ANSWER KEY WITH EXPLANATIONS

Using Idioms Correctly: Fixed and Flexible Parts, with Quiz

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1	**D**	2	**A**	3	**C**	4	**B**	5	**A**	6	**D**	7	**B**	8	**C**	9	**A**	10	**C**
11	**D**	12	**B**	13	**A**	14	**C**	15	**B**										

Explanations

1. Which sentence uses “kick the bucket” in a suitable way?
✔ **D) My old laptop kicked the bucket the night before my deadline.**
Kick the bucket is a jokey way to say die, fine for a machine. It is wrong at a funeral or in a sympathy message, and the passive loses the idiom’s meaning.

2. I hate phoning the bank, but tomorrow I’ll ___ and call them.
✔ **A) bite the bullet**
Bite the bullet means do the painful thing you have put off. The article and the singular never change, and the verb is always bite.

3. The newspaper ___ and announced the winner before the votes were counted.
✔ **C) jumped the gun**
Jump the gun means act too early, like a runner who starts before the pistol. The verb and the noun are both fixed; fire the gun is only literal.

4. Our flight was eight hours late and, ___, the airline lost our bags.
✔ **B) to add insult to injury**
To add insult to injury introduces something that makes a bad situation worse. The order is fixed; salt belongs to a different idiom, rub salt into the wound.

5. If you are burning the candle at both ends, what are you doing?
✔ **A) working late and getting up early for too long**
Burn the candle at both ends means you go to bed late and get up early, day after day, until you are exhausted.

6. “I think Jo got the wrong end of the stick.” What happened?
✔ **D) She misunderstood what someone said.**
Get the wrong end of the stick means misunderstand completely. Do not mix it up with the American get the short end of the stick, which means be treated unfairly.

7. The news that two branches would close really ___ among the pigeons.
✔ **B) set the cat**
The idiom accepts put or set, but the cat is part of the fixed core. Throw is not one of the accepted verbs.

8. There is so much detail in this report that we can’t see the ___ for the trees.
✔ **C) wood**
The British idiom is can’t see the wood for the trees, singular wood with no article change. American English says the forest for the trees.

9. Every politician fears that a journalist will find a ___.
✔ **A) skeleton in the cupboard**
A skeleton in the cupboard is a shameful secret from the past. British English says cupboard, American closet; wardrobe, ghost and bone are not part of the idiom.

10. Don’t ask who should pay for the broken fence; that would ___.
✔ **C) open a can of worms**
Open a can of worms means start on one question and find many harder problems. The can and the worms are fixed.

11. Our engagement was meant to be a secret, but my brother ___ at dinner.
✔ **D) spilled the beans**
Spill the beans means tell a secret too early. Spilt milk belongs to a proverb about things you cannot change; let and drop are not the idiom’s verbs.

12. Police say that ___ in the search for the missing walker.
✔ **B) no stone will be left unturned**
Leave no stone unturned means try everything. It often appears in the passive, but no, stone and unturned must all stay.

13. Ten reported cases may be ___: experts think hundreds more go unreported.
✔ **A) only the tip of the iceberg**
The tip of the iceberg is the small part of a problem you can see. Tip and iceberg are fixed; only or just often comes before it.

14. The expensive watch left at the scene was ___: the burglar had dropped it to fool the police.
✔ **C) a red herring**
A red herring is a clue that pulls attention away from the truth. A dark horse is a person with hidden talents, which does not fit here.

15. The study ___ by testing the drug on teenagers, but the jury ___ on whether it is safe.
✔ **B) broke new ground … is still out**
Break new ground means do something nobody has done before. The jury is still out means nobody has decided yet; in and gone out break the idiom.