

SKILL 17: LISTEN FOR IDIOMS

Idioms appear in some questions in the short dialogues. Idioms are special expressions in a language that all speakers of the language know; these special expressions describe one situation in life but are applied to many different areas of life. Idiom questions can be difficult for students because they seem to be describing one situation when they are really describing a different situation.

Example from the Paper and Computer TOEFL® Tests

On the recording, you hear:

- (man) *Tom is a full-time student and is holding down a full-time job.*
 (woman) *He's really burning the candle at both ends.*
 (narrator) *What does the woman say about Tom?*

In your test book or on the computer screen, you read:

- (A) He's lighting a candle.
 (B) He's holding the candle at the top and the bottom.
 (C) He's doing too much.
 (D) He's working as a firefighter.

In this question, the idiom *burning the candle at both ends* has nothing to do with candles and nothing to do with burning or fires, so answers (A), (B), and (D) are not correct. Instead, this idiom is an expression that is used in a situation when someone is trying to do more than he or she really can do; after all, a candle usually only burns at one end, so a candle that burns at two ends is *doing too much*. Therefore, the best answer to the question above is answer (C).

NOTE: A list of common idioms and exercises using these idioms appear in Appendix C. You may want to study these idioms before you try the following exercises.

EXERCISE 17: In this exercise, underline the idiom in each short dialogue. Then, read the question and choose the best answer to that question. Remember that the best answer is one that might not seem to be related to the idiom in the last line.

- (man) *I have to take advanced biology from Professor Stanton next semester.* (A) The man should try a piece of cake.
 (woman) *Don't worry about it. It's a piece of cake.* (B) The man should worry about the course.
 (narrator) *What does the woman mean?* (C) The man shouldn't take part in the course.
 (D) The course is easy.
- (woman) *Thanks for changing the oil and putting air in the tires.* (A) It will take him a whole day to do the job.
 (man) *It's all in a day's work.* (B) This is a regular part of his job.
 (narrator) *What does the man mean?* (C) He can do the work at the end of the day.
 (D) He's too busy today to do the work.

3. (man) *What was it like while the president was giving his speech?*
 (woman) *You could hear a pin drop.*
 (narrator) *What does the woman mean?*
- (A) The president dropped his pen.
 (B) The audience was very quiet.
 (C) The speech contained several puns.
 (D) The president discussed dropping a bomb.

TOEFL EXERCISE 17: In this exercise, listen carefully to each short dialogue and question on the recording, and then choose the best answer to the question. You should be particularly careful of idioms.



NOW BEGIN THE RECORDING AT TOEFL EXERCISE 17.

1. (A) The man's never late.
 (B) It's good that the man was fifteen minutes late.
 (C) It's never good to be late for class.
 (D) It's good that the man went to class, on time or not.
2. (A) The woman's work is all in her head.
 (B) The woman has to do two experiments rather than one.
 (C) It's a good idea to work together.
 (D) The biology experiment concerns two-headed animals.
3. (A) She has no time to work now.
 (B) She doesn't want to work on the report either.
 (C) It's best to get it over with now.
 (D) There's no time to present the report now.
4. (A) She's very lucky to get the last book.
 (B) She's sorry she can't get the book today.
 (C) She always has good luck with books.
 (D) She just wanted to look at the book.
5. (A) The man doesn't like eating in restaurants.
 (B) She doesn't really like that restaurant.
 (C) Each of them has his own restaurant.
 (D) Everyone has different tastes.
6. (A) She'll do it immediately.
 (B) It is not possible to do it.
 (C) The man should have told her sooner.
 (D) She would have done it if the man had asked.
7. (A) Abbie used a feather in his art project.
 (B) He was knocked down.
 (C) He was really surprised.
 (D) Abbie's father knocked on the door.
8. (A) They are taking a boat trip together.
 (B) The six chapters are all about the boat.
 (C) Everyone has to do the same thing.
 (D) The man will read while he's on the boat.
9. (A) She is taller than the others.
 (B) She put her science project on top of the others.
 (C) She has a really good head on her shoulders.
 (D) She's the best of them all.
10. (A) The man needs to improve his penmanship.
 (B) The man doesn't really need to apply for the scholarship.
 (C) The man needs to fill out the application with dots and crosses.
 (D) The man needs to pay attention to every detail.

TOEFL EXERCISE (Skills 16–17): In this exercise, listen carefully to each short dialogue and question on the recording, and then choose the best answer to the question.



NOW BEGIN THE RECORDING AT TOEFL EXERCISE (SKILLS 16–17).

1. (A) She gets lots of take-out dinners.
(B) She and her roommate alternate cooking responsibilities.
(C) Her roommate cooks more often than she does.
(D) Her roommate does the cooking while she does other chores.
2. (A) He resembles his father.
(B) He has a chipped tooth.
(C) He lives one block from his father.
(D) He and his father were playing a game with blocks.
3. (A) She's going somewhere else.
(B) She does not like football.
(C) She has a lot of work to do.
(D) She is getting sick.
4. (A) He put his foot where he should not have.
(B) He put the food that the teacher gave him into his mouth.
(C) He said something embarrassing.
(D) He told the teacher that his foot was hurt.
5. (A) She'd like the man to delay his trip.
(B) She prefers that the man leave a few minutes earlier than he planned.
(C) She wants to know if the man will stay in the market for only a few minutes.
(D) She'd like to talk to the man for a few minutes.
6. (A) The man might start a fire in the park.
(B) The man parked his car near the fire.
(C) The man's thinking of doing something dangerous.
(D) The man's playing a game in the park.
7. (A) The machines do not act very well.
(B) The machines don't really bother her.
(C) She would like them to stop the noise.
(D) She wishes the machines would cut the wood.
8. (A) Fred has a dog that barks a lot.
(B) Fred has hidden the money in a tree.
(C) Fred has backed into a tree.
(D) Fred has made a mistake.
9. (A) She will give him any help he needs.
(B) He has to give away what he doesn't need.
(C) He should not give up.
(D) He should give back what he borrowed.
10. (A) She'd rather go swimming than do the homework.
(B) The chemistry homework is really difficult.
(C) She's doing the homework by the swimming pool.
(D) The stream is drying up.

TOEFL REVIEW EXERCISE (Skills 1–17): In this exercise, listen carefully to each short dialogue and question on the recording, and then choose the best answer to the question.



NOW BEGIN THE RECORDING AT TOEFL REVIEW EXERCISE (SKILLS 1–17).

1. (A) There's no more wood inside.
(B) The wood in the fireplace should be put outside.
(C) There's a fire outside.
(D) He needs to bring some wood outside.
2. (A) She worked late at a conference.
(B) Her meeting was canceled.
(C) She called a conference at work.
(D) She was late to a conference.

3. (A) In a hospital
(B) At a police station
(C) At the beach
(D) In a locker room
4. (A) There was too much room on the dance floor.
(B) He enjoyed the room where they went dancing.
(C) The dance floor was too crowded.
(D) The club needed more rooms for dancing.
5. (A) He could not understand the fax machine.
(B) He wrote the letter that was sent.
(C) The fax machine was easy for him to use.
(D) He was not very good with figures.
6. (A) The woman hit her head on a nail.
(B) The woman hit his new car.
(C) The woman was exactly right.
(D) The woman bought the new car.
7. (A) He would like the woman to help him find his paper.
(B) He wants the woman to put the paper away.
(C) He needs the woman to review the paper.
(D) He would like the woman to write the paper for him.
8. (A) Information about the problem is unavailable.
(B) No one has been informed.
(C) Everybody knows what is going on.
(D) Nobody is aware that the problem is serious.
9. (A) He did not sleep well.
(B) He never woke up this morning.
(C) The alarm failed to go off.
(D) He needed a loud alarm to wake up.
10. (A) The pilot made an emergency landing.
(B) The pilot was forced to leave the plane in a hurry.
(C) The pilot fielded questions about the forced landing.
(D) The plane was damaged when it landed forcefully.

LONG CONVERSATIONS

(PAPER TOEFL® TEST) 

Two long conversations, each followed by a number of multiple-choice questions, appear in Part B of the Listening Comprehension section of the paper TOEFL test. You will hear the conversations and the questions on a recording; they are not written in your test book. You must choose the best answer to each multiple-choice question from the four choices that are written in your test book.

The conversations are often about some aspect of school life (how difficult a class is, how to write a research paper, how to register for a course). The conversations can also be about topics currently in the news in the United States (desalination of the water supply, recycling of used products, damage from a storm or some other type of natural phenomenon).

Example from the Paper TOEFL® Test

On the recording, you hear:

- (narrator) *Questions 1 through 4. Listen to a conversation between a professor and a student.*
- (man) *Hello, Professor Denton. Are you free for a moment? Could I have a word with you?*
- (woman) *Come on in, Michael. Of course I have some time. These are my office hours, and this is the right time for you to come and ask questions. Now, how can I help you?*
- (man) *Well, I have a quick question for you about the homework assignment for tomorrow. I thought the assignment was to answer the first three questions at the top of page 67 in the text, but when I looked, there weren't any questions there. I'm confused.*
- (woman) *The assignment was to answer the first three questions at the top of page 76, not 67.*
- (man) *Oh, now I understand. I'm glad I came in to check. Thanks for your help.*
- (woman) *No problem. See you tomorrow.*

Questions:

1. On the recording, you hear:

(narrator) *Who is the man?*

- In your test book, you read:
- (A) A professor
 - (B) An office worker
 - (C) Professor Denton's assistant
 - (D) A student

2. On the recording, you hear:

(narrator) *When does the man come to see Professor Denton?*

- In your test book, you read:
- (A) During regular class hours
 - (B) Just before class time
 - (C) As soon as class is finished
 - (D) During office hours

3. On the recording, you hear:

(narrator) *Why does the man come to see Professor Denton?*

- In your test book, you read:
- (A) To turn in an assignment
 - (B) To ask a question
 - (C) To pick up a completed test
 - (D) To explain why he did not attend class

4. On the recording, you hear:

(narrator) *What incorrect information did the man have?*

- In your test book, you read:
- (A) The date the assignment was due
 - (B) The page number of the assignment
 - (C) The length of the assignment
 - (D) The numbers of the assignment questions

The first question asks you to determine who the man is. Since the man opens the conversation with *Professor Denton* and he asks about the page number of an assignment for tomorrow, he is probably a student. The best answer to this question is therefore answer (D). The second question asks about when the man comes to see the professor. The professor says that *These are my office hours*, so the best answer to this question is answer (D). The third question asks why the man comes to see the professor. Since the man says *I have a quick question for you*, the best answer to this question is answer (B). The last question asks what incorrect information the man had. The man thought that the assignment was on page 67 and not on page 76, so he was mistaken about the *page number* of the assignment. The best answer to this question is answer (B).

PROCEDURES FOR THE LONG CONVERSATIONS

(Paper TOEFL® Test) 

1. **If you have time, preview the answers to the questions.** While you are looking at the answers, you should try to do the following:
 - Anticipate the **topics** of the conversations you will hear.
 - Anticipate the **questions** for each of the groups of answers.
2. **Listen carefully to the first line of the conversation.** The first line of the conversation often contains the main idea, subject, or topic of the conversation, and you will often be asked to answer such questions.
3. **As you listen to the conversation, draw conclusions about the situation of the conversation: who is talking, where the conversation takes place, or when it takes place.** You will often be asked to make such inferences about the conversation.
4. **As you listen to the conversation, follow along with the answers in your test book and try to determine the correct answers.** Detail questions are generally answered in order in the conversation, and the answers often sound the same as what is said on the recording.
5. **You should guess even if you are not sure.** Never leave any answers blank.
6. **Use any remaining time to look ahead at the answers to the questions that follow.**

The following skills will help you to implement these procedures in the long conversations on the paper TOEFL test.

BEFORE LISTENING

SKILL 18: ANTICIPATE THE TOPICS

It is very helpful to your overall comprehension if you know what topics to expect in the long conversations. You should therefore try to anticipate the topics you will be hearing. For example, are the conversations about some aspect of school life, or some type of social issue, or a trip someone is planning? A helpful strategy is therefore to look briefly at the answers in the test book, before you actually hear the conversations on the recording, and try to determine the topics of the conversations that you will hear.

EXERCISE 18: Look at the answers to the five questions together, and try to anticipate the topic of the conversation for those five questions. (Of course, you cannot always determine exactly what the topic is, but you often can get a general idea.) Questions 1 through 5 have been answered for you.

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| <p>1. (A) Find <i>work on campus</i>
 (B) Work in the <i>employment office</i>
 (C) Help <i>students</i> find <i>jobs</i>
 (D) Ask the woman questions</p> | <p>4. (A) Every morning
 (B) Afternoons and weekends
 (C) When he's in class
 (D) Weekdays</p> |
| <p>2. (A) In the library
 (B) In a classroom
 (C) In a campus office
 (D) In an apartment</p> | <p>5. (A) Fill out a form
 (B) Give her some additional information
 (C) Tell her some news
 (D) Phone her</p> |
| <p>3. (A) No more than ten
 (B) At least twenty
 (C) Not more than twenty
 (D) Up to ten</p> | |

What is the topic of the conversation for questions 1 through 5?

looking for a job on campus

You can guess this because of the following clues:

- *work on campus*
- *employment office*
- *students*
- *jobs*