

Work-Related Idioms and Slang

Idiom/Slang	What does it mean?	How might I say it in a sentence?
11 th hour	Right before the deadline; time is almost up (12 is the deadline)	<i>"We finished cleaning that house at the 11th hour, just before the renters came in."</i>
A day late and a dollar short	Too late and not enough.	<i>"We are a day late and a dollar short because no customers want to buy this older cell phone model."</i>
A fresh pair of eyes	A new and different perspective	<i>"We need a fresh pair of eyes on this project because we have been working on it for too long."</i>
A piece of cake	Easy, uncomplicated	<i>"I can build these easy models in 10 minutes—this job is a piece of cake!"</i>
Accident waiting to happen	An arrangement that might result in damage or injury	<i>"Stop stacking those boxes so high—that is an accident waiting to happen."</i>
All ears	Ready to listen and pay attention	<i>"Go ahead and explain it to me, I am all ears."</i>
All work and no play	The focus is on work, and there is no opportunity for fun.	<i>"We cannot chat at work at all because our boss is all work and no play."</i>
Arm's length	At a distance equal to the length of an arm; not close to physically	<i>"I should stand an arm's length away from someone when talking to them."</i>
Arm's length	Not emotionally close to; apart or away from	<i>"You should keep her at arm's length because she cannot be trusted."</i>
A.S.A.P.	Stands for As Soon As Possible; top priority, needs to be done now	<i>"I need to finish cleaning those rooms A.S.A.P.!"</i>
Back burner	A lower priority; not as important right now	<i>"Let's put that task on the back burner until we finish these more important tasks."</i>

Idiom/Slang	What does it mean?	How might I say it in a sentence?
Back to square one	Return to the beginning; starting over	<i>"Our plan did not work at all, so now we are back to square one."</i>
Bad mouth	Talk about in a negative way; gossip	<i>"It hurts my feelings when a co-worker bad mouths me to their friend."</i>
Bang up job	An excellent job; good work	<i>"His boss was so happy with him because he did a bang up job yesterday."</i>
Beat around the bush	Avoid saying or doing something; to delay	<i>"Don't beat around the bush, just tell me why you are upset."</i>
Beat the clock	Finish in time; finish before the deadline	<i>"You are going to have to hurry if you want to beat the clock."</i>
Beating a dead horse	Talking about an idea or issue too much or too long.	<i>"We need to stop beating a dead horse because we have already talked about this and made a decision."</i>
Behind closed doors	In private, confidential	<i>"You should talk to him about this behind closed doors because customers should not hear it."</i>
Bend over backwards	Try very hard to please someone	<i>"Sometimes, you have to bend over backwards to make customers happy."</i>
Bent out of shape	Upset, frustrated, stressed	<i>"The customer was bent out of shape because he had to wait in line for 15 minutes."</i>
Big fish	The boss; the person in charge	<i>"Kelly is the big fish in this department, so we need to listen to her."</i>
Bite off more than you can chew	To take on more work than you can handle	<i>"Don't bite off more than you can chew by offering to repair all 27 of those hard drives. "</i>

Idiom/Slang	What does it mean?	How might I say it in a sentence?
Bite someone's head off	To yell at someone suddenly	<i>"If I don't get some sleep later, I am going to bite someone's head off!"</i>
Bite the bullet	To accept, face, or deal with the consequences	<i>"You are just going to have to bite the bullet and apologize for that mistake."</i>
Bite your tongue	Keep your thoughts to yourself	<i>"Bite your tongue and don't argue with your supervisor."</i>
Bounce ideas	To take turns sharing ideas with each other	<i>"Let's all have a meeting so we can bounce ideas around."</i>
Brainstorm	When two or more people develop a solution or idea together	<i>"Let's brainstorm a new way to organize these books."</i>
Break even	Not making money and not losing money	<i>"I pretty much broke even after I received my \$500 paycheck and then paid my \$450 rent."</i>
Bring home the bacon	Bring home money; to get paid; bring home a paycheck	<i>"If you want to buy a new car, you need to bring home the bacon."</i>
Broke	Having no money, poor	<i>"I am broke because I spent my entire paycheck on video games."</i>
Brown nose	Flatter someone in effort to gain favor or advantage	<i>"My co-worker is such a brown nose, he is always trying to tell the boss how great she is."</i>
Brownie points	Recognition or favor by the boss	<i>"I am going to work late this week and try to get some brownie points from my supervisor."</i>
Buckle down	Get focused, start working; get the job done	<i>"You need to buckle down and finish this assignment!"</i>

Idiom/Slang	What does it mean?	How might I say it in a sentence?
Burn the candle at both ends	Working too hard, for too long, and on too many things	<i>"He is burning the candle at both ends by working here during the day and then waiting tables at night."</i>
Burn your bridges	End a relationship in a bad way with no chance of repairing it.	<i>"If you quit without giving any notice to your boss, you will burn your bridges there."</i>
Burning the midnight oil	Working late into the night	<i>"I have been burning the midnight oil lately in order to get this project done on time."</i>
Business as usual	Same as always; no change in the routine; what is expected	<i>"Even though the weather was really bad, it was business as usual for the landscaping company."</i>
Call it a day	Time to go home, the end of the workday	<i>"It is 6pm and I have wrapped all the boxes, so let's call it a day."</i>
Call the shots	In charge, makes the final decisions	<i>"My supervisor calls the shots on how we should store the data."</i>
Canned	Fired, removed from the job	<i>"She was canned because yelled at her boss."</i>
Chill out	Relax, take a break; calm down	<i>"Today has been really stressful, so I need to just go home and chill out."</i>
Climb the corporate ladder	Move up, advanced, get promoted in a company	<i>"After working here for 6 years, I am finally starting to climb the corporate ladder."</i>
Close up shop	Close a business at the end of the day	<i>"It's 5pm and so it's time to close up shop for the day."</i>
Cost an arm and a leg	Costs a large amount of money	<i>"There is no way I can afford those tickets, they cost an arm and a leg!"</i>
Idiom/Slang	What does it mean?	How might I say it in a

		sentence?
Crunch time	A time interval before a deadline where you must work really hard to complete something	<i>"The project is due tomorrow, so it's crunch time."</i>
Dead weight	Someone who is a burden; someone who cannot or does not do their job correctly	<i>"He never finishes his part of the project, so I feel like he is just dead weight that we have to carry."</i>
Dirty work	Harder, tougher , unpleasant work	<i>"Everyone else left, so I had to do the dirty work of moving all of the tables and chairs back to the closet."</i>
Dog eat dog world	A competitive, tough environment	<i>"I need to apply and interview for many jobs, because it is a dog eat dog world out there."</i>
Done deal	A deal or agreement that has been made; the issue has been decided	<i>"It's a done deal, I have already accepted that job offer."</i>
Dot your i's and cross your t's	Include all necessary details; carefully check for any mistakes	<i>"You should dot your i's and cross your t's before you turn that report in to the boss."</i>
Down to the wire	Just before the deadline; right before time is up	<i>"We were working down to the wire in order to get the products mailed out in time."</i>
Drag your feet	Move slowly or hesitate; resist or avoid something	<i>"Don't drag your feet, just go out there and load those crates."</i>
Drop someone a line	Call someone by phone	<i>"I will drop him a line later on today after I read his report."</i>
Elbow grease	Hard work, effort	<i>"It's going to take some serious elbow grease to get all of these plants loaded."</i>
Idiom/Slang	What does it mean?	How might I say it in a

		sentence?
Face the music	Face the consequences	<i>"I know I messed up, and now I am going to have to face the music."</i>
For your eyes only	Confidential; for no-one else to see	<i>"Those private medical records are for your eyes only."</i>
Front burner	A higher priority; a task that should be completed soon or now	<i>"Put that task on the front burner because the store opens in only 2 hours."</i>
Get a grip	Relax, calm down, focus on what is important	<i>"I need to get a grip and stop worrying about that game."</i>
Get the ax	Get fired	<i>"He will get the ax if he keeps showing up to work late."</i>
Get the boot	Get fired	<i>"She might get the boot if she is rude to the customers."</i>
Get the hang of it	Starting to understand how to do something; learning something new	<i>"Don't worry, you will get the hang of it after you practice several times."</i>
Get the pink slip	Get fired	<i>"I am worried that I might get the pink slip if I miss work again."</i>
Get the sack	Get fired	<i>"You will get the sack if you steal the company's property."</i>
Go with the flow	Accept the situation without argument or resistance; follow the lead of other people	<i>"Just try to go with the flow and accept that your schedule might change sometimes."</i>
Got a case of the Mondays	In a bad mood because it's not the weekend anymore	<i>"I have got a case of the Mondays and I do not want to clean today."</i>
Green	New, inexperienced	<i>"She just started working here yesterday, so she's still pretty green."</i>
Idiom/Slang	What does it mean?	How might I say it in a

		sentence?
Hammer out the problems	Solve the problems	<i>"We need to hammer out the problems before we can even begin to create a new system."</i>
Have a lot of my plate	Very busy, too much to do	<i>"I have a lot on my plate right now, so I don't think I can make it to the movies tonight."</i>
Have my hands full	Very busy, too much to do	<i>"I have my hands full with working full time, going to school, and taking care of my pets."</i>
Hit the ground running	Start working on something immediately; start a task without hesitation	<i>"I need to hit the ground running if I want to finish this project before the weekend."</i>
Hump day	Wednesday; the middle of the work week	<i>"It's hump day, only two more days until the weekend!"</i>
In over my head	Overwhelmed, confused	<i>"I feel like I am in over my head in this job—I need some help."</i>
In stock	In the store; available for use and/or purchase	<i>"We do have that item in stock right now, let me go get it for you."</i>
In the black	Earning money, making profits	<i>"I think we might get a raise this month because the company is in the black."</i>
In the loop	Aware of something; involved with what is going on	<i>"She will be mad if we don't keep her in the loop because she is a part of our team."</i>
In the red	Losing money, in debt; in trouble financially	<i>"I am worried that we all might lose our jobs because this company is in the red."</i>
In the swing of things	Get involved, focused, active	<i>"It might be hard for me to get back in the swing of things after being on vacation for a week."</i>
Idiom/Slang	What does it mean?	How might I say it in a

		sentence?
In the weeds	In trouble, overwhelmed	<i>"Five tables are ready to order, two tables need their checks, and I have four tables to clean—I am in the weeds!"</i>
It's not the end of the world	It will be okay; everything will be alright; it's not that bad	<i>"Hey, it's not the end of the world if I forget to bring my lunch one day."</i>
Jump the gun	Start too quickly	<i>"Don't jump the gun and buy more paper before we even know how much paper we need!"</i>
Jump through hoops	Work very hard and do many things to please someone	<i>"Sometimes, you have to jump through hoops to make customers happy."</i>
Keep something under wraps	Keep something private, hidden, confidential	<i>"Let's keep this under wraps until our supervisor has had a chance to look it over."</i>
Keep your eye on the prize	Stay focused on the goal	<i>"Just keep your eye on the prize and try not to get distracted by other things."</i>
Kiss up	Flatter in effort to gain favor, attention, and privileges	<i>"Sometimes, I have to kiss up to my customers a little if I want them to buy these products."</i>
Make a living	To earn money so you can bill your bills, buy food, and take care of other needs and wants	<i>"It is time for me to get a job so I can make a living."</i>
Make cold calls	Contact people (usually customers) by phone who you do not know	<i>"In this sales job, I spend most of my time making cold calls to potential customers."</i>
Make up your mind	Make a decision	<i>"Please make up your mind about this project so I know what to do next."</i>
Idiom/Slang	What does it mean?	How might I say it in a

		sentence?
Marching orders	Get fired	<i>"She received her marching orders after her boss found out what happened."</i>
Mix business with pleasure	To combine personal/social activities with work activities; to engage in personal/social relationships while at work	<i>"It is not a good idea to mix business with pleasure, so you should not ask that co-worker out on a date."</i>
Newbie	A new person on the job	<i>"I am a newbie, so I don't know where the copy machine is located yet."</i>
Nine to five	A job the occurs during the traditional workday (9am - 5pm); when most businesses operate	<i>"I am tired of working nights and weekends, I just want a nine to five."</i>
Nothing ventured, nothing gained	If you don't try something, you will never know if you might have succeeded; don't be afraid to try	<i>"Even though I might not get this job, I am going to apply anyway—nothing ventured, nothing gained, right?"</i>
Off the hook	Free from responsibility, obligation, or blame	<i>"Don't worry, the boss found out who really made the mistake, so you are off the hook."</i>
Off the hook	Really good, fun, cool, interesting, or new	<i>"Their new album is off the hook!"</i>
On his/her bad side	Out of someone's favor; they are not happy with you or do not like you	<i>"You don't want to get on her bad side because she has a lot of power in this office."</i>
On his/her good side	In someone's favor; they are happy with you and they like you	<i>"I need to stay on her good side because she has a lot of power in this office."</i>
On the dot	At an exact time, not a minute later	<i>"You need to finish that job by 10am on the dot."</i>
On the fence	Unsure, undecided	<i>"I am on the fence about this—I don't know which job offer to accept."</i>
Idiom/Slang	What does it mean?	How might I say it in a

		sentence?
On the other hand	As another option; an alternative	<i>"You could buy this system; on the other hand, you might want to consider this handheld device instead."</i>
Pass the buck	Put the blame or responsibility on someone else	<i>"Just take responsibility for what happened and don't try to pass the buck to someone else."</i>
Pick up the slack	Take responsibility or action when others cannot	<i>"I don't want to have to pick up the slack when he does not do his job correctly."</i>
Pull a few strings	Use connections, power, or advantages to get something done	<i>"My old teacher might be able to pull a few strings and help me get that job."</i>
Pull your weight	Do your fair share; take responsibility	<i>"You need to pull your weight because this is a team, and we have to get this job done together."</i>
Pull yourself up by your boot straps	Rely on yourself to make things better or to get the job done	<i>"I had to pull myself up by my bootstraps after I lost my job."</i>
Put our heads together	Think about an idea/issue together; develop a solution together	<i>"Let's put our heads together and try to figure out what is wrong with this computer."</i>
Put pen to paper	Start writing; begin working	<i>"I need to stop talking about this idea and just put pen to paper."</i>
Quick study	A fast learner	<i>"You are a quick study—you learned how to use this software in just one hour."</i>
R. and R.	Stands for rest and relaxation; a vacation or break from work	<i>"I need some serious R and R after the tough month that I have had."</i>
Reality check	A reminder of what is realistic; a review of what really happened	<i>"He needs a reality check—he is never going to be the supervisor of this store."</i>
Idiom/Slang	What does it mean?	How might I say it in a

		sentence?
Roll up your sleeves	Start working; do the task; get it done	<i>“Ok, it’s time to roll up your sleeves and finish this work.”</i>
Rundown	Quick summary; explanation	<i>“Ok, please give me a rundown on what happened at yesterday’s meeting.”</i>
Scale back hours	Decrease hours	<i>“I might need to scale back my hours here if I have to take 2 classes next semester.”</i>
Shape up or ship out	Start doing what you are supposed to do, or leave	<i>“That guy has a really bad attitude, so his boss told him to shape up or ship out.”</i>
Show someone the ropes	Teach someone how to do something	<i>“My co-worker showed me the ropes, and now I feel much more confident about this job.”</i>
Spread too thin	Trying to do too many things at time so that you cannot properly devote your time to everything	<i>“He took on too many tasks and now he is spread too thin.”</i>
Stamp of approval	Expression of agreement or approval	<i>“I am happy because when I explained my idea to the boss, I got her stamp of approval!”</i>
Start from scratch	Start from the very beginning	<i>“We did not set up these tables correctly, so now we have to start from scratch.”</i>
Start off on the right foot	Make a good first impression	<i>“I want to make sure that I start off on the right foot with all of my new co-workers by being friendly and helpful.”</i>
Start off on the wrong foot	Make a bad first impression	<i>“I started off on the wrong foot with my co-worker by asking him how much money he makes.”</i>
Idiom/Slang	What does it mean?	How might I say it in a

		sentence?
Step on it	Hurry up, move quickly	<i>"I was running late to work, so I asked the cab driver to step on it."</i>
Suck it up	Accept something without complaining about it	<i>"I am going to have to suck it up and accept the fact that not everyone in my office listens to music that I like."</i>
Sugarcoat	Make something seem more pleasant or positive than it actually is	<i>"Don't sugarcoat the issue, just tell him exactly what he did wrong."</i>
Take someone under your wing	Help someone by showing them how to do something; showing support to someone	<i>"She was really nice because she took me under her wing and helped me understand how to do this job."</i>
T.G.I.F.	Stands for Thank God It's Friday, or stands for Thank Goodness It's Friday; the weekend is almost here and the work week is almost over	<i>"T.G.I.F.—I am so ready to sleep in tomorrow morning."</i>
T.M.I.	Stands for Too Much Information; the information shared was too personal and inappropriate	<i>"When he told me all about his stomach problems, that was T.M.I.!"</i>
The big picture	The larger, complete understanding of a situation	<i>"I need to see the big picture here and not just focus on all of the little details."</i>
The clock is ticking	Time is running out; the deadline is approaching	<i>"Ok everyone, you need to fill these orders before 5pm, the clock is ticking."</i>
Think outside of the box	Think creatively or differently than usual	<i>"Let's think outside of the box. I am tired of hearing the same old ideas."</i>
Throw cold water over	End, stop, or disagree with someone else's idea	<i>"I made a different suggestion, but he threw cold water over it."</i>
Idiom/Slang	What does it mean?	How might I say it in a

		sentence?
Under the weather	Feeling ill, sick	<i>"I am feeling under the weather and so I might have to call in sick today."</i>
Up-to-date	Current, recent information	<i>"I need up-to-date information on how to place these orders for my customers."</i>
Wear many hats	Have many jobs, roles, or responsibilities	<i>"I wear many hats in this job—I greet customers, repair parts, answer phones, and check billing records."</i>
What's up?	What is going on? Hello!	<i>"Hey, what's up? I have not seen you in so long!"</i>
Win-win situation	A positive outcome for all people involved; everyone "wins"	<i>"This is a win-win situation because I will get to work more hours, and my boss gets to have his weekends off."</i>
Wishy-washy	Indecisive, unsure, uncertain	<i>"Don't be so wishy-washy about this, just pick one side of the argument."</i>
Woke up on the wrong side of the bed	In a bad mood, irritated, cranky	<i>"I am sorry that I was rude, I just woke up on the wrong side of the bed this morning."</i>
Word of mouth	When information is spread by talking, rather than through written words/advertisements	<i>"Customers have learned about our restaurant through word of mouth only."</i>
Work fingers to the bone	Work very hard	<i>"I have been working my fingers to the bone on this project."</i>
Work like a dog	Work very hard	<i>I've been working like a dog. I'm going to sleep well tonight!</i>