

How to find English idioms that aren't in the dictionary

Hello and welcome to Better at English, the podcast that focuses on real English for real people. My name is Lori, and today I'm going to give you a quick and easy way to find the meaning of idioms that aren't in your dictionary.

Idioms are notoriously difficult for non-native speakers, because they usually don't make sense if you translate them word for word. For example, the idiom "to kick the bucket" has nothing to do with buckets and everything to do with dying. Most learners are eager to learn about idioms because native speakers use them so frequently. So understanding idioms is important for understanding native speakers, and for sounding more native-like yourself!

If you are reading or listening to B@E, you are probably already an independent learner of English who is used to looking up idioms in your dictionary. If you're really keen, you might even have a special dictionary of idioms. Dictionaries are indispensable tools for learning the meaning of idiomatic words and phrases. But they are not perfect: we've all experienced the frustration of discovering that the idiom we're looking just isn't in our dictionary. Luckily, there is a simple trick for finding idioms on the Internet. Here is how you do it:

Go to Google and search for the word *idiom* plus the key words from your idiom. The search results are almost guaranteed to lead you to a helpful definition. Here is an example:

Imagine you heard this conversation:

Michael: Would you mind if I tried your new guitar?
Lori: Sure, *knock yourself out!*

The idiom is "knock yourself out," or "to knock oneself out" in the dictionary form.

To find the meaning of this idiom, do a Google search for the word idiom and add the phrase "knock yourself out" in quotation marks. Like this: [idiom "knock yourself out"](#)

All you need to do is scroll through the results, which, with luck, will be a combination of online dictionary definitions and online forum discussions. Make sure to check out any forum discussions that you find; they often contain interesting and useful discussions about meaning and usage and give you far more insight than you will get from a dictionary definition.

If you don't get useful results on your first search, try adjusting your search query. For example, for "knock yourself out" you can try

[idiom "knock oneself out"](#)
[idiom knock oneself out](#)

Google is not a perfect corpus by a long shot, but it is a fantastic tool for doing quick'n'dirty research into meaning and usage. I highly recommend that you spend a few minutes reading the [Google search help file](#) so that you can take full advantage of this wonderful tool.

I use the trick I've shown you today all the time; in fact, Google is my number one reference tool for double-checking my native-speaker intuition. This is just one of several tips that I'll be sharing with you over the coming weeks. I hope you find it useful.

That's all for now; thanks so much for listening. As always, you can find the full transcript at our website, www.betteratenglish.com. There are also links to the example searches I've used today. Bye for now!

[Cambridge International Dictionary of Idioms](#) (Online, free!)
