



CSS English Precise & Comprehension – Idioms (1970–2025)

Idioms with Meanings and Sentences

Prepared by
CSSPREP.COM.PK

2025 Edition



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Idioms – 2025

The CSS English Precis and Comprehension paper for 2025 did not include any questions on idioms.

Idioms – 2024

The CSS English Precis and Comprehension paper for 2024 did not include any questions on idioms.

Idioms – 2023

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Idioms – 2022

The CSS English Precis and Comprehension paper for 2022 did not include any questions on idioms.

Idioms – 2021

The CSS English Precis and Comprehension paper for 2021 did not include any questions on idioms.

Idioms – 2020

1. To break the ice

Meaning: To do or say something to relieve tension or get a conversation going in an awkward situation.

Sentence: He told a funny story at the start of the meeting to break the ice.

This expression alludes to breaking the ice to clear a path for ships, used figuratively since the late 1800s.

2. Nip in the bud

Meaning: To stop something at an early stage before it becomes a problem.

Sentence: The manager decided to nip the rumors in the bud before they spread further.

This idiom comes from gardening, referring to pruning a bud to prevent a plant from growing, used since the 1600s.

3. See eye to eye with

Meaning: To agree completely with someone.

Sentence: I don't always see eye to eye with my brother on politics.

This phrase, dating back to the 1800s, likely derives from the idea of two people looking directly at each other in agreement.

4. For good

Meaning: Permanently; forever.

Sentence: She moved to Canada for good last year.

This expression, used since the 1800s, implies a final or irrevocable action.

5. Tamper with

Meaning: To interfere with something in a harmful or unauthorized way.

Sentence: Never tamper with the electrical wiring—it can be dangerous.

This term, from the 1500s, originally meant to meddle or alter something improperly.



6. **The small hours**

Meaning: The early hours after midnight.

Sentence: They finally went to bed in the small hours after partying all night.

This phrase, used since the 1800s, refers to the quiet, early morning hours.

7. **Keep up appearances**

Meaning: To maintain an outward show of well-being or normalcy despite difficulties.

Sentence: Though they were struggling financially, they tried to keep up appearances at social events.

This idiom, from the 1700s, reflects maintaining a facade to preserve social standing.

8. **Prima facie**

Meaning: At first sight; based on the first impression.

Sentence: Prima facie, the evidence suggests he was at the scene of the crime.

This legal term, from Latin, has been used in English since the 1400s to denote initial evidence.

Idioms – 2019

1. **To cast pearls before swine**

Meaning: To offer something valuable to someone who does not appreciate it.

Sentence: Giving that rare book to someone who hates reading is like casting pearls before swine.

This phrase comes from the Bible (Matthew 7:6), used since the 1600s to describe wasting value on the unworthy.

2. **To step into one's shoes**

Meaning: To take over someone else's role or responsibilities.

Sentence: After the CEO retired, his son stepped into his shoes and led the company.

This idiom, from the 1800s, refers to assuming someone's position or duties.

3. **Stuff and nonsense**

Meaning: Something foolish or untrue; nonsense.



Sentence: His claim that he can finish all the work in one hour is pure stuff and nonsense.
This expression, used since the 1800s, dismisses absurd or baseless statements.

4. **A wild goose chase**

Meaning: A futile or hopeless pursuit.

Sentence: Looking for my lost ring in the huge park was a wild goose chase.

This phrase, from Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* (1590s), originally referred to a futile horse race.

5. **To be ill at ease**

Meaning: To feel uncomfortable or uneasy.

Sentence: She was ill at ease during the interview because the questions were so tough.

This term, used since the 1700s, describes a state of discomfort or nervousness.

6. **Sit on the fence**

Meaning: To avoid taking sides in a dispute or decision.

Sentence: He always sits on the fence instead of supporting one side clearly.

This idiom, from the 1800s, likens indecision to sitting on a fence between two sides.

7. **In a jiffy**

Meaning: Very quickly; in a very short time.

Sentence: I'll be back with your coffee in a jiffy.

This phrase, from the 1700s, may derive from slang for a moment or instant.

8. **To preen oneself**

Meaning: To admire or groom oneself excessively.

Sentence: He kept checking his hair in the mirror, clearly preening himself before the party.

This idiom, from the 1400s, originally referred to birds grooming their feathers.

Idioms – 2018

1. **Show and tell**

Meaning: A demonstration or explanation of something, often used in educational settings to show and describe objects.



Sentence: The students brought their favorite toys for show and tell in class.

This phrase, from the 1900s, is commonly associated with classroom activities.

2. **Helter-skelter**

Meaning: In a disorderly or chaotic manner.

Sentence: When the fire alarm rang, everyone ran helter-skelter out of the building.

This term, from the 1500s, originally described a spiral slide or chaotic movement.

3. **To the death**

Meaning: Until one party is completely defeated, often used for intense or extreme commitment to a cause or conflict.

Sentence: The two rivals were prepared to fight to the death for the championship title.

This phrase, from the 1300s, emphasizes unrelenting determination.

4. **Tilt at windmills**

Meaning: To fight imaginary enemies; to waste time on futile or non-existent threats.

Sentence: He's always campaigning against problems that don't exist—he's just tilting at windmills.

This idiom comes from *Don Quixote* (1605), where the protagonist attacks windmills, mistaking them for giants.

5. **Het up**

Meaning: Upset, agitated, or angry.

Sentence: She got all het up over a minor disagreement with her coworker.

This term, from the 1900s, is a variation of "heated up," implying emotional agitation.

6. **The whole ball of wax**

Meaning: Everything; the entirety of something.

Sentence: When I got promoted, I received a new office, a pay raise—the whole ball of wax.

This phrase, from the 1900s, may relate to a legal practice involving wax balls for inheritance.

7. **It's about time**

Meaning: Used to express that something should have happened earlier.



Sentence: It's about time you cleaned your room—it's been a mess for weeks!

This expression, used since the 1900s, conveys impatience for delayed action.

8. **Punch-up**

Meaning: A physical fight or brawl.

Sentence: There was a punch-up outside the bar after the game.

This term, from the 1900s, describes a spontaneous physical altercation.

Idioms – 2017

1. **Spirit away**

Meaning: To sneak away to another place.

Sentence: The police spirited the prisoner away before the crowd assembled in front of the jail.

This phrase, from the 1700s, suggests stealthy removal, often with a sense of mystery.

2. **Plough back**

Meaning: To put profits made by a business back into it.

Sentence: All the profits are being ploughed back into the company.

This term, from the 1900s, likens reinvesting profits to plowing fields for future growth.

3. **Eager beaver**

Meaning: An alert and energetic person.

Sentence: John is such an eager beaver, nobody wants to work with him as he makes everyone else look bad.

This phrase, from the 1940s, likely derives from beavers' industrious nature.

4. **Ring a bell**

Meaning: Sound vaguely familiar.

Sentence: The place he was talking about rang a bell but I couldn't remember where I had read about it.

This idiom, from the 1900s, suggests something triggering a vague memory.

5. **Be left holding the baby**

Meaning: Be left with an unwelcome responsibility.