

Corpus-Based Exercises

Exercise 1: Explaining the Meaning of Idioms

Circle the answer that best explains the meaning of the idiom.

1. *take a stab at*
 - a) try to do
 - b) criticize
 - c) fail at
 - d) betray
2. *on target*
 - a) fixed as an absolute
 - b) completely accurate
 - c) not moving
 - d) busy at work
3. *shift gears*
 - a) wait for a few minutes
 - b) end the discussion
 - c) move to a different topic
 - d) start an argument
4. *tune someone out*
 - a) ignore them
 - b) go somewhere with them
 - c) praise them
 - d) misunderstand them
5. *keep tabs on*
 - a) agree with something
 - b) continue at the same pace
 - c) observe or record carefully
 - d) keep a secret
6. *odds and ends*
 - a) the final events
 - b) strange events
 - c) harsh words
 - d) various small items
7. *garden variety*
 - a) new and exciting
 - b) common type
 - c) forbidden or illegal
 - d) colorful
8. *take the plunge*
 - a) commit to something important
 - b) make a large profit
 - c) set unrealistic goals
 - d) appear out of nowhere
9. *off the wall*
 - a) a waste of time
 - b) dangerous or risky
 - c) odd or unexpected
 - d) very important
10. *take someone to task*
 - a) scold or criticize them harshly
 - b) talk to them privately
 - c) buy them lunch
 - d) encourage them to succeed

Exercise 2: Idioms in Context

Now read the following excerpts from MICASE, and see if you can figure out the meaning of the idiom from its context.

1. there were some definitions in the reading anyone, wanna *take a stab at it*? mhm?
2. estimator three has the lowest overall variability, even though it might not be *on target*.
3. anything else about The American that we wanna *touch on*? well let me *shift gears* for a few minutes then to prep you for what we'll do next week.
4. my boss talks to himself all the time and I've learned to *tune him out* when he's doing that so I don't even hear what he says.
5. how about the roles of the other people in the group? 'cuz you've been kind of the minder in a way *keeping tabs on things* and keeping things going.
6. I've got a few pieces of business and *odds and ends* I have to deal with and I want to say a little bit about how things are going with the projects so I'd like to reconvene if we could at half past nine.
7. next slide shows we do, in addition, we do have your sort of *garden variety* of clear cutting, so there is some extensive forest cutting going on, although the present time, that's sort of stagnated because of
8. for the time of the post-doc, you know, others will expect you to function something like an assistant professor. so again it just depends on the institution but it's a wonderful opportunity for you to move to that next step before you *take the plunge* of getting on a tenure-track line.
9. wow, that's an interesting question um, you know, I mean the first thing that comes to my mind is this may be a little *off the wall* but the first thing that comes to mind is this has done a lot for me as a musician but I haven't had the time to actually be a musician, so I'm looking forward to how this will transpire in my practice and in my playing, this, really doesn't have much to do with, the academic part but the musician was sort of on hold for a year . . .
10. the poem basically carries that, you know that old-fashioned, reactionary idea that the primary purpose for women in life is to bear children and that's what this poem is all about. Diane Di Prima, another San Francisco poet, *took him to task* on the subject, and you'll find her poem on page three sixty-one. (. . .) so it's good to know that she was ready to take him to task, on that subject. that'd be kind of an interesting thing for you to study if you're talking about gender, relations and gender ideas in the Beat Generation would be to contrast, that poem by Gary Snyder with that poem, uh, by Diane Di Prima.
11. that fifty-fifty means in terms of the money, spent. half the money is spent on treatment, half the money is spent on law enforcement. maybe the half that's spent on treatment goes a lot farther. you get more *bang for your buck* in that fifty than you get in the other fifty.