# Idioms describing people

VOCABULARY PRACTICE

ADVANCED | C1

**Name:** _____ **Date:** _____

## 1 Match each advanced person idiom with its meaning.

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 1 a dark horse | ____ | a someone whose behaviour is dangerously unpredictable |
| 2 a loose cannon | ____ | b a powerful person who must be taken seriously |
| 3 a wet blanket | ____ | c someone who follows personal rules rather than accepted ones |
| 4 a shrinking violet | ____ | d a respected and dependable community member |
| 5 a social butterfly | ____ | e a person with hidden abilities or unexpected qualities |
| 6 a pillar of the community | ____ | f someone who moves easily between many social groups |
| 7 a creature of habit | ____ | g someone whose new approach is welcome and refreshing |
| 8 a breath of fresh air | ____ | h a person who dislikes changing routines |
| 9 a force to be reckoned with | ____ | i a very shy person |
| 10 a law unto themselves | ____ | j someone who reduces other people's enjoyment |

## 2 Choose the idiom that best conveys the intended stance.

**1** Respect for a powerful negotiator: *a force to be reckoned with / a wet blanket*.

**2** Concern about an unpredictable colleague: *a loose cannon / a creature of habit*.

**3** Surprise at a quiet candidate's hidden ability: *a dark horse / a social butterfly*.

**4** Approval of a refreshing new colleague: *a breath of fresh air / a law unto themselves*.

**5** Mild criticism of someone who spoils the mood: *a wet blanket / a pillar of the community*.

**6** Description of a highly respected local organiser: *a pillar of the community / a shrinking violet*.

**7** Description of a person attached to routine: *a creature of habit / a dark horse*.

**8** Critical description of someone who ignores shared rules: *a law unto themselves / a breath of fresh air*.

## 3 Match the idiom with the most natural continuation.

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 1 She is a dark horse | ____ | a and rarely changes his daily routine |
| 2 He is a loose cannon | ____ | b who has quietly developed remarkable expertise |
| 3 Mira is a social butterfly | ____ | c because her methods are energetic and original |
| 4 Pavel is a creature of habit | ____ | d who connects with people in every department |
| 5 The new coach is a breath of fresh air | ____ | e and can disrupt negotiations without warning |
| 6 Dana is a force to be reckoned with | ____ | f whose influence shapes every major decision |
| 7 Amir is a pillar of the community | ____ | g who has served local organisations for decades |
| 8 The director is a law unto herself | ____ | h and ignores procedures that constrain everyone else |

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## 4 Complete the commentary with idioms from the box.

**a breath of fresh air | a creature of habit | a dark horse | a force to be reckoned with | a law unto herself | a loose cannon | a pillar of the community | a shrinking violet | a social butterfly | a wet blanket**

The new chair initially seemed **1** _____, speaking little in large meetings, but she proved to be **2** _____ with formidable negotiating skill. Her deputy is **3** _____ who knows everyone, while the treasurer is **4** _____ and resists changes to established routines. A long-serving volunteer is widely regarded as **5** _____. The communications officer has been **6** _____, introducing clear, lively updates. One adviser, however, is **7** _____ whose unpredictable remarks create risk. Another can be **8** _____, dismissing every celebratory idea. The founder remains **9** _____, but sometimes behaves like **10** _____ and bypasses agreed procedures.

## 5 Read the text and answer the questions briefly.

**Metaphor and social judgement**

Person idioms do more than decorate language: they frame an individual through a compact social story. Calling someone *a pillar of the community* highlights stability and service; calling them *a loose cannon* foregrounds risk and unpredictability. The metaphor selects certain evidence and pushes other evidence into the background. Repetition can make that frame feel like an objective identity rather than one perspective. This is especially consequential in workplaces, journalism and education, where labels may shape opportunities. Responsible idiomatic language attributes a claim to a speaker, provides behavioural support, allows competing interpretations and recognises that vividness is not the same as accuracy.

**1** What does a person idiom create besides decoration? _____

**2** What does *a pillar of the community* foreground? _____

**3** What does *a loose cannon* foreground? _____

**4** How does a metaphor influence the evidence we notice? _____

**5** Where can repeated labels have serious consequences? _____

**6** Which four practices support responsible idiomatic language? _____

## 6 Replace the words in bold with a precise idiom.

**1** The candidate **had abilities that nobody expected**. _____

**2** The mediator **must be taken very seriously**. _____

**3** The organiser **is widely admired for many years of local service**. _____

**4** The consultant **behaves unpredictably and creates risk**. _____

## OVER TO YOU

Write a **160-190 word** critical commentary on idioms used to describe people in a workplace, school or media text. Analyse metaphor, stance, evidence and possible consequences.

[ ] Use at least eight target idioms. [ ] Compare two competing frames. [ ] Distinguish vividness from accuracy.

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# ANSWER KEY

## 1 Advanced person idioms

1 **e** 2 **a** 3 **j** 4 **i** 5 **f** 6 **d** 7 **h** 8 **g** 9 **b** 10 **c**

## 2 Intended stance

1 **a force to be reckoned with** 2 **a loose cannon** 3 **a dark horse** 4 **a breath of fresh air** 5 **a wet blanket** 6 **a pillar of the community** 7 **a creature of habit** 8 **a law unto themselves**

## 3 Natural continuations

1 **b** 2 **e** 3 **d** 4 **a** 5 **c** 6 **f** 7 **g** 8 **h**

## 4 Commentary

1 **a shrinking violet** 2 **a dark horse** 3 **a social butterfly** 4 **a creature of habit** 5 **a pillar of the community** 6 **a breath of fresh air** 7 **a loose cannon** 8 **a wet blanket** 9 **a force to be reckoned with** 10 **a law unto herself**

## 5 Reading - suggested answers

1 A compact social story or frame.
2 Stability and service.
3 Risk and unpredictability.
4 It highlights some evidence and backgrounds the rest.
5 In workplaces, journalism and education.
6 Attribute the claim, provide evidence, allow alternatives and recognise that vividness is not accuracy.

## 6 Precise idioms

1 **was a dark horse** 2 **is a force to be reckoned with** 3 **is a pillar of the community** 4 **is a loose cannon**

**Over to you:** Answers will vary. Look for metaphor awareness, evidential support and balanced analysis.