

UDC 81'373.72:159.953

HOOK-FRAME: AN ORIGINAL ALGORITHM FOR LEARNING ENGLISH IDIOMS

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While learning English, I encountered a common difficulty: idioms were hard to remember. A dream for anyone learning idioms is to memorize ten units a day or more. Students put in the effort, but after a week, only one or two idioms remain in their memory. Rote memorization doesn't work because idioms are tricky — their literal meaning often has nothing to do with their actual meaning.

The problem is familiar to everyone who learns a language. But for me, a person with an engineering degree and a love of analytics, it was especially acute. I needed not just "advice", but a clear, reproducible algorithm that can be applied to any new idiom. That's how the method I call "Hook-Frame" was born. In this article, I'll explain how it works, show examples, and demonstrate why it is effective.

Despite the many existing methods of memorizing idioms, most of them do not take into account the cognitive characteristics of students, or require significant time.

The **purpose** of the work is to propose an algorithm based on the theory of double coding and adapted for people with an analytical mindset.

Tasks:

1. Describe the algorithm of the method.
2. Show its application with examples.
3. Create visual images for the three idioms.
4. Substantiate the effectiveness of the approach.

Before offering a solution, it is important to understand the nature of the problem. An idiom (phraseological unit) is a fixed expression whose meaning can not be deduced from the meanings of its individual words. For example, the English idiom "to spill the beans" literally means "рассыпать бобы," while the real meaning is "выдать секрет, проболтаться." From a memory perspective, idioms are difficult for three reasons:

1. The gap between form and content: The brain tries to understand a phrase through familiar words ("beans," "spill"), but encounters an unexpected meaning ("reveal a secret"). This creates cognitive dissonance.

2. Lack of logic: We usually memorize new vocabulary through context or through connections with known words. Idioms often lack such connections — the meanings have to be memorized mechanically, and mechanical memory is unreliable.

3. Lack of visualization: Words denoting specific objects (table, dog, book) are easy to visualize. Idioms often describe abstract concepts: to reveal a secret, to feel sad, to spend a lot of money. Abstractions are harder to remember.

Research in the field of cognitive psychology confirms that it is easier to remember information that is encoded in two ways — verbally (words) and visually (images). This phenomenon is known as the double coding theory [1]. It is on this principle that the method is built, which I will describe in this article.

Step 1. Find the "hook" (keyword)

In any idiom, you need to find a word that can be easily visualized. It is usually a noun or adjective denoting a color or a bright quality. Verbs are less suitable because it is harder to "visualize" an action in a single image.

The rule for choosing a hook: Choose something you can see, touch, or imagine as an object.

Examples of successful choices: to spill the beans — **beans** (a specific object); to feel blue — **blue** (color — you can imagine); when pigs fly — **pigs** (easy to imagine); to cost **an arm and a leg** — arm, leg (body parts)

Example of an unsuccessful choice: In the idiom to be on cloud nine, one might mistakenly choose the verb "**to be**." But the action of "being" is harder to capture in a static frame than the object "cloud." A cloud is an excellent hook — a concrete object with shape and color.

Step 2. Building a logical bridge

Now you need to create a connection between the hook and the meaning of the idiom. This is a creative stage, but it should be grounded in logic. Ask yourself: "How can this word be related to the idiom's meaning?" It is important that the connection be logical, not absurd (see Table 1).

Table 1. Relationship between an idiom and its meaning

Idiom	Hook	Meaning
1. spill the beans	beans	выдать секрет
2. to feel blue	blue	грустить
3. when pigs fly	pigs	никогда

Idiom 1: Beans are usually stored in a closed pot (just as secrets are kept inside). If the pot is overturned, the beans spill out and become visible to everyone. The same happens with a secret: once it's told, it's no longer a secret.

Idiom 2: In European culture, blue is associated with sadness and melancholy. There is even a musical genre called "blues" — sad music. Feeling blue, therefore, means feeling sad.

Idiom 3: The logic is obvious: pigs don't fly. This is a biological fact. The event will happen only when pigs start flying — in other words, never.

Step 3. Create the final "frame"

Now you need to imagine one simple, static image in which your hook plays the main role. It should not be a cartoon or a scene, but a freeze frame — like a paused moment from a movie or an illustration in a book.

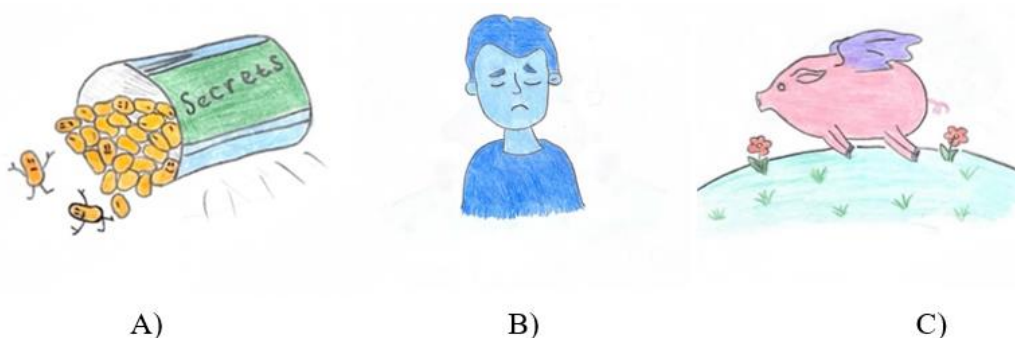
How to choose a freeze frame:

1. Keep it simple. Do not overload the image with details.
2. Place the hook at the center. It should be the most obvious visual element.

For "spill the beans": An overturned glass jar labeled "SECRETS." Beans are pouring out of the jar into a pile, with some beans already scattered on the table (Picture 1A).

For "feel blue": A sad man, completely painted blue (Picture 1B).

For "when pigs fly": A pink pig with small bird wings stands on the ground, trying to take off — but failing (Picture 1C).



Picture 1 – Author's illustrations for the Hook-Frame method.

Why does this method work? From the perspective of psychology and memory physiology, the Hook-Frame method is effective for several reasons:

1. Dual coding of information. When using this method, information is encoded both verbally (words and logic) and visually (image). This makes it more

memorable. The brain creates two pathways to the same memory: if one weakens, the other helps retrieve the information.

2. Emotional engagement. The learner creates their own images, which are personally meaningful. This process is creative and enjoyable. When an activity triggers positive emotions, it activates additional areas of the brain and improves memory.

3. Logical foundation for analytical minds. Many visualization methods suggest simply "imagining something funny." For people with an analytical mindset (engineers, programmers, mathematicians), this approach often feels unserious and ineffective. My method provides a logical rationale first, and only then introduces the image. This makes it comfortable for those who need to understand before they visualize.

The method was tested on my own experience over three months. During this time, I analyzed more than 120 English idioms at a steady pace (studying 3 idioms per day). The results were recorded both subjectively (based on perceived ease of memorization) and objectively (through tests after one week and one month) (see Table 2).

Table 2. Quantitative results

Method	The percent of material I memorized in a week	The percent of material I memorized in a month
Traditional method (cramming)	20-25%	5%
"Hook-frame" method	90-95%	70-75%

Qualitative observations: When I encounter an idiom in a text, I do not recall its definition directly — instead, I remember the visual frame. The meaning is instantly extracted from that image. Moreover, learning new idioms no longer feels like a chore; it has become an engaging activity.

Conclusions: The proposed "Hook-Frame" method is a simple, reproducible, and effective algorithm for memorizing English idioms. Its key strengths lie in its versatility, adaptability, emotional engagement, and reliability.

I do not claim to have discovered a new principle — visualization as a memorization technique has long been known. However, what I offer is a concrete, clearly structured algorithm that can be applied systematically, rather than on a case-by-case basis. In my view, this is the main value of this work for the practical study of foreign languages.

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