Idioms for everyday situations and feelings

VOCABULARY PRACTICE
ADVANCED | C1

Name: _____ Date: _____

1 Match each advanced term with its definition.

1 idiom decomposability ____	**a** the degree to which an idiom's individual components can be mapped onto elements of its figurative meaning
2 lexicogrammatical fixedness ____	**b** the extent to which an idiom's wording and grammatical structure resist alteration
3 phraseological unit ____	**c** a broad term covering idioms, collocations and other multi-word conventional expressions
4 idiom variation ____	**d** the phenomenon whereby some idioms permit limited creative modification while retaining their idiomatic meaning
5 syntactic frozenness ____	**e** the resistance of certain idioms to normal grammatical transformations such as passivisation
6 figurative transparency gradient ____	**f** a scale describing how directly an idiom's literal meaning relates to its figurative interpretation
7 institutionalised expression ____	**g** an expression that has become conventionally accepted as a fixed unit within a speech community
8 pragmatic idiomaticity ____	**h** the appropriateness of using an idiom for a particular communicative purpose in a given social context
9 idiom processing ____	**i** the cognitive mechanisms by which fluent speakers recognise and interpret idioms in real time
10 native speaker intuition ____	**j** a native speaker's intuitive, often unverbalised judgement about whether an expression sounds natural

2 Choose the most precise term for each context.

1 How individual components map onto figurative meaning is idiom decomposability / total opacity.

2 The extent to which wording resists alteration is lexicogrammatical fixedness / free variation.

3 A broad term for idioms, collocations and similar units is a phraseological unit / a single content word.

4 Idioms permitting limited creative modification is idiom variation / rigid invariance.

5 Resistance to grammatical transformations like passivisation is syntactic frozenness / full grammatical flexibility.

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6 A scale for how directly literal relates to figurative meaning is the figurative transparency gradient / a binary distinction.

7 An expression conventionally accepted as fixed is an institutionalised expression / a novel, spontaneous coinage.

8 The appropriateness of an idiom for a communicative purpose is pragmatic idiomaticity / grammatical correctness alone.

3 Match the verbs with the noun phrases to form academic collocations.

1 assess ____	**a** idiom decomposability
2 exploit ____	**b** idiom processing computationally
3 constrain ____	**c** syntactic frozenness deliberately
4 model ____	**d** lexicogrammatical fixedness
5 violate ____	**e** a novel phraseological unit
6 activate ____	**f** a stored idiomatic representation
7 institutionalise ____	**g** native speaker intuition
8 gauge ____	**h** pragmatic idiomaticity

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4 Complete the analysis with terms from the box.

figurative transparency gradient | idiom decomposability | idiom processing | idiom variation | institutionalised expression | lexicogrammatical fixedness | native speaker intuition | phraseological unit | pragmatic idiomaticity | syntactic frozenness

Psycholinguists studying 1 _____ debate whether fluent speakers retrieve an idiom as a single stored unit or partially compute its meaning compositionally, a question closely tied to 2 _____, the degree to which individual words within an idiom map recognisably onto elements of its overall figurative sense. Idioms vary substantially in 3 _____, the extent to which wording resists alteration; some permit considerable 4 _____, tolerating creative modification while retaining recognisable idiomatic meaning, while others display strict 5 _____, resisting even standard grammatical transformations such as passivisation entirely. Researchers increasingly locate individual idioms along a broader 6 _____, acknowledging that opacity and transparency form a continuum rather than a strict binary distinction. Any expression, once it becomes a recognised 7 _____ within a speech community, also carries specific 8 _____, constraints on the social contexts in which its use feels genuinely appropriate rather than jarring or misplaced. Ultimately, corpus data and experimental evidence must be checked against 9 _____, since no amount of statistical frequency data can fully substitute for a speaker's felt sense of whether a given 10 _____ actually sounds natural in context.

5 Read the text and answer the questions briefly.

How the mind processes idioms

Psycholinguistic research into idiom processing has produced competing models of how fluent speakers comprehend figurative expressions in real time. The direct access model proposes that familiar idioms are retrieved holistically from memory as a single stored unit, bypassing word-by-word literal processing almost entirely for highly frozen expressions. The compositional model counters that speakers do process individual words, with idiom decomposability determining how much this literal processing contributes to eventual comprehension, since transparent idioms permit meaningful word-level analysis while opaque idioms largely defeat it. Current evidence increasingly favours a hybrid account, suggesting that processing strategy varies dynamically depending on an idiom's degree of lexicogrammatical fixedness, its decomposability, and even the specific context in which it appears, rather than any single universal mechanism applying uniformly across the full range of idiomatic expressions.

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1 What has psycholinguistic research into idiom processing produced? _____

2 What does the direct access model propose? _____

3 What does the compositional model counter? _____

4 What determines how much literal processing contributes to comprehension, according to this model? ___

5 What does current evidence increasingly favour? _____

6 What does processing strategy vary depending on, according to the hybrid account? _____

6 Replace the words in bold with a precise term or collocation.

1 The idiom's individual words mapped clearly onto its figurative meaning. _____

2 The expression resisted normal grammatical transformations entirely. _____

3 The phrase had become a conventionally accepted fixed unit in the community. _____

4 The researcher checked the corpus finding against a native speaker's intuitive judgement. _____

OVER TO YOU

Write a 160-190 word critical commentary on competing models of how the mind processes idiomatic expressions, distinguishing observation from theoretical claim.

[ ] Use at least twelve target expressions. [ ] Include four academic collocations. [ ] Maintain a precise, balanced register.

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ANSWER KEY

1 Advanced terms

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

2 Precise terms

1 idiom decomposability 2 lexicogrammatical fixedness 3 a phraseological unit 4 idiom variation 5 syntactic frozenness 6 the figurative transparency gradient 7 an institutionalised expression 8 pragmatic idiomaticity

3 Academic collocations

1 a assess idiom decomposability 2 c exploit syntactic frozenness deliberately 3 d constrain lexicogrammatical fixedness 4 b model idiom processing computationally
5 c violate syntactic frozenness... note adjust 6 f activate a stored idiomatic representation 7 e institutionalise a novel phraseological unit 8 g gauge native speaker intuition

4 Analysis

1 idiom processing 2 idiom decomposability 3 lexicogrammatical fixedness 4 idiom variation
5 syntactic frozenness 6 figurative transparency gradient 7 institutionalised expression 8 pragmatic idiomaticity
9 native speaker intuition 10 phraseological unit

5 Reading - suggested answers

1 Competing models of how fluent speakers comprehend figurative expressions in real time.
2 That familiar idioms are retrieved holistically from memory as a single stored unit.
3 That speakers do process individual words.
4 Idiom decomposability.
5 A hybrid account.
6 An idiom's degree of lexicogrammatical fixedness, its decomposability, and the specific context in which it appears.

6 Precise terms and collocations

1 idiom decomposability 2 syntactic frozenness 3 an institutionalised expression 4 native speaker intuition

Over to you

Answers will vary. Look for conceptual precision, evidence-aware reasoning and balanced evaluation.