



AFCAT Idioms & Phrases

Idioms & Meanings

001. Bob's your uncle

Something is easy to do or use; the desired result follows simply.

002. A big draw

A person or attraction that is highly desirable or popular.

003. A bull in a china shop

A careless or clumsy person in a delicate situation.

004. A clean slate

A fresh start without being influenced by past events.

005. A cut above

Noticeably better or superior to someone or something else.

006. Know the ropes

Understand the details and procedures of a task or organization.

007. A dime a dozen

Very common and therefore not especially valuable.

008. A baker's dozen

A group of thirteen.

009. A dark horse

A little-known person who unexpectedly succeeds or has hidden abilities.

010. A cuckoo in the nest

An unwelcome person or element in a group.

011. A cog in the machine

A small but necessary part of a larger organization or system.

012. Go to the dogs

Deteriorate badly; become ruined.

013. Give someone a piece of your mind

Speak angrily and frankly to someone.

014. Not all beer and skittles

Not entirely pleasant, easy, or enjoyable.

015. Be in the red

Be in debt or operate at a financial loss.

016. Achilles' heel

A weakness or vulnerable point in an otherwise strong person or system.

017. Play it by ear

Act without a fixed plan and respond as events develop.

018. All and sundry

Everyone without distinction.

019. Cut the mustard

Meet the required standard or expectations.

020. Kick the bucket

Die.

021. Full of beans

Energetic, lively, and enthusiastic.

022. Under the weather

Slightly ill or in poor health.

023. Queer someone's pitch

Spoil or interfere with someone's plans or chances.

024. Wet behind the ears

Young, inexperienced, or immature.

025. Against the clock

In a great hurry to finish before a deadline.

026. Around the clock

Continuously, throughout the day and night.

027. An ace in the hole

A hidden advantage or resource kept for use when needed.

028. An armchair critic

A person who criticizes without practical knowledge or experience.

029. At a crossroads

At a stage where an important decision must be made.

030. At sixes and sevens

In a state of confusion or disorder.

031. Back in the saddle

Back in control or resuming an activity after a setback.

032. Bad egg

A dishonest or unreliable person.

033. Beauty sleep

Sleep believed to help one look fresh or attractive.

034. Bear the palm

Win or be acknowledged as the best.

035. Below the belt

Unfair, cruel, or outside accepted rules.

036. Between Scylla and Charybdis

Forced to choose between two equally dangerous alternatives.

037. Black and blue

Badly bruised.

038. Blind alley

A course of action that cannot lead to progress or a solution.

039. Carry the can

Accept blame or responsibility for something.

040. Clear the air

Remove tension, misunderstanding, or bad feeling through discussion.

041. Cry in the wilderness

Make an appeal or complaint that nobody notices or heeds.

042. Cut corners

Do something cheaply, quickly, or carelessly by omitting proper steps.

043. Dead ringer

A person or thing that looks almost exactly like another.

044. Dog in the manger

A person who prevents others from using something they cannot use themselves.

045. Dressing-down

A severe scolding or reprimand.

046. Drive home

Emphasize a point so that it is fully understood.

047. Exercise your franchise

Use your right to vote.

048. Fallout

The unpleasant consequences of an event or decision.

049. A feather in one's cap

An achievement to be proud of.

050. Find one's feet

Become confident and comfortable in a new situation.

051. A third wheel

An unnecessary extra person in a group or relationship.

052. A flash in the pan

Something that seems promising at first but quickly fails.

053. Fly the nest

Leave the family home and begin an independent life.

054. Follow one's nose

Go straight ahead or trust one's instincts.

055. Gatecrasher

An uninvited guest at a party or event.

056. Get someone's goat

Annoy or irritate someone.

057. Get the sack

Be dismissed from a job.

058. Go belly-up

Fail completely, become bankrupt, or die.

059. Go cold turkey

Stop an addictive habit suddenly and completely.

060. Go down like a lead balloon

Be received very badly or prove extremely unpopular.

061. Go Dutch

Share the cost, with each person paying their own part.

062. Halcyon days

A peaceful and happy period in the past.

063. Palmy days

A prosperous or flourishing period.

064. Bite the dust

Fail, be defeated, or die.

065. Have a long face

Look sad or disappointed.

066. Have the last laugh

Succeed after being mocked or doubted.

067. Head in the clouds

Be dreamy, impractical, or unaware of reality.

068. Hit the ceiling

Become suddenly extremely angry.

069. Black sheep

A disreputable or disgraced member of a family or group.

070. In a pickle

In a difficult or troublesome situation.

071. In raptures

Extremely delighted or enthusiastic.

072. In one's birthday suit

Completely naked.

073. Judas kiss

An outwardly friendly act that conceals betrayal.

074. Jump the gun

Act before the proper time or before being fully prepared.

075. Kangaroo court

An unofficial court that ignores accepted legal standards.

076. Keep up with the Joneses

Try to match the lifestyle or possessions of one's neighbours.

077. Latin and Greek

Language or material that is very difficult to understand.

078. Let sleeping dogs lie

Avoid disturbing a situation that could cause trouble.

079. Let the grass grow under one's feet

Delay acting or waste time.

080. Rise like a phoenix

Recover strongly after failure, destruction, or difficulty.

081. In a jiffy

Very quickly; in a moment.

082. Up to the hilt

Completely or to the greatest possible extent.

083. Man of letters

A learned literary person or professional writer.

084. In weal and woe

In prosperity and adversity; in good times and bad.

085. Lion's mouth

A place or situation of serious danger.

086. A curtain lecture

A private scolding given by one spouse to the other.

087. Blaze a trail

Be the first to do something and create a path for others.

088. Live from hand to mouth

Survive with only enough money for immediate needs.

089. Not mince matters

Speak plainly and directly without softening the truth.

090. Of the first water

Of the finest quality or highest rank.

091. On Shank's mare

Travelling on foot.

092. On the ball

Alert, capable, and quick to understand or act.

093. Out at elbows

Shabbily dressed or short of money.

094. Out of the woods

Free from danger or serious difficulty.

095. Pass the hat round

Collect money from a group of people.

096. Plain as day

Very clear or obvious.

097. Pie in the sky

An unrealistic hope or promise.

098. Play devil's advocate

Argue the opposing view to test an idea or discussion.

099. Pull a fast one

Trick or deceive someone.

100. Pull strings

Use influence or personal connections to obtain an advantage.

101. Put on ice

Postpone or delay something.

102. Put one's foot down

Take a firm stand and refuse to allow something.

103. Put one's cards on the table

State one's intentions or facts openly and honestly.

104. Run riot

Behave in a wild, uncontrolled, or unrestrained way.

105. Red herring

Something that distracts attention from the real issue.

106. Red tape

Excessive official rules, procedures, or bureaucracy.

107. Run down

Become exhausted, weak, or depleted.

108. Salad days

The period of one's youth and inexperience.

109. Salt of the earth

A very honest, dependable, and admirable person.

110. Sail close to the wind

Act near the limit of what is legal or acceptable.

111. Scrape the bottom of the barrel

Use the poorest remaining option or resource.

112. Sharp practice

Dishonest or unscrupulous conduct.

113. Show the white flag

Admit defeat or surrender.

114. Sit on the fence

Avoid choosing between alternatives or taking a clear position.

115. Smell blood

Recognize an opponent's weakness and see an opportunity to attack.

116. Split one's sides

Laugh extremely hard.

117. Steal someone's thunder

Take attention or credit away from someone else.

118. Steer clear of

Avoid a person, place, or situation.

119. Still waters run deep

A quiet person may have deep thoughts or strong qualities.

120. Suit someone to a T

Fit or suit someone perfectly.

121. Swan song

A final performance or achievement before retirement or death.

122. Sword of Damocles

A constant threat of danger hanging over someone.

123. Take something in one's stride

Deal calmly and easily with a difficulty.

124. Take a leaf out of someone's book

Copy someone's useful example or method.

125. Take the heat

Accept blame, pressure, or criticism.

126. Take to one's heels

Run away.

127. The bee's knees

An excellent or outstanding person or thing.

128. The last straw

The final problem that makes a bad situation unbearable.

129. The man in the street

An ordinary person or typical member of the public.

130. The old Adam

The sinful or undesirable side of human nature.

131. The nitty-gritty

The basic, practical, and most important details.

132. The world is your oyster

You have many opportunities open to you.

133. Think on your feet

Make quick and effective decisions in a difficult situation.

134. Throw down the gauntlet

Issue a challenge.

135. Throw a spanner in the works

Cause a problem that prevents a plan from succeeding.

136. Throw in the towel

Admit defeat and stop trying.

137. Beat the air

Make useless or ineffective efforts.

138. Break loose

Escape from restraint or control.

139. Clear the decks

Remove obstacles and prepare for action.

140. Cut a sorry figure

Make a poor or embarrassing impression.

141. Fan the flames

Make a conflict, feeling, or difficult situation worse.

142. Fish in troubled waters

Take advantage of a confused or difficult situation.

143. Breathe down someone's neck

Watch or supervise someone very closely.

144. Go bananas

Become very excited, angry, or irrational.

145. View with a jaundiced eye

Regard something with suspicion, resentment, or prejudice.

146. Have something up one's sleeve

Have a secret plan or advantage ready.

147. Jump on the bandwagon

Join a popular activity, cause, or trend.

148. Keep body and soul together

Earn enough to survive.

149. Keep the wolf from the door

Have enough money to avoid hunger or severe hardship.

150. Lay someone by the heels

Capture or imprison someone.

151. Make a pile

Earn a large amount of money.

152. Measure swords

Compete or argue with someone.

153. Meet one's Waterloo

Suffer a final and decisive defeat.

154. Pay through the nose

Pay far more than something is worth.

155. Pick up the threads

Resume an activity or relationship after an interruption.

156. Play fast and loose

Behave irresponsibly, dishonestly, or without firm principles.

157. Take one's hat off to

Show admiration or respect for someone.

158. Dressed to the nines

Dressed very elegantly or elaborately.

159. Turn over a new leaf

Change one's behaviour for the better.

160. Under duress

Acting because of threats, force, or pressure.

161. Bring someone to book

Make someone answer for wrongdoing.

162. Wear the green willow

Mourn lost or unrequited love.

163. The wee hours

The very early hours after midnight.

164. The whole nine yards

Everything possible or the full extent.

165. Yellow-bellied

Cowardly or very timid.

166. Bring home the bacon

Earn money for one's household or achieve success.

167. Yeoman service

Excellent, useful, and loyal service.

168. A diamond in the rough

A person with good qualities or potential that are not yet polished.

169. Dry run

A rehearsal or practice attempt.

170. A fine state of affairs

An unpleasant or disappointing situation, often said ironically.

171. A fly on the wall

An unnoticed observer of a private situation.

172. A gentleman at large

A man of independent means without a regular occupation.

173. The golden mean

A moderate course between two extremes.

174. Greenhorn

An inexperienced or naive person.

175. A grey area

A situation with no clear rule or answer.

176. A lean patch

A period of difficulty, shortage, or poor performance.

177. A long shot

An attempt with little chance of success.

178. A lot on one's plate

Many tasks or responsibilities to handle.

179. A man of straw

A weak person without real influence or substance.

180. A skeleton in the cupboard

An embarrassing secret hidden from others.

181. A stick in the mud

A dull, old-fashioned person who resists change.

182. A stuffed shirt

A self-important, formal, or pompous person.

183. A wildcat strike

A strike begun without official union approval.

184. Aid and abet

Help or encourage someone to commit a wrongful act.

185. A chink in the armour

A weakness that can be exploited.

186. Rule with an iron hand

Control people very strictly or harshly.

187. An old head on young shoulders

A young person who behaves with unusual maturity.

188. Appeal to Caesar

Appeal to the highest available authority.

189. As clear as mud

Very confusing or unclear.

190. At someone's beck and call

Always ready to obey someone's orders.

191. At the drop of a hat

Immediately and without hesitation.

192. Banana oil

Nonsense or insincere talk.

193. A dab hand

A person highly skilled at a particular activity.

194. Hard up

Short of money.

195. Behind the eight ball

In a difficult or disadvantageous position.

196. A fool's errand

A useless task with little chance of success.

197. Flog a dead horse

Waste effort on a hopeless matter.

198. The alpha and omega

The beginning and the end; the whole of something.

199. Beats me

I do not know or understand.

200. Cloak-and-dagger

Involving secrecy, spying, or intrigue.

201. At the end of one's tether

Having no patience, strength, or resources left.

202. I don't buy it

I do not believe or accept it.

203. Play second fiddle

Take a subordinate role to someone else.

204. A wolf in sheep's clothing

A dangerous or dishonest person who appears harmless.

205. All agog

Very eager, curious, or excited.

206. To the manner born

Naturally suited to a particular role or way of life.

207. Lose one's marbles

Become mentally confused or irrational.

208. Like a bear with a sore head

Very irritable or bad-tempered.

209. Go to the wall

Be defeated, ruined, or forced out of business.

210. The writing on the wall

A clear sign that failure or disaster is approaching.

211. Nip in the bud

Stop something at an early stage before it develops.

212. Take the rap

Accept blame or punishment, often for someone else.

213. Grist to the mill

Useful material or an advantage that can be put to good use.

214. In a lather

In a state of nervous excitement or agitation.

215. Mop the floor with someone

Defeat someone completely.

216. Brain sauce

Intelligence, wisdom, or mental ability.

217. Lynch law

Punishment by a mob without a lawful trial.

218. Dole out

Distribute something in portions.

219. Smell a rat

Suspect that something is wrong or dishonest.

220. Take umbrage

Feel offended or resentful.

221. Hoist with one's own petard

Harmed by the same scheme intended to harm another.

222. Teething problems

Minor difficulties during the early stage of a project or activity.

223. In the heat of the moment

While acting under strong emotion without enough thought.

224. Fall flat

Fail to have the intended effect.

225. Strain at a gnat

Object to a small matter while accepting a much greater one.

226. Stand on one's punctilio

Insist on strict observance of formality or etiquette.

227. Live in clover

Live a comfortable and luxurious life.

228. Beard the lion in his den

Confront a powerful or dangerous person on their own ground.

229. Temporize with

Avoid committing oneself by delaying or being evasive.

230. Tilt at windmills

Attack imaginary enemies or pursue an unrealistic cause.

231. Set the Thames on fire

Do something remarkable or spectacular.

232. Down to the wire

Undecided or unfinished until the last possible moment.

233. At someone's elbow

Very near someone and ready to help.

234. Everyone and his brother

A very large number of people.

235. Feet of clay

A hidden weakness in an admired person.

236. Make the feathers fly

Cause a fierce quarrel or fight.