

Example: She retired last month, but still gets up at the same time in the morning. Old habits die hard.

55. ***Once in a blue moon***

Meaning: Very rarely

Example: Jill has a very rocky relationship with her father. She speaks to him once in a blue moon.

56. ***Open the floodgates***

Meaning: Release something that was previously under control

Example: Economists fear that relaxing price control will open the floodgates to inflation.

57. ***Out of the blue***

Meaning: Happen unexpectedly

Example: She had given up all hope when out of the blue she got a call from Harvard.

58. ***Out on a limb***

Meaning: Do something risky or something that others do not support (leaving the doer in a difficult situation)

Example: She was out on a limb with her project – nobody supported her idea.

59. ***Over the top***

Meaning: Totally excessive and not suitable for the occasion.

Example: Her sari was way over the top for a somber occasion like this.

60. ***Pen is mightier than the sword***

Meaning: Words and communication have a greater effect than war

Example: A simple handwritten note put an end to their week long cold war – pen is mightier than the sword.

61. ***Push one's luck***

Meaning: Trying to obtain more than what one has (risk spoiling the current situation)

Example: You have my permission to go to your friends' place but don't push your luck by planning a night out.

62. ***Raining cats and dogs***

Meaning: Raining heavily

Example: We'll have to cancel the trip, it's raining cats and dogs here.

63. ***Reap the harvest***

Meaning: Benefit or suffer as a direct result of past actions.

Example: When he cleared IIT-JEE, he reaped the harvest of all his hard work.

64. Roll up one's sleeves

Meaning: Get ready for hard work

Example: My brother said he would roll up his sleeves and do whatever it takes to support the family.

65. See eye to eye

Meaning: To be in agreement with

Example: She was glad her roommate saw eye to eye on the choice of the flat.

66. Shot in the dark

Meaning: A complete guess (may or may not be close to the truth)

Example: He didn't know too much about programming, so answering the interviewer's question was merely a shot in the dark.

67. Sink your teeth into

Meaning: Do something with a lot of energy and enthusiasm.

Example: Robin immediately sank his teeth into his new job.

68. Skating on thin ice

Meaning: Do or say something risky or something that could cause trouble.

Example: Don't say anything that hurts her self esteem or you could be skating on thin ice.

69. Stand in a good stead

Meaning: To be useful or be of good service to someone.

Example: Being fluent in German will stand you in a good stead when applying for an MS in Germany.

70. Strike while the iron is hot

Meaning: To act at the right time

Example: The price of gold is at a 10 year low, strike while the iron is hot and invest in it right away.

71. Take a back seat

Meaning: Choose to be less important in a role

Example: He finally decided to take a back seat and let his son run the family business.

72. Take with a grain/pinch of salt

Meaning: To doubt the accuracy of information

Example: A lot is said about the celebrities in media, but that information should be taken with a grain of salt.

73. Take a nosedive

Meaning: Rapid drop or decrease in value

Example: The share prices took a nosedive when there were rumors of the company's CEO resigning.

74. Take the plunge

Meaning: Venture into something of one's interest despite the risks involved

Example: Jack finally took the plunge and opened a restaurant.

75. Taste of one's own medicine

Meaning: Treat people the same (unpleasant) way they treated you

Example: People who often disregard others should be given a taste of their own medicine.

76. Think the world of

Meaning: Admire someone very much

Example: Emily is a wonderful teacher – children think the world of her.

77. Tight spot

Meaning: A difficult situation

Example: The recent lawsuit has put the firm in a tight spot.

78. Tongue in cheek

Meaning: (of a remark) Supposed to be taken in funny or ironic sense

Example: Her comment was taken more seriously than intended. It was supposed to be tongue in cheek.

79. Turn a blind eye

Meaning: Pretend not to notice

Example: People tend to turn a blind eye to crime against women.

80. Walk on eggshells

Meaning: Be extremely cautious about one's words or actions

Example: Celebrities are scrutinized by the media for all their actions so they're required to walk on eggshells.

81. Want someone's head on a platter

Meaning: Want someone to be punished severely

Example: "I want that murderer's head on a platter!", said the Chief of police.

82. ***Watch (someone) like a hawk***

Meaning: Keep eyes on or watch carefully

Example: The examiner watched the test takers like a hawk.

83. ***Water under the bridge***

Meaning: Something bad that happened in the past but is no longer important

Example: The couple had a serious fight in the past but that water is under the bridge now.

84. ***Wave a dead chicken***

Meaning: Do some useless, unhelpful thing in the hope that it will solve a problem

Example: Restarting the laptop once the motherboard has crashed is like waving a dead chicken.

85. ***Weak in the knees***

Meaning: Barely able to stand because of emotion, fear or illness

Example: The shock of being summoned by the Supreme Court made me go weak in the knees.

86. ***Wear many hats***

Meaning: Do many different types tasks

Example: We have such a small number of employees that one is often supposed to wear many hats.

87. ***Weather the storm***

Meaning: Succeed in surviving a difficult period of time

Example: Given the current global market conditions, the Indian economy is weathering the storm pretty well.

88. Wet behind the ears

Meaning: Inexperienced and immature

Example: Instead of a full time job, she should be offered an internship as she is still wet behind the ears.

89. Whale of a time

Meaning: Enjoy a lot

Example: She had a whale of a time in Goa with her girl gang.

90. Whistle in the dark

Meaning: Pretend to be brave in a scary situation

Example: Upon being attacked, she blew a whistle in the dark which surprised her attackers.

91. Why keep a dog and bark for yourself

Meaning: If someone or something can do a job for you, why do it yourself?

Example: My sister has a printer, but she continues to write notes manually. Why keep a dog and bark for yourself?

92. Wide off the mark

Meaning: Incorrect; Inadequate; Not what is expected

Example: Her answer was wide off the mark; it was impossible for me to give a better rating to it.

93. Wild goose chase

Meaning: Waste time looking for something that has little chance of being found

Example: She tried to find out who the anonymous caller was, but it turned out to be a wild goose chase.

94. ***Wipe the slate clean***

Meaning: Make a fresh start

Example: When Mike was leaving home, he decided to wipe the slate clean with his dad.

95. ***Wolf in sheep's clothing***

Meaning: Dangerous person pretending to be harmless

Example: I thought she was a good person, but I realized that she was a wolf in a sheep's clothing when she backstabbed me during the selection process.

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96. ***Work your fingers to the bone***

Meaning: Extreme hard work

Example: She totally deserves the success; she worked her fingers to the bone when she started out as a model.

97. ***Worm's eye view***

Meaning: A perspective seen from below or from a low or inferior position

Example: The trainees get only a worm's eye view of the corporate structure.

98. ***Worth one's salt***

Meaning: Good or competent at the job or profession specified

Example: She deserves respect as she is totally worth her salt.

99. ***Wrap one's brain around***

Meaning: Concentrate on something in an effort to understand

Example: I really need to wrap my brain around this concept before the exam.

100. ***Zero in on something***

Meaning: Focus all attention onto one thing

Example: The teacher immediately zeroed in on the weaker students of the class.

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