

LIST OF IDIOMS WITH THE PREPOSITION TO

idiom	meaning	example
a bone to pick	have something to discuss or argue with another person	Tell your brother I have a bone to pick with him about the money he owes me.
a shoulder to cry on	a sympathetic person who listens to your problems	I needed a shoulder to cry on, but he was only interested in going out with his friends.
add fuel to the fire/flames	do/say something to make a bad situation even worse	The burglar added fuel to the flames by resisting arrest.
add insult to injury	something happens to make a bad situation worse	I had to work bank holiday Monday. To add insult to injury, I didn't get paid time and a half.
another string to one's bow	gain another skill/ability	Freya has started ice skating. She wants to add another string to her bow.
appeal to someone's better nature	asking for mercy/sympathy	I spoke to your dad and appealed to his better nature. He's agreed to let you go to the concert.
attracted to someone	be sexually attracted to someone	I think I'm going to Finish with Bradley, I'm not attracted to him anymore.
back to back	next to each other with backs touching	I watched all of the season 3 episodes back to back. It was amazing.
back to basics	revert to simple ideas/activities	We're going back to basics this week, you all failed the advanced grammar test.
back to square one	start again from the beginning because of failure	My fiancé and I split after 12 years together. It's back to square one.
back to the drawing board	start again at the beginning after an attempt has failed	We were gazumped on the house we wanted, looks like it's back to the drawing board.
bitter pill to swallow	a bad situation that must be accepted	Watching another man play daddy to my kids is a bitter pill to swallow.
break one's neck to do something	use a lot of effort to achieve a goal	I broke my neck cleaning for the in-laws, but they didn't show up.
bring something to the table	provide something useful/beneficial	We'll arrange a meeting where everyone can bring their ideas to the table.
burn to a crisp	burn very badly	I forgot I was cooking a pizza. It's burnt to a crisp.
can't hold a candle to	one person/thing is nowhere near as good as another	None of the groups nowadays hold a candle to The Beatles.
chilled to the bone	very cold	Let's get out of the pool and get a coffee. I'm chilled to the bone.
close to home	a topic that affects you/makes you uncomfortable as you can relate to it	Our class about the dangers of drink driving was a little close to home.
come to a head	a situation reaches a climax	Tensions came to a head in the town and violence erupted.
come to blows	start arguing/fighting after a disagreement	It all came to blows when Christine found out who keyed her car.
cream rises to the top	the best person/idea will always be recognised in the end	Tucker cheated and won the race. I'll win next time, cream always rises to the top.

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cut off one's nose to spite one's face	perform a vengeful act that hurts oneself more than another person	Lisa stopped me seeing the kids, she cut off her nose to spite her face. Now she has no free time to spend with her new boyfriend.
cut to the chase	get to the point	She cut to the chase and asked me to lend her £1,000.
dance to someone else's tune	be controlled by another person and comply with their demands	I have to dance to my mum's tune, or she'll kick me out.
day-to-day	happens every day, routine	My day-to-day life is boring. I need some adventure in my life.
dead to the world	fast asleep	I had three pints of strong ale and was dead to the world.
down to earth	realistic, unpretentious, humble	Did you know Harry is a millionaire? He's so down to earth.
down to the wire	until the last possible moment	The election will go down to the wire. I couldn't say either way
dress to kill	wear smart/glamorous/attractive clothes to be noticed by others	Dress to kill tomorrow. We want to make a good impression on the client.
dress to the nines	dress smart/glamorous	I spent hours dressing to the nines, but he cancelled our date at the last minute.
each to their own	everyone has the right to their own preference	One sister goes to ballet, the other goes to juditsu. Each to their own
eyes are the window to the soul	looking into someone's eyes can tell you what they're feeling/thinking	They say the eyes are the window to the soul. Trevor has devious eyes.
face up to something	accept something unpleasant	She has to face up to the fact that he's not coming back.
fit/ready to drop	completely exhausted/extremely tired	Three kilometres into the race and I was ready to drop, but I carried on.
from time to time	occasionally	I listen to classical music from time to time.
get down to business	start doing something with seriousness and determination	Let's have a quick coffee break, then we'll get down to business.
get off to a flying start	make a successful start	My juice bar didn't get off to a flying start, but it's gaining popularity.
get to grips with something	comprehend, understand the situation, start to deal with a problem	I've blitzed the bathroom, now I'll get to grips with the kitchen.
glad to see the back of	be pleased when someone leaves	I'm glad to see the back of winter, it's been very cold this year.
go to one's head	something makes you feel more important than others	Now Richard is in charge, I'm afraid the power will go to his head.
go to pot	deteriorate	My nan's garden is going to pot, she's too weak to cut the grass now.
go to seed	deteriorate, look unhealthy/unattractive/shabby	I'm too old to do the garden, it's gone to seed.
go to the dogs	deteriorate, turn bad	My town is going to the dogs. The crime rate has risen dramatically in recent years.
go to the mattresses	go to war using ruthless tactics	My aunt and uncle are going to the mattresses over custody of their kids.
go to town on	do something with enthusiasm/energy/speed/in excess	I went to town on the garden, it's now ready for summer.

idiom	meaning	example
hard nut to crack	a person/situation that is difficult to figure out	Louis was a hard nut to crack, but we became good friends in the end.
hard/difficult to stomach	hard to accept something that is wrong/unpleasant	Watching children beg on the street is hard to stomach.
have an axe to grind	have a complaint/dispute	The boss has called an emergency meeting, I think he has an axe to grind.
have bigger fish to fry	have more important/interesting things to do	I can't help you look for a new bike. I've got bigger fish to fry.
have something to hand	nearby, easily accessible	I've got my details to hand. When the bank call, I'll tell them.
haven't got a leg to stand on	have no proof/evidence to justify your actions	The key witness has arrived, the suspect doesn't have a leg to stand on.
heart to heart	an intimate conversation where you talk about feelings/personal things	I had a heart to heart with Ellie, we've decided to put the past behind us.
it takes two to tango	some activities you can't do alone and both parties are responsible	I blamed my personal trainer for tempting me into cheating, but it takes two to tango.
jump to conclusions	make a decision before you have all the facts	Hayley is always jumping to conclusions. She gets herself into so much trouble.
jump to it	start doing something quickly/enthusiastically	Get out of bed! Jump to it or you'll be late for school.
keep one's ear to the ground	listen for information or gossip	I'm not sure when the tickets go on sale, I'll keep my ear to the ground.
keep one's nose to the grindstone	continuously work hard	You've kept your nose to the grindstone all year. You deserve a juicy bonus.
kick to the curb	dismiss/abandon/humiliate someone/something	Helen has been working for Carson for 30 years and he just kicked her to the curb.
knee-high to a grasshopper	very small/young	I haven't seen Tara since she was knee-high to a grasshopper.
laugh all the way to the bank	make lots of money (usually from an idea people thought was foolish)	I put a bet on a 100/1 horse, and he won! I'm laughing all the way to the bank.
learn to live with something	accept and adapt to something unpleasant	I've learnt to live with my husband's snoring because I love him.
license to print money	something with high profits and little effort	Renting the 6 flats I own is a license to print money.
like a lamb to the slaughter	be calm and unaware of the danger to come	Four boys waited like lambs to the slaughter outside the headmaster's office.
live from hand to mouth	very poor, have just enough money to survive	We are living from hand to mouth at the moment and we have another baby on the way.
love to death	love someone or something a lot	I love my little nephew to death, he's such a cutie.
march to the beat of one's own drum	do as you please, go against the norms	Alan won't go if he doesn't want to. He marches to the beat of his own drum.
money to burn	have lots of spare money	If I get this promotion, I'll have money to burn.
more than one way to skin a cat	there are many ways to accomplish a goal	I didn't get tickets to the concert, but there is more than one way to skin a cat.
mountain to climb	facing a very difficult task/challenge	The new president is doing a great job, but he still has a mountain to climb.

idiom	meaning	example
music to one's ears	hear a piece of information that makes you happy/excited	My attacker has been caught and locked up, it's music to my ears.
nine to five	a routine office job	I love having a routine and working nine – five.
nineteen to the dozen	really fast	The puppy's legs are moving nineteen to the dozen. He's chasing his mum.
no room to swing a cat	a very small cramped space	They gave me a new office. It's nice but there is no room to swing a cat.
no time to lose	it's time to get started immediately, hurry	Drive faster! There's no time to lose, we need to get to the hospital.
nurse someone back to health	care for a sick person/animal until they are back to good health	I found an injured baby pigeon. I nursed it back to health and released it into the wild.
on the road to recovery	improving/getting better	After a difficult two years, the business is finally on the road to recovery.
one thing leads to another	an activity/series of events results in an unplanned event	I carried her shopping home, one thing led to another and we ended up baking cakes.
pedal to the metal	do something very quickly or drive fast	We need to put the pedal to the metal if we want to get this order out on time.
put one's mind to it	give something your complete attention, concentration, determination, effort etc.	I want to be an astronaut. If I put my mind to it, I can do anything.
rags to riches	to describe the transition from poverty to wealth	Kayleigh's life is a real rags to riches story.
sail close to the wind	do something risky/dangerous	Bruno has been sailing too close to the wind lately. He'll be in prison before long.
see eye to eye	fully agree with someone	Me and my siblings see eye to eye about putting our great aunt into a home.
sell ice to the Eskimos	someone who is very persuasive	Paul managed to get them to buy an extra 100 units. He could sell ice to the Eskimos.
seven sheets to the wind	very drunk	We were all seven sheets to the wind last night, what a great night.
shape of things to come	what the future is going to be like	Kids today just sit behind screens. It's the shape of things to come.
square up to someone	bravely confront someone	Lee finally squared up the bullies, they left him alone from then on.
step up to the plate	come forward and take responsibility especially in times of crisis	Two employees have quit. I need everyone to step up to the plate to ensure orders are done.
take a shine to	like a lot	I really took a shine to the cat we found, but then it's owner came forward.
take one's hat off to someone	salute/congratulate/honour someone	I can't believe you travel the world alone, I take my hat off to you.
take someone to the cleaners	unfairly take all someone's money/property/possessions	Gordon won the poker night. He took everyone to the cleaners.
take something to heart	be deeply affected/hurt by criticism	I called him an idiot and he took it to heart, we're not speaking.
take to something like a duck to water	have a natural ability	Hayley has taken to motherhood like a duck to water. She is a natural.
throw caution to the wind	behave in a reckless manner	My dad threw caution to the wind and gambled all his savings on one race.

idiom	meaning	example
throw someone to the wolves	sacrifice someone to take the blame/responsibility/be attacked	Micky told the teacher that Lucas copied him. He threw him to the wolves.
to boot	also, as well, in addition	She got fired, crashed her car and lost her keys to boot.
to the tune of	amount/price	We need to raise some cash to the tune of £11,000 to get bobby his operation.
too close to call	you can't predict the outcome, it will be by a small margin	The election is too close to call, either of the 3 could win.
up the wooden hill to Bedfordshire	go upstairs to bed	Make sure the kids are up the wooden hill before 10.
up to one's ears/eyes/eyeballs/neck	extremely busy	Josh is up to his neck in boxes. He's moving tomorrow so he can't come out.
up to par	satisfactory, acceptable	The main course was nice, but the dessert wasn't up to par.
up to speed	fully informed, up to date	I missed 3 weeks of classes. It's going to take me a while to get back up to speed.
work one's fingers to the bone	work very hard	My dad worked his fingers to the bone then dies a week after he retired.
wouldn't say boo to a goose	a shy person	I can't believe he is a drug dealer! He wouldn't say boo to a goose when he was younger.
zero to hero	a rapid increase in popularity or success	Harley went from zero to hero after scoring a last minute winner.

