

Lesson 1: Robert Looks Uptight

*(It's January at the University of California in Riverside, California (UCR). Robert and Dustin, two seniors at UCR, have finished eating lunch in the cafeteria and are just **about to** leave.)*

Dustin: You look kind of **uptight**, Robert.

Robert: I'm not really. It's just that I think that there may be an opening in this class that I thought was full and I want to be sure that, if there is one, I **beat everyone else to it**. I really need this class if I want to graduate on schedule.

Dustin: So what are you going to do?

Robert: Well, I need to go see the professor this afternoon. The thing is, it's **about time** for me to get back to the lab and finish up some experiments so I'm going to have to **hold off on** seeing her till later. Anyway, what are you doing this afternoon?

Dustin: Oh, I think I'm going to go to the gym and then print some stuff off the computer and take it over to Starbucks and work on it there.

Robert: So how about if I **drop by** there around 4:00 or maybe later if I get **held up**?

Dustin: OK. See you there.

Extra Idiom

to drop by = to make a short visit

Exercise 1:1

Directions: Reread the dialogue and put the letter of the best meaning next to each of the idioms below.

1. _____ to be about to do something
 2. _____ to be about time to do something
 3. _____ to be uptight
 4. _____ to beat someone to do something
 5. _____ to hold off on something
 6. _____ to hold something up
 7. _____ to hold someone up
-
- a. to be very tense; to be unable to relax
 - b. to get to something before someone else, by being faster than he is
 - c. to prevent something from happening at this time; to delay something
 - d. to be approximately the time to do something (we can do this thing immediately or in the near future, as we think is best)
 - e. to be ready to do something in the immediate future
 - f. to postpone doing something (until conditions are more favorable)
 - g. to rob someone at gunpoint *or* to delay someone

Exercise 1:2

Directions: Reread the dialogue and put "True" or "False" next to each of the following sentences.

1. _____ Dustin thinks that Robert looks a bit **uptight**.
2. _____ Robert wants to join a class.
3. _____ Dustin needs to return to his laboratory *immediately*.
4. _____ Robert thinks he should wait until later to talk to a professor.
5. _____ Dustin will **drop by** Starbucks around 4:00 this afternoon.

Exercise 1:3

Directions: Put an X next to the best answer for each question below.

1. If **I am uptight**, I will probably make
 - a. _____ fewer mistakes than usual.
 - b. _____ more mistakes than usual.

2. If something **is about to** happen, it is
 - a. _____ always too late to stop it.
 - b. _____ often too late to stop it.

3. If it **is about time** for the play to begin,
 - a. _____ the stage crew has probably almost finished the arrangement of the props on the stage.
 - b. _____ the play will probably need to be canceled.

4. If **it's about time to do something**, we
- _____ must always do this thing within a minute or two.
 - _____ have a little flexibility as to when we do this thing.
5. If you want **to beat someone to something**, we can guess that
- _____ there is enough of this thing to satisfy everyone.
 - _____ some people will not be able to get this thing.
6. To want **to beat someone to something** is
- _____ a human emotion.
 - _____ always an admirable emotion.
7. When we **hold off on** an action, we are usually waiting until
- _____ thirty seconds later.
 - _____ conditions look more favorable for this action.
8. Why did the teacher **hold off on** giving the test?
- _____ Because he still needed to explain an important concept.
 - _____ Because many of his students dislike taking tests.
9. What often **holds** people **up** in big cities?
- _____ Traffic.
 - _____ Ducks and geese.
10. If someone says, "I **was held up** yesterday" this person either
- _____ was robbed at gunpoint *or* was delayed.
 - _____ was robbed at gunpoint *or* slept too long in the morning.

Exercise 1:4

Directions: Put the best idiom from Exercise 1:1 into each blank space in the sentences below.

1. When the explorer Scott finally arrived at the South Pole, he found that Amundsen had beaten him _____ it a month earlier.
2. That magazine comes out twelve times a year and I pay \$5 a copy at the newsstand. I think that it's about _____ for me to get my own subscription. I'd save a lot of money that way.
3. If there was a holdup last night on Mississippi Street, a criminal held someone _____ on Mississippi Street last night.
4. In England, people still tell stories about Robin Hood who lived at the end of the 12th century and who (legends say) held _____ rich people in Sherwood Forest in order to give their money to the poor.
5. If your sister is feeling _____ about her job interview tomorrow, what could you say to her to help her feel less nervous?
6. (On the telephone) "Hello, this is Kirsten Linz. Could you tell Mr. Pratt that my taxi is _____ up in traffic so I'll be just a few minutes late? Thank you!"
7. When we say the meeting is "about _____ begin," we are making an observation. We understand that the meeting will begin almost immediately. We are not controlling the situation; we are just observing it. But when we say that it is about _____ for the meeting to begin, we are making a judgment or giving an opinion. In this situation, we usually control the situation so it is our decision to do this now or to wait a little bit to do this thing.
8. I think it's _____ time to begin. Are you ready now or would you like me to hold off _____ it for a couple of minutes?
9. When the conductor steps up to the podium, you know that the concert is _____ to begin.
10. In the Aesop fable about the hare (rabbit) and the tortoise, the hare is much faster than the tortoise. However, the hare becomes too confident and stops to take a nap by the side of the road in the middle of the race. While he is sleeping, the tortoise passes him by and beats _____ to the finish line.

11. When you hold off _____ something, you usually control the situation and you make the decision to do something later, but if something _____ you up, you have little influence on the situation. This thing does not allow you to go ahead with your plan of action.
12. It's about time for us _____ get going. It's eleven o'clock already!
13. If you are _____ to have surgery and you suddenly become sick, the doctor will almost certainly want to _____ off on the surgery until you are healthy again.
14. I was just about _____ leave for work when the telephone rang, but I didn't answer it. I knew that, if I picked it up, I might miss my bus.
15. If one team of scientists can beat another team of scientists _____ an important discovery, they may win the Nobel Prize for medicine. That is one reason why some scientists are in a hurry to make new discoveries.
16. When we say that we "beat someone," we mean that we are superior because we get a higher score on a test, a better performance in an athletic competition (for example, when the Brazilians beat the Americans at soccer, etc.), but when we _____ someone to something, we "win" because we arrive at a thing or at a place first.
17. I saw a great parking space, but another driver beat me _____ it.
18. It seems that, in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, at Carnival time, almost no one is _____. Everyone always seems to be relaxed and happy.
19. When William the Conqueror crossed from France to invade England in the autumn of 1066, he _____ off on crossing The English Channel until he got a brief interval of good weather. If he hadn't gotten that very brief interval of fair weather, he would have had to hold off _____ his invasion until the spring of 1067. If that had happened, English history (and the English language) would have been very different, according to many historians.
20. In your life, what is it about _____ for you to do? (You don't need to do it immediately, but you should not wait much longer to do it.)