

A

What are fixed phrases?

There are many groups of words which you need to learn as complete phrases, because they often have a meaning which is different from the words on their own. Many of these are called idioms.

They arrived **out of the blue** [I didn't know they were coming; it was unexpected].

Does the name Merchant **ring a bell** [sound familiar]?

You'll have to **make up your mind** soon. [make a decision]

Some fixed phrases are easier to understand, but the same idea may be expressed in a different way in your language.

I think we'll have to **get rid of** some of this furniture.

[remove it, e.g. sell it, throw it away, give it away, etc.]

I'm afraid I can't talk to you now; **I'm (just) about to** leave. [I am going to leave very soon]

I don't know what Martin said, but Natalie **burst into tears** [suddenly started crying]. She was very upset.

Everyone was there **apart from** Yasmine.

[not including Yasmine; *syn* **except for**]



B

Time phrases

He's leaving **in four days' time** [four days from now; also in three weeks'/six months'/two years' time, etc.].

I got here **the week before last** [during the week/month, etc. before the previous one].

The course is fine **so far** [up until now].

I rang our local doctor and fortunately she was able to come **at once** [now, immediately;

syns **right away** / **straight away**].

He's so busy at work; he comes home late **night after night** [every night; also **day after day**, etc.].

C

Pairs of words

A number of fixed phrases consist of two words, usually joined by **and**, and sometimes **or**.

I go to the theatre **now and again** [occasionally; *syns* **now and then**].

Andy had **one or two** [a few] suggestions.

I've got a house in the country, and I like to go there whenever possible for a bit of **peace and quiet** [a calm situation without noise].

I've been **up and down** the street, but I can't find their house. [first in one direction, then the other]

I've been to Paris **once or twice** [a few times].

I'll finish this report **sooner or later** [I don't know when, but I'll finish it].

D

Introducing advice, opinions, etc.

Many fixed phrases are used to introduce advice, an opinion, an example, etc.

If I were you [in your situation], I'd accept the job they offered you.

In general [usually, or in most situations; *syn* **on the whole**] the summers are quite warm in this part of the country.

There were lots of questions. **For instance** [for example], how much will it cost?

I'm sure you'll have a great holiday. **By the way**, what time does the train leave? (used to introduce a new subject to the conversation)

To be honest, I didn't like her boyfriend very much. (used to say what you really think)

Exercises

75.1 Using all the words in the square, find eight more phrases.

ON	DAY	SOONER	AND	RIGHT
SO	AND	NOW	TWO	LATER
UP	OR	OFF	PEACE	AFTER
FAR	AND	ONE	AWAY	AGAIN
AND	DAY	QUIET	OR	DOWN

on and off

75.2 Complete the sentences with one word, then underline the full fixed phrase in each sentence.

- 1 She's been working on that essay night after night.
- 2 I'm arranging everything for next week. By the _____, is your sister coming this evening?
- 3 My parents always turn up at my flat out of the _____.
- 4 Some people enjoyed the book, but to be _____, I thought it was boring.
- 5 I'd like to get _____ of these CDs because I don't listen to them any more.
- 6 In _____, people are much happier when they have jobs that they enjoy.
- 7 I don't know what to do at the moment but I'll have to make up my _____ soon.
- 8 It's a flexible ticket. For _____, you can use it during the week or at weekends.
- 9 Can I ring you later? I'm just _____ to have lunch.
- 10 If I _____ you, I'd get a new dictionary.

75.3 Complete the fixed phrase in each dialogue.

- 1 A: Do you go there much?
B: Now and again.
- 2 A: Have you had any ideas?
B: Yeah. One _____.
- 3 A: Was she very upset?
B: Yes. She burst _____.
- 4 A: You arrived ten days ago?
B: Yeah, the week _____.
- 5 A: Should I accept the job?
B: Yes, I would if _____.
- 6 A: Will they get here?
B: Yeah, sooner _____.
- 7 A: Have you been there often?
B: Once _____.
- 8 A: Do you need me there now?
B: Yes. Could you come at _____?
- 9 A: When are you going back?
B: In two weeks' _____.
- 10 A: How's the course?
B: It's good so _____.
- 11 A: I spoke to Chris Myler. Do you know him?
B: No, the name doesn't ring _____.
- 12 A: Have you done all the housework?
B: Yes, apart _____ the washing.

75.4 Here are more idioms. Can you underline one in each sentence, and guess what it means?

- 1 I've been in the job a few days, but I already feel at home. *feel comfortable and relaxed*
- 2 I've just bought these shoes and they cost a fortune. _____
- 3 Could you keep an eye on my bag for me? _____
- 4 The answer's on the tip of my tongue. _____
- 5 We had a night on the town last night. _____
- 6 I could do with a new computer; mine's quite old now. _____