

Idioms and Proverbs (wise sayings, mottoes and quotable quotes)

In your writing, if you can use some idioms, proverbs and quotable quotes, your essay will be more fun to read. You can also highlight an idea, making it more memorable with some of the wise sayings below.

- (1) An **idiom** is a phrase that has a meaning of its own that cannot be understood from the meanings of the individual words.

Here are some examples of idioms:

- ***To be fed up*** means to be tired and annoyed with something that has been happening for too long.

忍無可忍；厭倦的

- ***By the skin of your teeth*** means that something was successful, but only just barely. “She passed the test by the skin of her teeth” means she almost failed.

僥倖成功，勉強完成

More examples of idioms:

- ***Up in the air*** - the situation being planned is still undecided; everything is still uncertain/unsure.

懸而未決

- ***Stabbed in the back*** - Being stabbed in the back means that you've been betrayed by someone who you trust.

在背後被捅過刀子

- ***It takes two to tango*** - Where two parties are involved in a situation, fault usually lies with both if things go wrong.

雙方都有責任；一個巴掌拍不響

- ***Kill two birds with one stone*** - a single action knocks out two tasks or responsibilities; accomplish two different things at the same time.

一石二鳥，一舉兩得

- A piece of cake - When something is a piece of cake, it is so simple that it is like eating a piece of cake.

非常容易的事情

- A rule of thumb - a "rule" that's based on common experience and common sense.

經驗之談

- Blow off steam - When you're feeling angry or upset, you want to do something to relieve the emotions/get rid of the stress, then you're blowing off steam.

發洩怒氣；宣洩感情

- A dark horse - a horse that wins a race but nobody expected it. It's used a lot in sports or competition.

黑馬

- A rip-off - Too expensive; one is being taken advantage of.

敲竹槓

- Add fuel to the fire - To add more problems to an existing issue

火上澆油

- Give it a shot - To try to do something

試一試

- In hot water - Be in trouble

惹上麻煩

- In the same boat - Be in the same situation

處境相同，面臨同樣的困境

- Miss the boat - You missed your chance

錯失良機

- Mumbo jumbo - To call something total nonsense

晦澀難懂的話；繁文縟節

- Out of the blue - With no warning

出乎意料地

- Read between the lines - Find the hidden meaning

看出字裡行間的意思

- Second to none - The best

首屈一指

- The icing on the cake - Something additional that turns good into great

錦上添花

- Cross your fingers - For good luck

祈求好運；希望

- Fall on deaf ears - People wouldn't listen to something

充耳不聞

- Get cold feet - Be nervous

裹足不前

- Giving the cold shoulder - Ignore someone

故意冷落

- Have a change of heart - Changed your mind

改變主意

- I'm all ears - You have my full attention

洗耳恭聽

- Speak your mind - Say what you really feel

坦言直說

(2) A **proverb** is a short popular saying that gives advice about how people should behave or that expresses a belief that is generally thought to be true. Here are some examples:

- *Don't cry over spilled milk.*

覆水難收

- *Those who live in glass houses shouldn't throw stones.*

五十步笑百步

- *A stitch in time saves nine.*

及時行事，事半功倍

Like idioms, proverbs often have a meaning that is greater than the meaning of the individual words put together, but in a different way than idioms.

The literal meaning of a proverb such as “Don't cry over spilled milk” does make sense on its own, but it's not until you apply this meaning to a broader set of situations that you understand the real point of the proverb. For example, “Don't cry over spilled milk” means “Don't get upset over something that has already been done. It's too late to worry about it now, just get on with your life.”

More examples of proverbs:

Absence makes the heart grow fonder. 不相見，倍思念

It means that when you separate from someone that you love by distance, you will miss the person more.

Actions speak louder than words. 事實勝於雄辯

- Actions are a better reflection of one's character because it's easy to say things, but difficult to act on them and follow through.

All good things come to an end. 天下無不散的筵席

- Good experiences eventually come to an end.

Beauty is in the eye of the beholder. 情人眼裡出西施

- What may seem beautiful to one person may not seem to another.

Beauty is only skin deep. 人品比外表更重要

- A person's character, intellectual ability, and other inner qualities are more important than his/ her physical beauty.

Blood is thicker than water. 血濃於水

- Relationships with family (or blood relatives) is stronger than other relationships.

Curiosity killed the cat. 過於好奇會惹禍上身

- Enquiring into others' work can be dangerous. One should mind one's own business.

Don't judge a book by its cover. 以貌取人

- You can't form an opinion of a book just by looking at its cover; likewise, you can't form an opinion about someone (or something) from their outward appearance.

Give them an inch and they'll take a mile. 得吋進尺

- If you give someone a small amount of power or freedom to do something, they may try to get a lot more.

Laughter is the best medicine. 歡笑是良藥

- Thinking positively and laughing will help you to feel better.

Look before you leap. 三思而後行

- Act with caution; consider all consequences before taking an action.

(3) More Examples:

❖ *Chase your tail*

Meaning - Spending a lot of time and energy doing a lot of things but actually achieving very little.

Example – He has been chasing his tail all week collecting data but the report is still not ready.

❖ *A whole bag of tricks*

Meaning - trying all the clever means to achieve something.

Example - It was really difficult to find the information even after applying the whole bag of tricks.

❖ *Deliver the goods*

Meaning - Do what is expected or promised.

Example - I have given my car to a new mechanic for repair, hope he can deliver the goods.

❖ *Explore all avenues*

Meaning - Trying out every possibility to get a result.

Example - It is a difficult thing to do but if we really want it done, we must explore all avenues.

❖ *Fast track something*

Meaning - Rating something higher on your priority list to achieve the desired result.

Example - In view of the seriousness of the crime, the civil society is pressing up on a fast track decision from the court.

❖ *Get ducks in a row*

Meaning - Getting your things well-organized.

Example - To ensure a successful product launch, we must get our ducks in a row.

Questions:

Can you get the meaning of the idioms/ proverbs from context?

- ❖ We mean business / let's get down to business
- ❖ She sailed through the presentation smoothly. It was considered to be well-done.
- ❖ He is jack of all trades. It is hard for us to assign him to a specific post.
- ❖ *Don't cry over spilled milk*. You need to get on with life.
- ❖ We have to face the music. Let's tackle the problems together.

- End -