THE 18 IDIOMS

Winter Idioms with Meanings

B1 to C1 · fold this page away for activity 1

Snow, ice and cold idioms are about people and work, not the weather, so you can use them all year. They are grouped by what the cold means.

THE COLD MEANS: UNFRIENDLY

give *someone* the cold shoulder
be cold and unfriendly to a person on purpose, usually by ignoring them

leave *someone* out in the cold
not include a person in a group or an activity

a frosty reception
an unfriendly reaction to a person or an idea

freeze *someone* out
push a person out of a group by being unfriendly to them

THE COLD MEANS: NERVOUS OR AWKWARD

get cold feet
suddenly feel too nervous to do something you planned

break the ice
help a group feel more relaxed at the start

THE COLD MEANS: DANGER

be on thin ice
be in a risky situation, close to trouble

the tip of the iceberg
a small sign of a much bigger problem

THE COLD MEANS: TOO MUCH

be snowed under
have far too much work

snowball
grow bigger and more serious very fast

THE COLD MEANS: STOPPED OR TRICKED

put *something* on ice
stop a plan or project for a while, planning to come back to it

a snow job
a lot of confident talk meant to make you believe something that isn't true (American, informal)

throw cold water on *something*
say an idea won't work, so people stop being excited about it

stop *someone* cold
make a person stop suddenly, often from surprise (American)

THE COLD MEANS: NO FEELING

leave *someone* cold
not interest or excite a person at all

cold comfort
something meant to make you feel better that doesn't help much

THE COLD MEANS: REALLY ABOUT WINTER

in the dead of winter
in the coldest, darkest middle part of winter

(as) pure as the driven snow
completely innocent or honest, often said as a joke about a person who isn't

ACTIVITY 1

Sort the Cold

B1 to B2 · alone or in pairs · 15 minutes · cut on the dashed lines

1. Cut out the seven pink headings and the 18 idiom cards. Don't look at page 1 yet.
2. Read the sentence on each card. Put the card under the heading that shows what the cold means in it.
3. Now guess the meaning of each idiom from its group. Check your groups and meanings on page 1.

THE COLD MEANS **unfriendly**	THE COLD MEANS **nervous or awkward**	THE COLD MEANS **danger**	THE COLD MEANS **too much**	THE COLD MEANS **stopped or tricked**	THE COLD MEANS **no feeling**	THE COLD MEANS **really about winter**

be snowed under Sorry I didn't call. I'm snowed under with work.	**(as) pure as the driven snow** My cat looks as pure as the driven snow, but she broke the vase.	**snowball** A small joke snowballed into a big argument.
a frosty reception My new haircut got a frosty reception at home.	**put *something* on ice** We've put our trip to Peru on ice until summer.	**leave *someone* out in the cold** The part-time staff were left out in the cold again.
break the ice A silly name game broke the ice on day one.	**throw cold water on *something*** My brother threw cold water on my plan to open a café.	**leave *someone* cold** Football leaves me cold. I just don't get it.
stop *someone* cold The price on the menu stopped me cold.	**give *someone* the cold shoulder** Since the meeting, my neighbor has given me the cold shoulder.	**the tip of the iceberg** The broken printer is just the tip of the iceberg.
freeze *someone* out The other parents froze Carmen out of the group chat.	**be on thin ice** You're on thin ice. One more late report and you're in trouble.	**get cold feet** Marco got cold feet about buying the apartment.
in the dead of winter Our heating broke in the dead of winter.	**cold comfort** A free coffee was cold comfort after a two-hour delay.	**a snow job** That car salesman gave us a real snow job.

ACTIVITY 2

Leo's Week, Retold

B1 to B2 · alone, then compare in pairs · 15 to 20 minutes · a pen

1. Read Leo's week. It's written in plain English, with ten phrases underlined.
2. Change each underlined phrase to an idiom from the box. Change the form to fit the sentence: *be snowed under* becomes *was snowed under*. Two idioms in the box are extra.
3. Compare with a partner. Then write Leo's Friday below with three idioms you didn't use.

IDIOM BOX

be on thin ice · cold comfort · get cold feet · a snow job · throw cold water on *something* · break the ice · leave *someone* out in the cold · a frosty reception · be snowed under · snowball · put *something* on ice · the tip of the iceberg

MONDAY

Leo came back from the break and ❶ had far too much work before ten. His idea for the spring campaign ❷ got an unfriendly reaction, and by lunch his manager had ❸ stopped it for a while. He nearly ❹ felt too nervous to give his afternoon presentation. Then Carmen ❺ helped everybody relax with one question: *Coffee?*

TUESDAY

Two angry emails from a client turned out to be ❻ a small sign of a much bigger problem. By the afternoon, one late delivery had ❼ quickly grown into a crisis.

WEDNESDAY

After a second missed deadline, Leo knew he was ❽ close to trouble with his manager. He suggested a fix, but Finance ❾ said it wouldn't work.

THURSDAY

The new team chat ❿ didn't include the night shift, and they found out about the crisis from a customer.

YOUR IDIOMS

1 _____ 2 _____

3 _____ 4 _____

5 _____ 6 _____

7 _____ 8 _____

9 _____ 10 _____

FRIDAY

_____

_____

ACTIVITY 3

Look-Alikes

B1 to C1 · alone or in pairs · 15 minutes · a pen

1. Each box has two idioms that look alike but mean different things.
2. Read each sentence. Circle **A** or **B**, then write the idiom in the gaps in the right form.
3. In pairs, explain the difference between the two idioms in your own words. Check on page 6.

A **leave *someone* cold**
B **leave *someone* out in the cold**

1 Nobody told the new interns about the party. They were _____ _____. (A) (B)

2 Jazz has always _____ me _____. I just don't feel anything. (A) (B)

A **be on ice**
B **be on thin ice**

3 The office move is _____ until the new manager starts. (A) (B)

4 You've been late four times this month. You're _____. (A) (B)

A **get cold feet**
B **give *someone* the cold shoulder**

5 Inés wanted to quit and travel, but she _____ at the last minute. (A) (B)

6 After our argument, Tomás _____ me _____ for days. (A) (B)

A **be snowed under**
B **snowball**

7 One bad review _____ into hundreds of angry comments. (A) (B)

8 I can't come to lunch. I'm _____ with reports. (A) (B)

A **break the ice**
B **freeze *someone* out**

9 The other designers _____ Julia _____ until she stopped sharing ideas. (A) (B)

10 The host _____ by asking everybody about their worst job. (A) (B)

A **throw cold water on *something***
B **cold comfort**

11 My boss always _____ on new ideas before we finish explaining them. (A) (B)

12 Hearing that the train was late for everybody was _____. (A) (B)

ACTIVITY 4

Cold Questions

B1 to C1 · pairs or groups of 3 · 15 to 20 minutes · cut on the dashed lines

1. Cut out the cards and put them face down. Take a card and read the question to your partner.
2. Your partner answers with the idiom on the card, in a full sentence: *I was snowed under last March, before the tax deadline.*
3. Ask one follow-up question from the list below. Then swap: your partner takes a card.

FOLLOW-UP QUESTIONS: What happened next? · How did you feel? · Would you do it again? · Why do you think so? · What would you do differently?

be snowed under When were you last snowed under? What did you do first?	**break the ice** How do you break the ice with a new coworker or neighbor?	**get cold feet** Have you ever gotten cold feet about a big decision? Did you go ahead?
a frosty reception What kind of idea gets a frosty reception in your family?	**put *something* on ice** Which plan of yours is on ice right now? Will you go back to it?	**snowball** Tell your partner about a small problem that snowballed.
leave *someone* cold Which popular film, show or hobby leaves you cold?	**the tip of the iceberg** What everyday problem in your city is the tip of the iceberg?	**a snow job** Have you ever heard a sales pitch that was a snow job?
throw cold water on *something* When did a friend throw cold water on your idea? Were they right?	**in the dead of winter** What's the best thing to do in the dead of winter?	**stop *someone* cold** When did a price, a question or a piece of news stop you cold?

FOR THE TEACHER

Answer Key

activities 1 to 3 · activity 4 has no fixed answers

Activity 1 · Sort the Cold

UNFRIENDLY
give *someone* the cold shoulder, leave *someone* out in the cold, a frosty reception, freeze *someone* out

NERVOUS OR AWKWARD
get cold feet, break the ice

DANGER
be on thin ice, the tip of the iceberg

TOO MUCH
be snowed under, snowball

STOPPED OR TRICKED
put *something* on ice, a snow job, throw cold water on *something*, stop *someone* cold

NO FEELING
leave *someone* cold, cold comfort

REALLY ABOUT WINTER
in the dead of winter, (as) pure as the driven snow

Activity 2 · Leo's Week, Retold

1. was snowed under
2. got a frosty reception
3. put it on ice
4. got cold feet about
5. broke the ice
6. the tip of the iceberg
7. snowballed into
8. on thin ice
9. threw cold water on it
10. left the night shift out in the cold

Extra idioms: a snow job, cold comfort. Other forms are fine if the meaning and grammar are right, for example *had put it on ice*.

Activity 3 · Look-Alikes

1. **B** left out in the cold
2. **A** left me cold
3. **A** on ice
4. **B** on thin ice
5. **A** got cold feet
6. **B** gave me the cold shoulder
7. **B** snowballed
8. **A** snowed under
9. **B** froze Julia out
10. **A** broke the ice
11. **A** throws cold water
12. **B** cold comfort

Activity 5 · The Office Forecast needs no printing. Students write next week's "weather report" for their job with four idioms: *Monday will be snowed under, with a frosty reception for the new budget by Wednesday.*