ANSWER KEY WITH EXPLANATIONS

Modern Idioms and Clichés to Avoid in English, with Quiz

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Explanations

1. Free wi-fi on every bus would be ___ for students who travel to college.
✔ **B) a game changer**
A game changer is something new that changes how everyone does things. The other forms are not idioms.

2. Which situation is a perfect storm?
✔ **D) a flood, a power cut and a strike in the same week**
A perfect storm is several real problems arriving together and making each other worse. A row about something small is a storm in a teacup.

3. After the pandemic, working from the kitchen table became ___.
✔ **A) the new normal**
The new normal is a once-strange situation that is now everyday life. The words and their order are fixed.

4. The designer is known for ___ with jackets made from old sails.
✔ **C) pushing the envelope**
Push the envelope means go beyond the usual limits; the envelope was a plane's safe range. Push the boat out is a different idiom (spend a lot on a celebration), and it needs out.

5. "Just add hot water and stir. ___"
✔ **C) It's not rocket science.**
It's not rocket science means it is easy. There is no article: rocket science, like science, is uncountable here.

6. I opened an article on Roman roads at nine, and by midnight I had ___.
✔ **A) gone down a rabbit hole**
Go down a rabbit hole means one thing leads to another until you are deep in a strange topic. The image is from Alice in Wonderland.

7. Our manager ___ by telling the director the mistake was all mine.
✔ **D) threw me under the bus**
Throw someone under the bus means let them take the blame to save yourself. Throw someone in at the deep end means give them a hard task with no help; a lifeline is help.

8. Instead of apologising, the comedian ___ the joke and told it again on TV.
✔ **B) doubled down on**
Double down on means repeat a view more strongly when criticised. Back down is the opposite; double up means bend over (with laughter or pain); double back means turn and go back.

9. Raising £10,000 in a month is ___ for a small village school.
✔ **B) a big ask**
A big ask is a hard request or target, informal British and Australian English. The similar idiom is a tall order, never a tall ask.

10. Residents felt the consultation was ___: the decision had already been made.
✔ **D) a tick-box exercise**
A tick-box exercise is done only so a form says it was done. Tick-tock is a clock's sound and a box office sells tickets.

11. "Should the report use Arial or Calibri?" "Either. It's not ___."
✔ **A) a hill I want to die on**
Not a hill I want to die on means not worth fighting for, so I will let it go. Only die on is part of the idiom.

12. In a formal report, which word replaces the cliché "at the end of the day"?
✔ **C) ultimately**
At the end of the day means the most important thing is, so ultimately fits. Eventually means after a long time, and lastly introduces the final point in a list.

13. What is the best replacement in a formal email for "Going forward, please use the side door."?
✔ **A) In future**
Going forward is office jargon for from now on. In future is the clear British choice; the other options do not mean from now on at the start of a sentence.

14. Why do examiners dislike "In this day and age" as an essay opener?
✔ **B) It is a tired phrase that only means now.**
In this day and age is correct British English, but it is a cliché: it only means now. Open with a fact or a clear claim instead.

15. "The train's cancelled again." "Oh well, ___." She hates that phrase and ___.
✔ **C) it is what it is … avoids it like the plague**
It is what it is means we can't change it, so let's accept it. Avoid something like the plague means stay well away from it; like the plague is fixed.