

Academic English UK

Lecture Skills



Common Idioms used in Lectures

EXAMPLE

Copyright: These materials are photocopyable but please leave all logos and web addresses on handouts. Please don't post these materials onto the web. Thank you

Teacher's Notes EXAMPLE

Aim: This lesson aims to raise students' awareness of how idioms are used in lectures to structure ideas, emphasise meaning, and support understanding.

Lesson Timing

120–180 minutes. The main worksheet is 120 minutes. Speaking and extension tasks can add an additional 30–60 minutes.

Preparation

Make the recording available so students can listen individually (e.g. OneDrive or ELE). Students should bring headphones so they can listen independently.

Lecture Recording: Available in Paid Version

Lead-in (10 minutes)

- Students discuss what idioms are and whether they have heard them in lectures.
- Elicit examples from students.
- Give out booklet and read through **Task 1: What are idioms?**
- Feedback: **Emphasise idioms are common in spoken, rather than written academic English.**

Task 2: Introduction to Lecture Idioms (20 minutes)

- Students read the short lecture extract and identify idioms individually.
- Pair check: Students compare answers.
- Whole class feedback: Elicit answers and clarify meanings.

Task 3: Common Lecture Idioms (30 minutes)

- Students complete the gap-fill activity on common lecture idioms.
- Pair check after completion. At this stage, students can use AI to check any unknown idioms.
- Whole class feedback: Display the answer key and clarify meaning.

Task 4: Identifying Idioms in a Lecture (30 minutes)

- Pre-listening: Students review key vocabulary.
- First listening (7.35-minute lecture): Students tick the idioms they hear in Task 3 table (there are 18 idioms in the lecture).
- Whole class feedback.
- **EXTRA Listening practice for main ideas: Students take notes on the five issues, then answer the seven comprehension questions (see appendix at the back of the booklet + 30 minutes).**

Task 5: What do the Idioms refer to in a Lecture? (30 minutes)

- Students read through the 10 idioms in the table, then listen individually as many times as needed to identify what each idiom refers to in the lecture and fill in the table.
- Differentiation: Students can use the transcript to aid comprehension while they listen.
- Whole class feedback.

Task 6: Consolidation (20 minutes)

- Visuals: Students match images to idioms.
- Pair or small group discussion and feedback.

Task 7: Speaking Production (30 minutes)

- Students create sentences using the given idioms.
- Pair or group speaking activity.
- Encourage students to use idioms naturally in short explanations.
- Differentiation: give time for students to formulate answers.

Homework Task

- Listen to a TED Talk and identify idioms used in the lecture.

Common Idioms in Lectures EXAMPLE

Aims of the lesson

By the end of this lesson, you will be able to:

- identify and understand common idioms used in academic lectures, particularly how they function for signposting, emphasis, and engagement.
- interpret idioms in context while listening to a lecture, linking each idiom to its communicative purpose and meaning.
- apply lecture idioms in speaking, using them appropriately to structure ideas, explain concepts, and interact in academic discussions.

Task 1: What are idioms?

An idiom refers to its meaning as a whole, rather than the meanings [redacted]. In idioms, [redacted] words often do not help you understand the actual meaning.

Example:

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “It’s a piece of cake” → Literally: a slice of dessert ❌ → Actual meaning: [redacted] ✅ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “It costs an arm and a leg” → Literally: you [redacted] ❌ → Actual meaning: it is very expensive ✅
--	---

Idioms are widely used in spoken and informal academic English because they:

- add naturalness → native speakers use them frequently.
- make [redacted] → they add colour and personality.
- condense meaning → a short phrase [redacted]
 - “Let’s get to the point” = stop wasting time and focus.
 - “That’s a grey area” = [redacted].

Task 2: Introduction to Lecture Idioms

Read this short extract from a lecture on social media and identify five idioms. Fill in the table on the next page with the full idiomatic phrase and meaning. The first one has been done for you.

Hello, everyone. Today, I’d like to talk about the impact of social media on society. ***In the blink of an eye***, platforms [redacted] and X have changed how we communicate and access information. People can now connect instantly [redacted] with [redacted] has become part and parcel of everyday life.

On the positive side, social media allows individuals to [redacted]. It also [redacted] quickly. However, people sometimes share information without thinking and simply go with the flow. This can [redacted], which makes it harder to know what is true.

There are [redacted]. Many users compare themselves to others online, which can lower confidence and create pressure to [redacted] too much [redacted] away from it all. This can affect sleep, productivity, and overall well-being.

From a broader perspective, social media companies [redacted] [redacted] experience, it also raises questions about privacy and control. Governments and educators are beginning to [redacted] responsible [redacted] an eye on how much time they spend online and how it affects them.

To sum up, social media has both positive [redacted] powerful tool, but it must be used carefully and thoughtfully.

EXAMPLE

	Idiom (the whole phrase)	Meaning
0	in the blink of an eye	<i>Something happens very quickly or almost instantly.</i>
1		
2		
3		
4		
5		

Task 3: Common Lecture Idioms

Below is a list of 28 common idioms used by lecturers to structure their ideas, emphasise key points, check understanding, make references, and signal the end of a lecture. Complete the idiomatic phrases by filling in the missing letters. The first letter and a brief explanation are provided.

	Structuring & Signposting the Lecture	Tick ✓
1	"Let's start by laying the groundwork ..." <i>(We're starting with the fundamentals)</i>	
2	"I'll begin by t _____ on X, and then dive deeper into Y" <i>(I'll give a brief overview, then get into details)</i>	
3	" _____ along..." <i>(I'm transitioning to the next topic.)</i>	
4	"Let's c _____ back to that later." <i>(That's _____ a more appropriate time)</i>	
5	"To tie this all together..." / "So, to w _____ this section up..." <i>(Here _____)</i>	
6	"I'm going to go off on _____ related..." <i>(I'm making a brief detour from the main point)</i>	
7	"For the _____ this" <i>(This is relevant but not essential for today)</i>	

	Emphasising Importance & Critical Thinking	Tick ✓
8	"The bottom line is..." <i>(This is the single most important conclusion of this point)</i>	
9	"Don't _____" <i>(You should question and verify this yourself)</i>	
10	"Let's _____ more." <i>(Let's analyse this concept in detail)</i>	
11	" _____ that" / "It's a d _____- _____ sword" <i>(There are complexities, trade-offs, or two sides to the issue)</i>	
12	"That's _____ to open today" <i>(That topic would lead us into a very complex and lengthy discussion)</i>	

EXAMPLE

Inviting Engagement & Checking Understanding		Tick ✓
13	"Are we on the same page?" <i>(Do you [redacted] it again?)</i>	
14	"I see a lot of b _ _ _ _ faces" <i>(I can [redacted] confused; let me say it differently)</i>	
15	"This [redacted] thought" <i>(Here's an interesting idea for [redacted] own)</i>	
16	"I'd [redacted] question out to the room" <i>(I want to hear your opinions or answers.)</i>	
17	"Let [redacted] picture" <i>(Perfect for introducing a new analogy, especially [redacted] one)</i>	

Referencing Sources & Scholarship		Tick ✓
18	"The gold standard in this field is..." <i>(The most original and influential study is...)</i>	
19	"The [redacted]" <i>(The consensus in the field is changing)</i>	
20	"It's a h _ _ _ _ debated topic" <i>(There is [redacted] expert)</i>	
21	"This idea [redacted] by Dr. Smith's research" <i>(This research completely challenged and changed the old theory)</i>	
22	"They [redacted] this study" <i>(They did pioneering original research)</i>	
23	"This is a [redacted]" <i>(This is a useful, [redacted] that applies in most situations)</i>	
24	"You'll want to get to g _ _ _ _ with this concept" <i>(You [redacted] understand this)</i>	

Finish a Lecture or Presentation		Tick ✓
25	"To round things off..." <i>(The most common signal for beginning [redacted])</i>	
26	"The [redacted] is..." <i>(Directs the audience to the single most [redacted] conclusion)</i>	
27	"To [redacted]" <i>(Signals that you are synthesising the various [redacted] picture)</i>	
28	"As a final t _ _ _ _..." <i>(Explicitly [redacted] the audience to retain)</i>	

Task 4: Identifying idioms in a lecture

You are going to listen to a short lecture on the five most common negative effects of social media.

1. Before you listen check these words.

<p>misinformation / [redacted] / echo chambers and [redacted] / binge [redacted] / attention span / algorithmic / emotionally / [redacted] / public opinion / political attitudes / [redacted] , comments / [redacted] / harmful behaviours / [redacted] / conspiracy / alternative [redacted] / divisions in public [redacted] / compulsive / dopamine / [redacted] / anxiety / self-esteem / [redacted] / isolation / novelty / [redacted] / fragmented content / [redacted] / wellbeing</p>
--

2. Listen to the lecture ([here](#)) and tick the idioms you hear in the tick box section in the table above.

Task 5: What do the idioms refer to in the lecture? EXAMPLE

How are the idioms used in the lecture. Listen again ([here](#)) as many times as you like and try to identify how each idiom is used to explain an idea or concept. The first one has been done for you.

	Idiom	Meaning in the lecture
1	So, let's start by laying the groundwork... (What is the groundwork?)	<i>Introduce the basic idea that social media is central to communication, information and socialisation: positives and negatives.</i>
2	The bottom line is... (What?)	
3	Let's [redacted] more... (What is unpacked?)	
4	Are we all on [redacted]? (How does the lecturer check this?)	
5	Let me paint you a different picture to help understand these concepts... (What does he say here?)	
6	This is [redacted] ... (What?)	
7	This is a good [redacted] ... (What?)	
8	I'd like to [redacted] the room... (What is the question?)	
9	Let's break that down... (How?)	
10	I'm [redacted] for a moment, but it's related... (How?)	
11	It's a double-edged sword... (How?)	
12	You'll [redacted] this concept... (Why?)	
13	For the sake of time, I'll skip over this... (Skip over what?)	
14	The [redacted] is... (What?)	
15	A [redacted] is... (What?)	

Lecture Transcript: The Five Most Common Negative Effects of Social Media EXAMPLE

Prof. Imogen Smith (2026)

Hello, I'm professor Imogen Smith and welcome to my short lecture today on the five most common negative effects of social media.

So, let's start by laying the groundwork. Social media has become central to how people communicate, access information, and spend their time. While it offers clear benefits, there is growing evidence that its design and patterns of use can lead to significant negative effects. In this lecture today, I'll focus on five of the most common which are misinformation, echo chambers and

FULL TRANSCRIPT INCLUDED IN PAID VERSION...

Task 5: Consolidation EXAMPLE

Try to guess the idiom from the visual image.

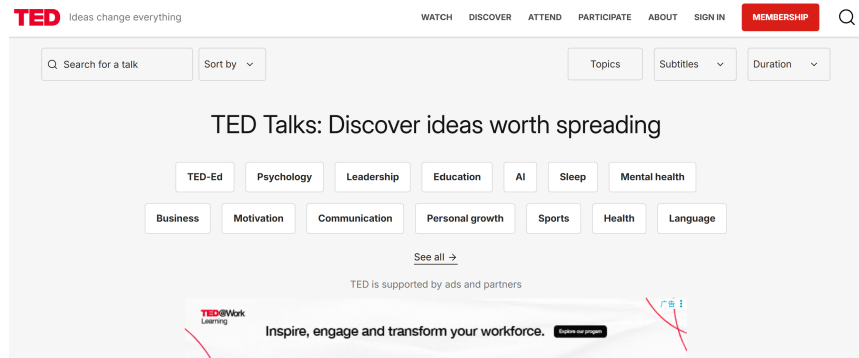
1 	6 	11 	16 
2 	7 	12 	17 
3 	8 	13 	18 
4 	9 	14 	19 
5 	10 	15 	20 

Task 6: Speaking Production EXAMPLE

Use the idiom to create a spoken sentence. Choose a number from 1-24, look at the idiomatic phrase and try to produce a sentence using it. You can choose any topic, but make sure your sentence clearly reflects the meaning of the idiom.

1. "Let's start by laying the groundwork..."	7. "I'll begin by [redacted] Y."	13. "[redacted] along..."	19. "So, [redacted] the dots..."
2. So, to [redacted]	8. "I'm going to go [redacted] a because..."	14. "For the sake of [redacted] this because..."	20. "The bottom line is..."
3. "Let's [redacted] idea a bit more."	9. "It's a double-edged sword because..."	15. "That's a [redacted] to open today because..."	21. "This idea was [redacted] research..."
4. "This is food [redacted] because..."	10. "I'd like to throw [redacted] to the room..."	16. "The gold standard is..."	22. "The [redacted] on this issue because..."
5. "It's a hotly debated topic because..."	11. "You'll want to [redacted] concept because..."	17. "So, to [redacted] together..."	23. "They really broke [redacted] study because..."
6. "This is a [redacted] because..."	12. "Let me paint [redacted] by..."	18. "The [redacted] message here is..."	24. "As a final thought..."

Task 7: Homework Task EXAMPLE



Choose a [TED Talk](#) (10-minutes long) based [REDACTED]

- 1) Listen and take notes on the main ideas of the talk.
- 2) Listen for [REDACTED] – write down [REDACTED] you hear.
- 3) Bring your notes and idioms to the next class.

ANSWERS EXAMPLE

Task 2: Introduction to Lecture Idioms

Hello, everyone. Today, I'd like to talk about the impact of social media on society. **In the blink of an eye**, platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and X have changed how we communicate and access information. People can now connect instantly across the world, share opinions, and stay updated with global events. In many ways, social media has become **part and parcel of everyday life**.

On the positive side, social media allows individuals to express themselves and build communities. It also helps important issues gain attention....

	Idiom (the whole phrase)	Meaning
0	In the blink of an eye	<i>Something happens very quickly or almost instantly.</i>
1	Part and parcel of everyday life	<i>A normal and essential part of daily life</i>
2	Go with the flow	<i>To follow....</i>

ALL ANSWERS INCLUDED IN PAID VERSION...