

Popular French Idioms

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Word	Literal Meaning	Meaning	Example	Translation
avoir le cafard	to have the cockroach	to feel down or depressed	Aujourd'hui, j'ai le cafard.	Today, I feel down.
avoir la pêche	to have the peach	to feel great and full of energy	Ce matin, j'ai la pêche.	This morning, I feel great.
avoir un coup de barre	to have a blow of the bar	to suddenly feel very tired	Après le déjeuner, j'ai eu un coup de barre.	After lunch, I suddenly felt exhausted.
coûter les yeux de la tête	to cost the eyes of the head	to be extremely expensive	Cette voiture coûte les yeux de la tête.	This car costs a fortune.
être crevé	to be dead tired	to be very tired	Je suis crevé ce soir.	I'm exhausted tonight.
tomber dans les pommes	to fall into the apples	to faint	Elle a eu chaud et elle est tombée dans les pommes.	She felt overheated and fainted.
être dans la lune	to be in the moon	to be absent-minded or daydreaming	Tu es dans la lune aujourd'hui.	You're daydreaming today.
poser un lapin	to put down a rabbit	to stand someone up	Il m'a posé un lapin.	He stood me up.
avoir la flemme	to have the laziness	to feel too lazy to do something	J'ai la flemme de sortir.	I'm too lazy to go out.
se prendre la tête	to take oneself the head	to stress out or overthink	Ne te prends pas la tête.	Don't stress out.
ça marche	that works	that works; okay	On se retrouve à 18 h ? — Ça marche.	Meet at 6 p.m.? — Okay.
ça ne casse pas trois pattes à un canard	it does not break three legs to a duck	it is nothing special	Ce film ne casse pas trois pattes à un canard.	This movie is nothing special.
avoir le moral à zéro	to have the morale at zero	to feel very low or discouraged	Il a le moral à zéro.	He feels really down.
avoir le cœur gros	to have a heavy heart	to feel sad	Elle a le cœur gros en partant.	She feels sad when leaving.
être aux anges	to be in the angels	to be extremely happy	Elle est aux anges.	She's over the moon.
avoir une peur bleue	to have a blue fear	to be terrified	J'ai eu une peur bleue.	I was terrified.
faire la tête	to make the face	to sulk	Il fait la tête depuis ce matin.	He's been sulking since this morning.
monter sur ses grands chevaux	to climb onto one's big horses	to get angry and act superior	Il monte sur ses grands chevaux pour rien.	He gets angry and acts superior for no reason.
avoir les nerfs	to have the nerves	to be annoyed or fed up	J'ai les nerfs aujourd'hui.	I'm really annoyed today.
avoir les boules	to have the balls	to be very upset or annoyed	J'ai les boules de rater le train.	I'm really annoyed to miss the train.
être vert	to be green	to be jealous	Il est vert de jalousie.	He's green with envy.
avoir la rage	to have rage	to be furious	Elle a la rage après cette erreur.	She's furious about that mistake.
avoir le seum	to have the grime	to be fed up or annoyed	J'ai le seum.	I'm fed up.
avoir le trac	to have stage fright	to be nervous before performing or speaking	J'ai le trac avant de parler.	I get nervous before speaking.

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avoir la main sur le cœur	to have the hand on the heart	to be sincere and generous	Il a la main sur le cœur.	He is sincere and generous.
avoir un cœur d'artichaut	to have an artichoke heart	to fall in love easily	Elle a un cœur d'artichaut.	She falls in love easily.
être une tête de mule	to be a mule head	to be stubborn	C'est une tête de mule.	He's very stubborn.
être une langue de vipère	to be a viper tongue	to be mean and gossip a lot	Elle est une langue de vipère.	She's a nasty gossip.
avoir un poil dans la main	to have a hair in the hand	to be lazy	Il a un poil dans la main.	He's lazy.
être bien dans sa peau	to be well in one's skin	to feel comfortable with oneself	Je me sens bien dans ma peau.	I feel comfortable with myself.
avoir les dents longues	to have long teeth	to be ambitious	Elle a les dents longues.	She is very ambitious.
avoir la grosse tête	to have a big head	to be arrogant because of success	Depuis sa promotion, il a la grosse tête.	Since his promotion, he's become arrogant.
être un ours	to be a bear	to be grumpy or unsociable	Le matin, il est un peu ours.	In the morning, he is a bit grumpy.
être une bonne poire	to be a good pear	to be too naive or easy to fool	Il est une bonne poire.	He is too naive.
être franc du collier	to be frank from the collar	to be straightforward and honest	Elle est franche du collier.	She is very straightforward.
avoir plus d'un tour dans son sac	to have more than one trick in one's bag	to have many tricks or resources	Il a plus d'un tour dans son sac.	He has more than one trick up his sleeve.
mettre la main à la pâte	to put the hand to the dough	to help out and get involved in the work	Tout le monde a mis la main à la pâte.	Everyone pitched in.
mettre les bouchées doubles	to put the bites double	to speed up and work harder	Il faut mettre les bouchées doubles.	We need to speed up.
faire d'une pierre deux coups	to do one stone two hits	to achieve two things at once	En prenant le train, je fais d'une pierre deux coups.	By taking the train, I kill two birds with one stone.
avoir du pain sur la planche	to have bread on the board	to have a lot of work to do	J'ai encore du pain sur la planche.	I still have a lot to do.
faire ses preuves	to make one's proofs	to prove oneself	Il doit encore faire ses preuves.	He still has to prove himself.
mettre les pieds dans le plat	to put the feet in the dish	to say something awkward or embarrassing	Il a encore mis les pieds dans le plat.	He put his foot in it again.
faire faux bond	to make a false leap	to fail to show up as promised	Il m'a fait faux bond.	He stood me up.
tirer son épingle du jeu	to pull one's pin out of the game	to get out of a difficult situation successfully	Elle a tiré son épingle du jeu.	She came out of it well.
mettre de l'eau dans son vin	to put water in one's wine	to become more moderate or less strict	Il a dû mettre de l'eau dans son vin.	He had to soften his position.
être au pied du mur	to be at the foot of the wall	to be forced to act because there is no choice left	Nous sommes au pied du mur.	We have no choice now.
avoir carte blanche	to have a blank card	to have complete freedom to decide	Le chef m'a donné carte blanche.	The boss gave me free rein.
être sur la bonne voie	to be on the right path	to be making good progress	Tu es sur la bonne voie.	You are on the right track.
être dans de beaux draps	to be in beautiful sheets	to be in trouble	Il est dans de beaux draps.	He is in big trouble.
être mal barré	to be badly steered	to be in a bad situation or headed for trouble	Ce projet est mal barré.	This project is in bad shape.

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ne pas être sorti de l'auberge	not to be out of the inn yet	to still have a long way to go before things get better	Avec ce dossier, on n'est pas sorti de l'auberge.	With this case, we are not out of the woods yet.
tourner autour du pot	to turn around the pot	to avoid saying something directly	Arrête de tourner autour du pot.	Stop beating around the bush.
chercher la petite bête	to look for the little beast	to nitpick or look for problems	Il cherche toujours la petite bête.	He always nitpicks.
être à côté de la plaque	to be next to the board	to be completely wrong or off target	Tu es à côté de la plaque.	You are way off.
faire fausse route	to take a false road	to go in the wrong direction or make the wrong choice	Je crois qu'on fait fausse route.	I think we are going the wrong way.
être au bout du rouleau	to be at the end of the roll	to be exhausted	Je suis au bout du rouleau.	I am worn out.
se noyer dans un verre d'eau	to drown in a glass of water	to make a small problem seem huge	Il se noie dans un verre d'eau.	He makes a mountain out of a molehill.
avoir un chat dans la gorge	to have a cat in the throat	to have a hoarse or blocked voice	J'ai un chat dans la gorge.	I have a frog in my throat.
ne pas être dans son assiette	not to be in one's plate	to not feel well or to feel off	Je ne suis pas dans mon assiette aujourd'hui.	I am not feeling well today.
donner sa langue au chat	to give one's tongue to the cat	to give up guessing	Je donne ma langue au chat.	I give up.
avoir la langue bien pendue	to have the tongue well hung	to be very talkative or sharp-tongued	Elle a la langue bien pendue.	She is very talkative.
tourner sept fois sa langue dans sa bouche	to turn one's tongue seven times in one's mouth	to think carefully before speaking	Tourne sept fois ta langue dans ta bouche.	Think before you speak.
parler pour ne rien dire	to speak in order to say nothing	to talk a lot without saying anything useful	Il parle pour ne rien dire.	He talks without saying anything.
raconter des salades	to tell salads	to tell lies or nonsense	Arrête de raconter des salades.	Stop making things up.
faire la sourde oreille	to make the deaf ear	to ignore on purpose	Il fait la sourde oreille quand on lui parle.	He ignores us when we talk to him.
mettre son grain de sel	to put one's grain of salt	to give an unwanted opinion	Il met toujours son grain de sel.	He always gives his unwanted opinion.
avoir quelqu'un dans le nez	to have someone in the nose	to dislike someone strongly	Je l'ai dans le nez depuis longtemps.	I've disliked him for a long time.
avoir un mot sur le bout de la langue	to have a word on the tip of the tongue	to almost remember a word	J'ai un mot sur le bout de la langue.	I have a word on the tip of my tongue.
avoir la banane	to have the banana	to be very happy and smiling	Elle a la banane ce matin.	She's in a great mood this morning.
mettre du beurre dans les épinards	to put butter in the spinach	to improve a modest income	Ce petit boulot met du beurre dans les épinards.	This little job helps improve our income.
compter pour du beurre	to count for butter	to not matter at all	Son avis compte pour du beurre.	His opinion doesn't matter at all.
rouler quelqu'un dans la farine	to roll someone in flour	to trick someone	Il m'a roulé dans la farine.	He tricked me.
faire tout un fromage de quelque chose	to make a whole cheese out of something	to make a big deal out of something	Ne fais pas tout un fromage de ça.	Don't make a big deal out of it.

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entre la poire et le fromage	between the pear and the cheese	during a meal, especially after the main course	On a parlé de travail entre la poire et le fromage.	We talked about work during the meal.
quand les poules auront des dents	when hens have teeth	never	Il paiera quand les poules auront des dents.	He'll pay never.
appeler un chat un chat	to call a cat a cat	to speak plainly	Il faut appeler un chat un chat.	We have to call things by their name.
manger sur le pouce	to eat on the thumb	to eat quickly and standing up	J'ai mangé sur le pouce.	I ate quickly, standing up.
toucher du bois	to touch wood	to avoid bad luck	Tout va bien, touchons du bois.	Everything is fine; let's hope it stays that way.
avoir de la veine	to have luck	to be lucky	Tu as de la veine !	You're lucky!
pas de bol	no luck	bad luck	Pas de bol, le train est parti.	Bad luck, the train left.
coup de bol	lucky break	a stroke of luck	J'ai eu un coup de bol.	I had a stroke of luck.
ça tombe bien	that falls well	that works out well	Ça tombe bien, je suis libre.	That works out well, I'm free.
ça alors	that, then	wow; really?	Ça alors, je ne m'y attendais pas !	Wow, I didn't expect that!
en voir de toutes les couleurs	to see all the colors	to go through a lot of trouble	Avec lui, j'en ai vu de toutes les couleurs.	With him, I've been through a lot.
tomber de haut	to fall from high up	to be very surprised and disappointed	Il est tombé de haut en apprenant la nouvelle.	He was shocked when he heard the news.
n'en revenir pas	to not come back from it	to be amazed	Je n'en reviens pas.	I can't believe it.
avoir du nez	to have a nose	to have good intuition	Il a du nez pour les affaires.	He has a good instinct for business.
sentir le vent tourner	to feel the wind turning	to sense that things are changing	Il sent le vent tourner.	He senses that things are changing.
être fauché	to be broke	to have no money	Je suis fauché ce mois-ci.	I'm broke this month.
ne pas rouler sur l'or	not to roll on gold	to be short of money	On ne roule pas sur l'or.	We're not rich.
valoir son pesant d'or	to be worth its weight in gold	to be very valuable or excellent	Son aide vaut son pesant d'or.	His help is extremely valuable.
faire une croix sur	to make a cross on	to give up on something	Je fais une croix sur les vacances cette année.	I'm giving up on holidays this year.
avoir de quoi faire	to have enough to do	to have plenty to deal with	Avec trois enfants, on a de quoi faire.	With three children, we have plenty to deal with.
faire les fins de mois	to make the end of the month	to manage until payday	Il fait les fins de mois difficilement.	He struggles to make ends meet.
en avoir pour son argent	to get one's money's worth	to get full value for money	Avec ce spectacle, on en a eu pour son argent.	With this show, we got our money's worth.
coûter bonbon	to cost candy	to be very expensive	Cette voiture coûte bonbon.	This car costs a lot.
être à sec	to be dry	to be out of money	Je suis à sec avant la fin du mois.	I'm out of money before the end of the month.