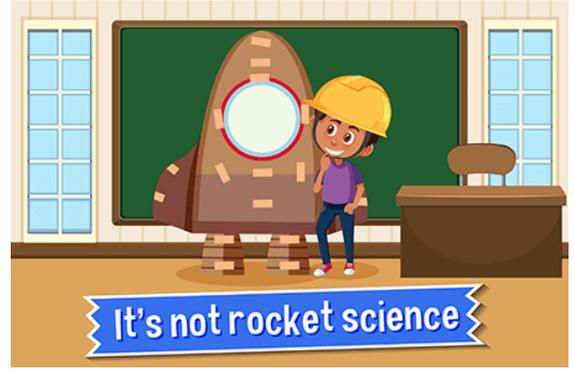


Perhaps you might be thinking, there are thousands of idioms in the English language ... how do I even begin to teach them? Idioms are used frequently by native English speakers, and it can be difficult to learn and understand their meanings without understanding the proper context for which they are used. This is because the meaning of an idiom is not always obvious or literal. The flexibility and appropriate use of idioms by non-native English speakers is also a key indicator of fluency, especially in spoken English. In the ESL context, teaching idioms to English learners promotes the use of colloquial English and allows students to sound more natural in everyday conversation. In this article, let us cover some ways you can authentically teach idioms in the ESL classroom.



Teach idioms related to the topic or theme of the lesson

The English language is rich in idioms so there is a variety to choose from. To introduce idioms in your ESL classroom, select a couple of them that are related to the topic or theme of the lesson. A suggested progression for learning English idioms is between 5 to 10 idioms per lesson depending on the level and age that you are teaching. For example, you can teach 5 to 10 idioms inspired by animals, [family](#), [time](#), sports, weather and more. If you're not sure where to start, topic-related idioms lists are easily accessible on the Internet. Depending on the textbook your school uses, you may find idioms in there as well.

Including idioms in our lesson is an opportune time to teach how language is used in context. Let us look at the topic of weather, for example. Some idioms related to this theme include:

- It's a breeze
- Come rain or shine
- Take a rain check
- Under the weather

Connecting idioms to the topic of the theme or lesson, allows us to better organize the idioms that we include in our lessons. It also helps the students to remember them better if the idioms are based on a specific theme.

Use authentic examples of idioms in context

Many native English speakers, especially when they converse among themselves use idioms, informal colloquial expressions, and slang. As a result, one problem that you might encounter while teaching idioms is finding authentic examples to explain what idioms mean and how they are used in real life. Video clips from TV shows, interviews, and even songs can be a great resource for introducing how idioms are used in everyday life. Play the clips and do a gap-fill activity to listen for any idioms, or you can also do a matching activity where students listen and use what they hear to match the idioms with the definitions. You can even include these clips as part of a game. Please refer to the next section of the article for some game suggestions. While these resources are widely available on the Internet, they may take some time to compile. Before teaching your list, take some time to prepare your online resources and save them for later use.

Another way to obtain genuine examples is by getting students to search newspapers or even magazines. This activity idea is a great way to introduce idioms to students for the first time. Depending on your students' level, select articles that contain examples of idioms and get them to do a 'treasure hunt.' Students can work in pairs or in small groups to find the idioms on your list. To help them to complete the task, you can give the meanings as clues. You can either project or write the clues on the board or give them a separate worksheet to help them search for the idioms in the text.

If you have access to resources like electronic devices or a computer lab, you can also put your students to work by getting them to search for the meaning and examples of their use. Write the list of idioms on the board and challenge students to find meanings for the idioms you are teaching that day. Another option would be to give 2-3 idioms to a pair of students and get them to teach the meanings of each idiom to the class after doing a bit of research. Several studies have shown that the more time and effort given in actively learning something correlates with how much students retain.

Practicing idioms in speaking and writing activities

You can implement music into your lesson plans to help students develop listening strategies. Use music to train students to listen for particular items like vocabulary or grammar structures or help students to improve their overall listening comprehension. Integrating listening activities with other skills such as writing, speaking, and reading can help to reinforce what students learn from listening activities. This is why music is a helpful tool for your ESL classroom, you can use music to execute activities that keep your students motivated, actively participating, and engaging in the classroom.

After introducing the list of idioms to your students, you can facilitate speaking and writing activities that can help them to understand the usage and appropriate context for when to use the idioms learned in class.

Many teachers love to include dialogues or skits in their lesson plans. If you have an outgoing or lively class, this activity can keep your students engaged. To set an example, prepare a short 1 to 2-minute dialogue as a gap-fill activity. After doing the gap-fill as a class, you can model the dialogue with a volunteer, or get two students to act it out. Give students some time to create their own 1 to 2-minute dialogues in pairs and give them the option of using any idioms from the list. Dialogues are a great way of getting students to practice using the vocabulary in context. Even if your class is not particularly outgoing, you can also use this activity to encourage your students to get out of their shells or try something outside of their comfort zone.

As a follow-up to the previous activity, you can facilitate group discussions by using the idioms in conversation questions. Prepare a few questions which contain the idioms and put the students in pairs or small groups so that they can practice using them in a discussion. These questions can also be used to conduct surveys, wherein students are encouraged to get out of their seats and speak with different people in the class. This works especially well for older learners. It would be best to model this activity before getting students to do it on their own. A little bit of preparation can give students confidence, so make sure to give your students ample time to think about their answers before getting them to express their ideas to their peers. Let us use the weather-related idiom list above as an example:

- What is something that you consider to be a breeze?
- What is something that you would do come rain or shine?
- Was there ever a time that you had to take a rain check? Why?
- Have you ever felt under the weather? Share your experience.

Alternatively, you could use the questions as journal prompts to help your students practice their writing skills. This is a great opportunity to get students writing in detail. After writing their journal entries, you could even get them to share or present their work to the class. By teaching idioms, you are helping them to build a wider range of vocabulary and develop more creative ways to express themselves.

Teach idioms through games

It is always fun to teach vocabulary through games, especially idioms. If you have already gone through the meanings on your idiom list, playing a game helps to reinforce what students have learned. It also makes the learning experience more enjoyable. Since idioms are comprised of multiple words, it makes games like Pictionary or charades more challenging, especially for higher-level learners. These activities work well as warm-ups or even energizers after a long day. Do a practice round as an example, so that your students have a clearer idea of how to participate.



Another activity you could try is the memory game. This is great for those learners who best absorb information visually. You can do a quick internet search for literal pictures of idioms and create a memory game using PowerPoint or even with flashcards. This kind of activity works well with younger or lower-level learners, and it is a great way to keep them engaged in the lesson.

For more mature or higher-level learners, try our Idiom Bluffs game. The objective of the game is for students to guess the real meaning of the idiom amongst the false explanations. To play this game, one player will read out an idiom, and each person will write down a made-up answer and hand it to the person who read the idiom. This person will read out the real answer and all the false answers at random. Afterward, their peers must guess the correct meaning. This game and other idiom-related resources can be found on our [Idioms ESL Games, Activities, and Worksheets](#) page.

If you are looking for more review ideas, you can also try creating a Jeopardy-inspired or trivia game on websites like Kahoot. Utilizing games to teach or review idioms not only makes lessons interesting but also serves as an effective comprehension checking tool.

The English language is dynamic and constantly changing, and we can see that with the use of idioms. Depending on the context, some idioms may be considered old-fashioned, while others are current and relevant. As teachers, we can use idioms for teachable moments like talking about which expressions are currently or frequently used by speakers in the country in which we are teaching. You can also use idioms to show how metaphorical and creative the English language can be. Try to add a few idioms as part of a mini-lesson or as an engaging activity by using any of the methods above to help your students build a more diverse vocabulary, and to develop a more flexible range and use of the English language.