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NTC's  
Super-Mini  
**ENGLISH**  
**IDIOMS**  
Dictionary

An Up-to-Date Guide

to the Idioms of

**British English**



*NTC Publishing Group*

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Super-Mini  
ENGLISH  
IDIOMS  
Dictionary

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*NTC Publishing Group*

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0-07-139995-X

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DOI: 10.1036/007139995X



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# To the User

All languages have phrases or sentences that cannot be understood literally. Even if you know all the words in a phrase and understand all the grammar of the phrase completely, the meaning may still not be apparent. Many proverbs, informal phrases, and common sayings offer this kind of problem. A phrase or sentence of this type is said to be idiomatic. This dictionary is a collection of the idiomatic phrases and sentences that occur frequently in the varieties of English that follow the British standard.

The dictionary is designed for easy use by lifelong speakers of English, as well as by the new-to-English speaker or learner. Readers who are native speakers of American, Australian, Canadian, or other varieties of English will find the entries fascinating and entertaining. Special features, such as numerous full-sentence examples and a Phrase-Finder Index, make this dictionary uniquely effective for language learners.

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# How to Use This Dictionary

First, try looking up the complete phrase in the dictionary. The entries are in absolute alphabetical order; that is, phrases are alphabetized letter by letter, disregarding spaces, hyphens, and punctuation. Entry phrases are never inverted or reordered. For example, **in the same boat** is listed under **in**, not as **the same boat, in; boat, in the same; or same boat, in the**. In the entry heads, the word *someone* or *one* stands for persons, and *something* stands for things.

If you do not find the phrase you want, or if you cannot decide exactly what the phrase is, look up any of its major words in the Phrase-Finder Index, which begins on page 207. There you will find listed, under the key word you have looked up, all the phrases that contain that word. Pick out the phrase you want, and look it up in the main body of the dictionary.

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# Terms and Symbols

□ (a box) marks the beginning of an example.

**ALSO:** introduces additional forms within an entry that are related to the main entry head.

**AND** indicates that an entry head has variant forms that are the same as, or similar to, the entry head in meaning. One or more variant forms may be preceded by **AND**.

**entry head** is the first word or phrase, in boldface type, of an entry; the word or phrase that the definition explains.

**see** means to turn to the entry head indicated.

**see also** means to consult the entry head indicated for additional information or to find expressions similar in form or meaning to the entry head containing the “see also” instruction.

**see under** means to search within the text of the entry indicated for a phrase that is in boldface type and introduced by **ALSO**.

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# A

**above one's station** higher than one's social class or position in society. □ *He has been educated above his station and is now ashamed of his parents' poverty.* □ *She is getting above her station since she started working in the office. She ignores her old friends in the warehouse.*

**above someone's head** too difficult or clever for someone to understand. □ *The children have no idea what the new teacher is talking about. Her ideas are way above their heads.* □ *She started a physics course, but it turned out to be miles above her head.*

**according to one's (own) lights** according to the way one believes; according to the way one's conscience or inclinations lead one. □ *People must act on this matter according to their own lights.* □ *John may have been wrong, but he did what he did according to his lights.*

**act the goat** deliberately to behave in a silly or eccentric way; to play the fool. (Informal.) □ *He was asked to leave the class because he was always acting the goat.* □ *No one takes him seriously. He acts the goat too much.*

**advanced in years** old; elderly. □ *My uncle is advanced in years and can't hear too well.* □ *Many people lose their hearing somewhat when they are advanced in years.*

**afraid of one's own shadow** easily frightened; always frightened, timid, or suspicious. □ *After Tom was robbed, he was afraid of his own shadow.* □ *Jane has always been a shy child. She has been afraid of her own shadow since she was three.*

**aid and abet someone** to help someone, especially in a crime or misdeed; to incite someone to do something which is wrong. □ *He was scolded for aiding and abetting the boys who were fighting.* □ *It's illegal to aid and abet a thief.*

**air of sanctity** See odour of sanctity.

**airs and graces** proud behaviour adopted by one who is trying to impress others by appearing more important than one actually is. □ *She is only a junior secretary, but from her airs and graces you would think she was managing director.* □ *Jane has a very humble background—despite her airs and graces.*

**(all) at sea (about something)** confused; lost and bewildered. □ *Mary is all at sea about the process of getting married.* □ *When it comes to maths, John is totally at sea.*

**all ears (and eyes)** listening eagerly and carefully. (Informal.) □ *Well, hurry up and tell me! I'm all ears.* □ *Be careful what you say. The children are all ears and eyes.*

**(all) Greek to me** unintelligible to me. (Usually with some form of *be*.) □ *I can't understand it. It's Greek to me.* □ *It's all Greek to me. Maybe Sally knows what it means.*

**all hours (of the day and night)** very late in the night or very early in the morning. □ *Why do you always stay out until all hours of the day and night?* □ *I like to stay out until all hours partying.*

**all over bar the shouting** decided and concluded; finished except for the formalities. (Informal. An elaboration of *all over*, which means “finished.”) □ *The last goal was made just as the final whistle sounded. Tom said, “Well, it's all over bar the shouting.”* □ *Tom has finished his exams and is waiting to graduate. It's all over bar the shouting.*

**all skin and bones** See nothing but skin and bones.

**all thumbs** very awkward and clumsy, especially with one's hands. (Informal.) □ *Poor Bob can't play the piano at all. He's all thumbs.* □ *Mary is all thumbs when it comes to gardening.*

**all to the good** for the best; for one's benefit. □ *He missed his train, but it was all to the good because the train had a crash.* □ *It was all to the good that he died before his wife. He couldn't have coped without her.*

**any port in a storm** a phrase indicating that when one is in difficulties one must accept any way out, whether one likes the solution or not. □ *I don't want to live with my parents, but it's a case of any port in a storm. I can't find a flat.* □ *He hates his job, but he can't get another. Any port in a storm, you know.*

**apple of someone's eye** someone's favourite person or thing. □ *Tom is the apple of Mary's eye. She thinks he's great.* □ *Jean is the apple of her father's eye.*

**armed to the teeth** heavily armed with weapons. □ *The bank robber was armed to the teeth when he was caught.* □ *There are too many guns around. The entire country is armed to the teeth.*

**as a duck takes to water** easily and naturally. (Informal.) □ *She took to singing just as a duck takes to water.* □ *The baby adapted to the feeding-bottle as a duck takes to water.*

**as black as one is painted** as evil or unpleasant as one is thought to be. (Usually negative.) □ *The landlord is not as black as he is painted. He seems quite generous.* □ *Young people are rarely as black as they are painted in the media.*

**(as) black as pitch** very black; very dark. □ *The night was as black as pitch.* □ *The rocks seemed black as pitch against the silver sand.*

**(as) bold as brass** brazen; very bold and impertinent. □ *She went up to her lover's wife, bold as brass.* □ *The girl arrives late every morning as bold as brass.*

**(as) bright as a button** very intelligent; extremely alert. □ *The little girl is as bright as a button.* □ *Her new dog is bright as a button.*

**(as) calm as a millpond** [for water to be] exceptionally calm. (Referring to the still water in a pond around a mill in contrast to the fast-flowing stream which supplies it.) □ *The English channel was calm as a millpond that day.* □ *Jane gets seasick even when the sea is calm as a millpond.*

**(as) cold as charity 1.** very cold; icy. □ *The room was as cold as charity.* □ *It was snowing and the moors were cold as charity.* **2.** very unresponsive; lacking in passion. □ *Their mother keeps them clean and fed, but she is cold as charity.* □ *John's sister is generous and welcoming, but John is as cold as charity.*

**(as) fit as a fiddle** healthy and physically fit. (Informal.) □ *In spite of her age, Mary is as fit as a fiddle.* □ *Tom used to be fit as a fiddle. Look at him now!*

**(as) happy as a lark** visibly happy and cheerful. (Note the variations in the examples.) □ *Sally walked along whistling, as happy as a lark.* □ *The children danced and sang, happy as larks.*

**(as) happy as a sandboy** AND **(as) happy as Larry; (as) happy as the day is long** very happy; carefree. □ *Mary's as happy as a sandboy now that she is at home all day with her children.* □ *Peter earns very little money, but he's happy as Larry in his job.* □ *The old lady has many friends and is happy as the day is long.*

**(as) happy as Larry** See (as) happy as a sandboy.

**(as) happy as the day is long** See (as) happy as a sandboy.

**(as) hungry as a hunter** very hungry. □ *I'm as hungry as a hunter. I could eat anything!* □ *Whenever I jog, I get hungry as a hunter.*

**(as) large as life (and twice as ugly)** an exaggerated way of saying that a person or a thing actually appeared in a particular place. (Informal.) □ *The little child just stood there as large as life and laughed very hard.* □ *I opened the door, and there was Tom, large as life.* □ *I came home and found this cat in my chair, as large as life and twice as ugly.*

**asleep at the wheel** not attending to one's assigned task; failing to do one's duty at the proper time. □ *I should have spotted the error. I must have been asleep at the wheel.* □ *The management must have been asleep at the wheel to let the firm get into such a state.*

**(as) near as dammit** very nearly. (Informal.) □ *He earns sixty thousand pounds a year as near as dammit.* □ *She was naked near as dammit.*

**(as) plain as a pikestaff** very obvious; clearly visible. (*Pikestaff* was originally *packstaff*, a stick on which a pedlar's or traveller's pack was supported. The original reference was to the smoothness of this staff, although the allusion is to another sense of plain: clear or obvious.) □ *The 'no parking' sign was as plain as a pikestaff. How did he miss it?* □ *It's plain as a pikestaff. The children are unhappy.*

**(as) pleased as Punch** very pleased or happy. (From the puppet-show character, who is depicted as smiling gleefully.) □ *The little girl was pleased as Punch with her new dress.* □ *Jack's as pleased as Punch with his new car.*

**(as) quiet as the grave** very quiet; silent. □ *The house is as quiet as the grave when the children are at school.* □ *This town is quiet as the grave now that the offices have closed.*



**(as) safe as houses** completely safe. □ *The children will be as safe as houses on holiday with your parents.* □ *The dog will be safe as houses in the boarding-kennels.*

**(as) sound as a bell** in perfect condition or health; undamaged. □ *The doctor says the old man's heart is as sound as a bell.* □ *I thought the vase was broken when it fell, but it was sound as a bell.*

**(as) thick as thieves** very close-knit; friendly; allied. (Informal.) □ *Mary, Tom, and Sally are as thick as thieves. They go everywhere together.* □ *Those two families are thick as thieves.*

**(as) thick as two short planks** very stupid. (Informal.) □ *Jim must be as thick as two short planks, not able to understand the plans.* □ *Some of the children are clever, but the rest are as thick as two short planks.*

**(as) thin as a rake** very thin; too thin. □ *Mary's thin as a rake since she's been ill.* □ *Jean's been on a diet and is now as thin as a rake.*

**at a loose end** restless and unsettled; unemployed. (Informal.) □ *Just before school starts, all the children are at a loose end.* □ *When Tom is home at the week-ends, he's always at a loose end.* □ *Jane has been at a loose end ever since she lost her job.*

**at a pinch** if absolutely necessary. □ *At a pinch, I could come tomorrow, but it's not really convenient.* □ *He could commute to work from home at a pinch, but it is a long way.*

**at a rate of knots** very fast. (Informal.) □ *They'll have to drive at a rate of knots to get there on time.* □ *They were travelling at a rate of knots when they passed us.*

**at death's door** near death. (Euphemistic.) □ *I was so ill that I was at death's door.* □ *The family dog was at death's door for three days, and then it finally died.*

**at first glance** when first examined; at an early stage. □ *At first glance, the problem appeared quite simple. Later we learned just how complex it really was.* □ *He appeared quite healthy at first glance.*

**at full stretch** with as much energy and strength as possible. □ *The police are working at full stretch to find the murderer.* □ *We cannot accept any more work. We are already working at full stretch.*

**at half-mast** half-way up or down. (Primarily referring to flags. Can be used for things other than flags as a joke.) □ *The flag was flying at half-mast because the general had died.* □ *We fly flags at half-mast when someone important dies.* □ *The little boy ran out of the house with his trousers at half-mast.*

**at large** free; uncaptured. (Usually said of criminals running loose.) □ *At midday the day after the robbery, the thieves were still at large.* □ *There is a murderer at large in the city.*

**at liberty** free; unrestrained. □ *You're at liberty to go anywhere you wish.* □ *I'm not at liberty to discuss the matter.*

**at loggerheads (with someone)** in opposition; at an impasse; in a quarrel. □ *Mr. and Mrs. Jones have been at loggerheads with each other for years.* □ *The two political parties were at loggerheads during the entire legislative session.*

**at one's wits' end** at the limits of one's mental resources. □ *I'm at my wits' end trying to solve this problem.* □ *Tom could do no more to earn money. He was at his wits' end.*

**at sixes and sevens** disorderly; completely disorganized. (Informal.) □ *Mrs. Smith is at sixes and sevens since the death of her husband.* □ *The house is always at sixes and sevens when Bill's home by himself.*

**at someone's beck and call** always ready to obey someone. □ *What makes you think I wait around here at your beck and call? I live here, too, you know!* □ *It was a fine hotel. There were dozens of maids and waiters at our beck and call.*

**at the bottom of the ladder** at the lowest level of pay and status. □ *Most people start work at the bottom of the ladder.* □ *When Ann was declared redundant, she had to start all over again at the bottom of the ladder.*

**at the drop of a hat** immediately and without urging. □ *John was always ready to go fishing at the drop of a hat.* □ *If you need help, just call on me. I can come at the drop of a hat.*

**at the eleventh hour** at the last possible moment. (Biblical.) □ *She always handed her term essays in at the eleventh hour.* □ *We don't worry about death until the eleventh hour.*

**at the end of one's tether** at the limits of one's endurance. □ *I'm at the end of my tether! I just can't go on this way!* □ *These children are driving me out of my mind. I'm at the end of my tether.*

**at the expense of someone or something** to the detriment of someone or something; to the harm or disadvantage of someone or something. □ *He had a good laugh at the expense of his brother.* □ *He took employment in a better place at the expense of a larger income.*

**at the top of one's voice** with a very loud voice. □ *Bill called to Mary at the top of his voice.* □ *How can I work when you're all talking at the top of your voices?*

**avoid someone or something like the plague** to avoid someone or something totally. (Informal.) □ *What's wrong with Bob? Everyone avoids him like the plague.* □ *I don't like opera. I avoid it like the plague.*

# B

**babe in arms** an innocent or naive person. (Informal.) □ *He's a babe in arms when it comes to taking girls out.* □ *Mary has no idea how to fight the election. Politically, she's a babe in arms.*

**back of beyond** the most remote place; somewhere very remote. (Informal.) □ *John hardly ever comes to the city. He lives at the back of beyond.* □ *Mary likes lively entertainment, but her husband likes to holiday in the back of beyond.*

**back to the drawing-board** [it is] time to start over again; [it is] time to plan something over again, especially if it has gone wrong. (Also with *old* as in the examples.) □ *The scheme didn't work. Back to the drawing-board.* □ *I failed English this term. Well, back to the old drawing-board.*

**bag and baggage** with one's luggage; with all one's possessions. (Informal.) □ *Sally showed up at our door bag and baggage one Sunday morning.* □ *All right, if you won't pay the rent, out with you, bag and baggage!*

**baptism of fire** a first experience of something, usually something difficult or unpleasant. □ *My son's just had his first visit to the dentist. He stood up to the baptism of fire very well.* □ *Mary's had her baptism of fire as a teacher. She had to take the worst class in the school.*

**beard the lion in his den** to face an adversary on the adversary's home ground. □ *I went to the solicitor's office to beard the lion in his den.* □ *He said he hadn't wanted to come to my home, but it was better to beard the lion in his den.*

**beat about the bush** to avoid answering a question or discussing a subject directly; to stall; to waste time. □ *Let's stop beating about the bush and discuss this matter.* □ *Stop beating about the bush and answer my question.*

**beat a (hasty) retreat** to retreat or withdraw very quickly. □ *We went out into the cold weather, but beat a retreat to the warmth of our fire.* □ *The cat beat a hasty retreat to its own garden when it saw the dog.*

**be a thorn in someone's side** to be a constant source of annoyance to someone. □ *This problem is a thorn in my side. I wish I had a solution to it.* □ *John was a thorn in my side for years before I finally got rid of him.*

**bed of roses** a situation or way of life that is always happy and comfortable. □ *Living with Pat can't be a bed of roses, but her husband is always smiling.* □ *Being the boss isn't exactly a bed of roses. There are so many problems to sort out.*

**before you can say Jack Robinson** almost immediately. □ *And before you could say Jack Robinson, the bird flew away.* □ *I'll catch a plane and be there before you can say Jack Robinson.*

**be getting on for something** to be close to something; to be nearly at something, such as a time, date, age, etc. (Informal.) □ *It's getting on for midnight.* □ *He must be getting on for fifty.*

**beggar description** to be impossible to describe well enough to give an accurate picture; to be impossible to do justice to in words. □ *Her cruelty to her child beggars description.* □ *The soprano's voice beggars description.*

**beg off** to ask to be released from something; to refuse an invitation. □ *I have an important meeting, so I'll have to beg off.* □ *I wanted to go to the affair, but I had to beg off.*

**believe it or not** to choose to believe something or not. □ *Believe it or not, I just got home from work.* □ *I'm over fifty years old, believe it or not.*

**bend someone's ear** to talk to someone at length, perhaps annoyingly. (Informal.) □ *Tom is over there bending Jane's ear about something.* □ *I'm sorry. I didn't mean to bend your ear for an hour, but I'm upset.*

**be old hat** to be old-fashioned; to be outmoded. (Informal.) □ *That's a silly idea. It's old hat.* □ *Nobody does that any more. That's just old hat.*

**be poles apart** to be very different, especially in opinions or attitudes; to be far from coming to an agreement. □ *Mr. and Mrs. Jones don't get along well. They are poles apart.* □ *They'll never sign the contract because they are poles apart.*

**best bib and tucker** one's best clothing. (Informal.) □ *I always put on my best bib and tucker on Sundays.* □ *Put on your best bib and tucker, and let's go to the city.*

**be thankful for small mercies** to be grateful for any small benefits or advantages one has, especially in a generally difficult situation. □ *We have very little money, but we must be grateful for small mercies. At least we have enough food.* □ *Bob was badly injured in the accident, but at least he's still alive. Let's be grateful for small mercies.*

**beyond one's ken** outside the extent of one's knowledge or understanding. □ *Why she married him is beyond our ken.* □ *His attitude to others is quite beyond my ken.*

**beyond the pale** unacceptable; outlawed. (The Pale historically was the area of English government around Dublin. The people who lived outside this area were regarded as uncivilized.) □ *Your behaviour is simply beyond the pale.* □ *Because of Tom's rudeness, he's considered beyond the pale and is never asked to parties any more.*

**beyond the shadow of a doubt** AND **beyond any shadow of doubt** completely without doubt. (Said of a fact, not a person.) □ *We accepted her story as true beyond the shadow of a doubt.* □ *Please assure us that you are certain of the facts beyond any shadow of doubt.*

**beyond words** more than one can say. (Especially with *grateful* and *thankful*.) □ *Sally was thankful beyond words at being released.* □ *I don't know how to thank you. I'm grateful beyond words.*

**bide one's time** to wait patiently. □ *I've been biding my time for years, just waiting for a chance like this.* □ *He's not the type to just sit there and bide his time. He wants some action.*

**bite someone's head off** to speak sharply and angrily to someone. (Informal.) □ *There was no need to bite Mary's head off just because she was five minutes late.* □ *The boss has been biting everybody's head off since his wife left him.*

**bite the hand that feeds one** to do harm to someone who does good things for you. □ *I'm your mother! How can you bite the hand*

*that feeds you? □ It's a real case of biting the hand that feeds her. She's reported her stepmother to the police for shop-lifting.*

**bitter pill to swallow** an unpleasant fact that has to be accepted. □ *It was a bitter pill for her brother to swallow when she married his enemy. □ We found his deception a bitter pill to swallow.*

**black sheep (of the family)** a member of a family or group who is unsatisfactory or not up to the standard of the rest; the worst member of the family. □ *Mary is the black sheep of the family. She's always in trouble with the police. □ The others are all in well-paid jobs, but John is unemployed. He's the black sheep of the family.*

**blank cheque** freedom or permission to act as one wishes or thinks necessary. (From a signed bank cheque with the amount left blank.) □ *He's been given a blank cheque with regard to reorganizing the workforce. □ The manager has been given no instructions about how to train the staff. He's just been given a blank cheque.*

**blow hot and cold** to be changeable or uncertain (about something). (Informal.) □ *He keeps blowing hot and cold on the question of moving to the country. □ He blows hot and cold about this. I wish he'd make up his mind.*

**blow off steam** See let off steam.

**blow one's own trumpet** to boast; to praise oneself. □ *Tom is always blowing his own trumpet. Is he really as good as he says he is? □ I find it hard to blow my own trumpet, so no one takes any notice of me.*

**blow the lid off (something)** to reveal something, especially wrongdoing; to make wrongdoing public. (Informal.) □ *The police blew the lid off the smuggling ring. □ The journalists blew the lid off the group's illegal activities.*

**blow up in someone's face** [for something] suddenly to get ruined or destroyed while seeming to go well. □ *All my plans blew up in my face when she broke off the engagement. □ It is terrible for your hopes of promotion to blow up in your face.*

**blue blood** the blood [heredity] of a noble family; aristocratic ancestry. □ *The earl refuses to allow anyone who is not of blue blood to marry his son. □ Although Mary's family are poor, she has blue blood in her veins.*

**bone of contention** the subject or point of an argument; an unsettled point of disagreement. □ *We've fought for so long that we've forgotten what the bone of contention is.* □ *The question of a fence between the houses has become quite a bone of contention.*

**born with a silver spoon in one's mouth** born with many advantages; born to a wealthy family; born to have good fortune. □ *Sally was born with a silver spoon in her mouth.* □ *It never rains when he goes on holiday. He was born with a silver spoon in his mouth.*

**bow and scrape** to be very humble and subservient. □ *Please don't bow and scrape. We are all equal here.* □ *The shop assistant came in, bowing and scraping, and asked if he could help us.*

**Box and Cox** two people who keep failing to meet. (Although they both sometimes go to the same place, they are never there at the same time. From characters in a nineteenth-century play, one of whom rented a room by day, the other the same room by night.) □ *Since her husband started doing night-shifts, they are Box and Cox. She leaves for work in the morning before he gets home.* □ *The two teachers are Box and Cox. Mr. Smith takes class on Monday and Wednesday, and Mr. Brown on Tuesday and Thursday.*

**break new ground** to begin to do something which no one else has done; to pioneer (in an enterprise). □ *Dr. Anderson was breaking new ground in cancer research.* □ *They were breaking new ground in consumer electronics.*

**break one's duck** to have one's first success at something. (From a cricketing expression meaning "to begin scoring.") □ *At last Jim's broken his duck. He's got a girl to go out with him.* □ *Jane has failed all her exams up until now, but she's broken her duck by passing French.*

**break one's word** not to do what one said one would; not to keep one's promise. □ *Don't say you'll visit your grandmother if you can't go. She hates for people to break their word.* □ *If you break your word, she won't trust you again.*

**break someone's fall** to cushion a falling person; to lessen the impact of a falling person. □ *When the little boy fell out of the window, the bushes broke his fall.* □ *The old lady slipped on the ice, but a snowbank broke her fall.*



**break someone's heart** to cause someone emotional pain. □ *It just broke my heart when Tom ran away from home.* □ *Sally broke John's heart when she refused to marry him.*

**break the ice** to start social communication and conversation. □ *Tom is so outgoing. He's always the first one to break the ice at parties.* □ *It's hard to break the ice at formal events.*

**break the news (to someone)** to tell someone some important news, usually bad news. □ *The doctor had to break the news to Jane about her husband's cancer.* □ *I hope that the doctor broke the news gently.*

**breathe down someone's neck** to keep close watch on someone, causing worry and irritation; to watch someone's activities, especially to try to hurry something along. (Informal. Refers to standing very close behind a person.) □ *I can't work with you breathing down my neck all the time. Go away.* □ *I will get through my life without your help. Stop breathing down my neck.*

**breathe one's last** to die; to breathe one's last breath. □ *Mrs. Smith breathed her last this morning.* □ *I'll keep running every day until I breathe my last.*

**bring down the curtain (on something)** See ring down the curtain (on something).

**bring home the bacon** to earn a salary. (Informal.) □ *I've got to get to work if I'm going to bring home the bacon.* □ *Go out and get a job so you can bring home the bacon.*

**bring something home to someone** to cause someone to realize the truth of something. □ *Seeing the starving refugees on television really brings home the tragedy of their situation.* □ *It wasn't until she failed her exam that the importance of studying was brought home to her.*

**bring something to a head** to cause something to come to the point when a decision has to be made or action taken. □ *The latest disagreement between management and the union has brought matters to a head. There will be an all-out strike now.* □ *It's a relief that things have been brought to a head. The disputes have been going on for months.*

**bring something to light** to make something known; to discover something. □ *The scientists brought their findings to light.* □ *We must bring this new evidence to light.*

**brush something under the carpet** See sweep something under the carpet.

**bull in a china shop** a very clumsy person around breakable things; a thoughtless or tactless person. (*China* is fine crockery.) □ *Look at Bill, as awkward as a bull in a china shop.* □ *Get that big dog out of my garden. It's like a bull in a china shop.* □ *Bob is so rude, a real bull in a china shop.*

**burn one's boats** AND **burn one's bridges (behind one)** to go so far in a course of action that one cannot turn back; to do something which makes it impossible to return to one's former position. □ *I don't want to emigrate now, but I've rather burned my boats by giving up my job and selling my house.* □ *Mary would now like to marry Peter, but she burned her bridges behind her by breaking off the engagement.*

**burn one's bridges (behind one)** See burn one's boats.

**burn the candle at both ends** to exhaust oneself by doing too much, for example by working very hard during the day and also staying up very late at night. □ *No wonder Mary is ill. She has been burning the candle at both ends for a long time.* □ *You can't keep on burning the candle at both ends.*

**burn the midnight oil** to stay up working, especially studying, late at night. (Refers to working by the light of an oil-lamp.) □ *I have to go home and burn the midnight oil tonight.* □ *If you burn the midnight oil night after night, you'll probably become ill.*

**bury the hatchet** to stop fighting or arguing; to end old resentments. □ *All right, you two. Calm down and bury the hatchet.* □ *I wish Mr. and Mrs. Franklin would bury the hatchet. They argue all the time.*

**bush telegraph** the informal, usually rapid spreading of news or information by word of mouth. □ *The bush telegraph tells me that the manager is leaving.* □ *How did John know that Kate was divorced? He must have heard it on the bush telegraph.*

**business end of something** the part or end of something that actually does the work or carries out the procedure. □ *Keep away*

*from the business end of the electric drill in case you get hurt.* □ *Don't point the business end of that gun at anyone. It might go off.*

**busman's holiday** leisure time spent doing something similar to what one does at work. □ *Tutoring pupils in the evening is too much of a busman's holiday for our English teacher.* □ *It's a bit of a busman's holiday to ask her to be wardrobe mistress for our amateur production in the summer. She's a professional dressmaker.*

**buy a pig in a poke** to purchase or accept something without having seen or examined it. (Poke means "bag.") □ *Buying a car without test driving it is like buying a pig in a poke.* □ *He bought a pig in a poke when he ordered a diamond ring by mail order.*

**buy something for a song** to buy something cheaply. □ *No one else wanted it, so I bought it for a song.* □ *I could buy this house for a song, because it's so ugly.*

**by fits and starts** irregularly; unevenly; with much stopping and starting. (Informal.) □ *Somehow, they got the job done, by fits and starts.* □ *By fits and starts, the old car finally got us to town.*

**by leaps and bounds** AND **in leaps and bounds** rapidly; by large movements forward. □ *Our garden is growing by leaps and bounds.* □ *The profits of my company are increasing in leaps and bounds.*

**by no means** absolutely not; certainly not. □ *I'm by no means angry with you.* □ *"Did you put this box here?" "By no means. I didn't do it, I'm sure."*

**by return post** by a subsequent immediate posting (back to the sender). (A phrase indicating that an answer is expected soon, by mail.) □ *Since this bill is overdue, would you kindly send us your cheque by return post?* □ *I answered your request by return post over a year ago. Please check your records.*

**by the same token** in the same way; reciprocally. □ *Tom must be good when he comes here, and, by the same token, I expect you to behave properly when you go to his house.* □ *The mayor votes for his friend's causes. By the same token, the friend votes for the mayor's causes.*

**by the seat of one's pants** by sheer luck and very little skill. (Informal. Especially with *fly*.) □ *I got through school by the seat of my pants.* □ *The jungle pilot spent most of his days flying by the seat of his pants.*

**by the skin of one's teeth** just barely; by an amount equal to the thickness of the (imaginary) skin on one's teeth. (Informal.) □ *I got through that exam by the skin of my teeth.* □ *I got to the airport late and caught the plane by the skin of my teeth.*

**by the sweat of one's brow** by one's efforts; by one's hard work. □ *Tom grew these vegetables by the sweat of his brow.* □ *Sally made her fortune by the sweat of her brow.*

**by virtue of something** because of something; owing to something. □ *She's permitted to vote by virtue of her age.* □ *They are members of the club by virtue of their great wealth.*

**by word of mouth** by speaking rather than writing. □ *I learned about it by word of mouth.* □ *I need it in writing. I don't trust things I hear about by word of mouth.*

# C

**call a spade a spade** to call something by its right name; to speak frankly about something, even if it is unpleasant. □ *Well, I believe it's time to call a spade a spade. We are just avoiding the issue.* □ *Let's call a spade a spade. The man is a liar.*

**call it a day** to leave work and go home; to say that a day's work has been completed; to bring something to an end; to stop doing something. (Informal.) □ *I'm tired. Let's call it a day even though it's only three o'clock.* □ *They're not engaged any more. They called it a day.* □ *I haven't finished this essay, but I'm calling it a day.*

**call of nature** the need to go to the lavatory. (Humorous.) □ *Stop the car here! I have to answer the call of nature.* □ *There was no interval in the meeting to take account of the call of nature.*

**can't hold a candle to someone** not equal to someone; unable to measure up to someone. (Also with *cannot*.) □ *Mary can't hold a candle to Ann when it comes to playing the piano.* □ *As for singing, John can't hold a candle to Jane.*

**can't make head nor tail of someone or something** unable to understand someone or something. (Also with *cannot*.) □ *John is so strange. I can't make head nor tail of him.* □ *Do this report again. I can't make head nor tail of it.*

**can't see beyond the end of one's nose** unaware of and uncaring for the things which might happen in the future; not far-sighted. (Also with *cannot*.) □ *John is a very poor planner. He can't see beyond the end of his nose.* □ *Ann can't see beyond the end of her nose. She's taken a job without finding out if the firm is financially secure.*

**can't see one's hand in front of one's face** unable to see very far, usually owing to darkness or fog. (Also with *cannot*.) □ *It was so dark that I couldn't see my hand in front of my face.* □ *Bob said that the fog was so thick he couldn't see his hand in front of his face.*

**carry all before one** to be exceptionally successful. □ *He carried all before him on school prize day.* □ *In the sports event, Mary just carried all before her.*

**carry a torch for someone** to be in love with someone who does not return love; to brood over a hopeless love affair. □ *John is carrying a torch for Jane.* □ *Is John still carrying a torch for his lost love?*

**carry the day** See win the day.

**carry the weight of the world on one's shoulders** to appear to be burdened by many problems. □ *Look at Tom. He seems to be carrying the weight of the world on his shoulders.* □ *Cheer up, Tom! You don't need to carry the weight of the world on your shoulders.*

**carte blanche** complete freedom to act or proceed as one pleases. (Literally, a white or blank card.) □ *We were given carte blanche to choose the colour scheme.* □ *They were not instructed where to shop. It was a case of carte blanche.*

**cast in the same mould** very similar. □ *The two sisters are cast in the same mould—equally mean.* □ *All the members of that family are cast in the same mould, and all have ended up in prison.*

**catch one's breath** to resume one's normal breathing after exertion; to return to normal after being busy or very active. □ *I ran so fast that it took me ten minutes to catch my breath.* □ *I don't have time to catch my breath. I have to start work immediately.*

**catch someone on the hop** to find someone unprepared or defenceless. (Informal.) □ *The unexpected exam caught some of the pupils on the hop.* □ *The police caught the suspect on the hop and without an alibi.*

**catch someone's eye** to establish eye contact with someone; to attract someone's attention. □ *Try and catch the barman's eye.* □ *The shiny red car caught Mary's eye.*

**catch the sun** to become sunburnt. (Informal.) □ *The baby's face is red—she's caught the sun.* □ *Fair-skinned people catch the sun easily.*

**Cat got your tongue?** Why don't you speak?; Speak up and answer my question! (Informal.) □ *Answer me! What's the matter, cat got your tongue?* □ *Why don't you speak up? Cat got your tongue?*

**caught over a barrel** at the mercy of someone; under the control of someone. (Informal.) □ *I'm caught over a barrel, and I have to do what he says.* □ *Ann will do exactly what I say. She's caught over a barrel.*

**cause tongues to wag** to cause people to gossip; to give people something to gossip about. □ *The way John was looking at Mary will surely cause tongues to wag.* □ *The way Mary was dressed will also cause tongues to wag.*

**champ at the bit** to be ready and anxious to do something; to be impatient. (Originally said about horses.) □ *The children were champing at the bit to get into the swimming-pool.* □ *The hounds were champing at the bit to begin the hunt.*

**chance one's arm** to do something risky or dangerous. □ *He certainly chanced his arm when he was rude to the boss's wife.* □ *Don't chance your arm by asking for yet another day off.*

**change hands** [for something] to be sold. (Refers to the changing of owners.) □ *How many times has this house changed hands in the last ten years?* □ *We built this house in 1920, and it has never changed hands.*

**change horses in mid-stream** to make major changes in an activity which has already begun; to choose someone or something else after it is too late. □ *I'm already baking a cherry pie. I can't bake an apple pie. It's too late to change horses in mid-stream.* □ *The house is half built. It's too late to employ a different architect. You can't change horses in mid-stream.*

**change someone's tune** to change the manner, attitude, or behaviour of a person, usually from bad to good, or from rude to pleasant. □ *The cashier was most unpleasant until she learned that I'm a bank director. Then she changed her tune.* □ *"I shall fine you £150, and perhaps that will help change your tune," said the judge to the rude defendant.*

**chapter and verse** detailed sources of information. (A reference to the method of referring to biblical texts.) □ *He gave chapter and verse for his reasons for disputing that Shakespeare had written the play.* □ *The suspect gave chapter and verse of his associate's activities.*

**chapter of accidents** a series of misfortunes. □ *Yesterday was just a chapter of accidents—nothing went right.* □ *The play rehearsal con-*

*sisted of a chapter of accidents, but the opening performance was perfect.*

**cheek by jowl** **1.** side by side; close together. □ *The walkers had to walk cheek by jowl along the narrow streets.* □ *The two families lived cheek by jowl in one house.* **2.** in co-operation; with a concerted effort. □ *The children worked cheek by jowl to make their mother's birthday gift in time.* □ *All members of the transition team worked cheek by jowl late into the night to get the job done.*

**cheesed off** bored; depressed; annoyed. □ *He was cheesed off with his job.* □ *She was cheesed off when she missed the bus.*

**cheese-paring** mean; niggardly. □ *He was too cheese-paring to eat properly.* □ *The cheese-paring old woman will not give to the poor.*

**chew the cud** to think deeply. (Informal. From the cow's habit of bringing food back from the first stomach into the mouth to chew it, called chewing the cud.) □ *I can't decide where to go on holiday. I'll have to chew the cud.* □ *He's chewing the cud about what to do next.*

**chilled to the bone** See chilled to the marrow.

**chilled to the marrow** AND **chilled to the bone** very cold. □ *I was chilled to the marrow in that snowstorm.* □ *The children were chilled to the bone in that unheated room.*

**chink in one's armour** a weakness or vulnerable point that provides an opportunity for attacking or impressing someone who is otherwise invulnerable. □ *His love for his child is the chink in his armour.* □ *Jane's insecurity is the chink in her armour.*

**chip off the old block** a person (usually a male) who behaves in the same way as his father or resembles his father. (Usually informal.) □ *John looks like his father—a real chip off the old block.* □ *Bill Jones is a chip off the old block. He's a banker just like his father.*

**chop and change** to keep changing or altering something. □ *The shop is always chopping and changing staff.* □ *The firm is constantly chopping and changing its plans.*

**clap eyes on someone or something** to see someone or something, perhaps for the first time; to set eyes on someone or something. (Informal.) □ *I wish she had never clapped eyes on her fiancé.* □ *I haven't clapped eyes on a red squirrel for years.*



**clear the air** to get rid of doubts or hostile feelings. (Sometimes this is said about an argument or other unpleasantness. The literal meaning is also used.) □ *All right, let's discuss this frankly. It'll be better if we clear the air.* □ *Mr. and Mrs. Brown always seem to have to clear the air with a big argument before they can be sociable.*

**climb down** to admit that one is wrong; to admit defeat. □ *They were sure they were in the right, but they climbed down when we proved them wrong.* □ *The teacher was forced to climb down and admit she had made a mistake.*

**clip someone's wings** to restrain someone; to reduce or put an end to someone's privileges or freedom. □ *You had better learn to get home on time, or your father will clip your wings.* □ *My mother threatened to clip my wings if I kept staying out late.*

**cloak-and-dagger** involving secrecy and plotting. □ *A great deal of cloak-and-dagger stuff goes on in political circles.* □ *A lot of cloak-and-dagger activity was involved in the appointment of the director.*

**close one's eyes to something** to ignore something; to pretend that something is not really happening. □ *You can't close your eyes to the hunger in the world.* □ *His mother closed her eyes to the fact that he was being beaten by his father.*

**cloud-cuckoo-land** an imaginary perfect world. □ *He thinks that he will be able to buy a house easily, but he is living in cloud-cuckoo-land.* □ *She hopes to get a job travelling abroad—she must believe in cloud-cuckoo-land.*

**clutch at straws** to seek something which is useless or unattainable; to make a futile attempt at something. □ *I really didn't think that I would get the job. I was clutching at straws.* □ *She won't accept that he was lost at sea. She's still clutching at straws.*

**cock-and-bull story** a silly, made-up story; a story which is untrue. □ *Don't give me that cock-and-bull story.* □ *I asked for an explanation, and all I got was your ridiculous cock-and-bull story!*

**cock a snook at someone** to show or express defiance or scorn at someone. □ *He cocked a snook at the traffic warden and tore up the ticket.* □ *The boy cocked a snook at the park attendant and walked on the grass.*

**cock of the walk** someone who acts in a more important manner than others in a group. □ *The deputy manager was cock of the walk until the new manager arrived.* □ *He loved acting cock of the walk and ordering everyone about.*

**cold comfort** no comfort or consolation at all. □ *She knows there are others worse off than her, but that's cold comfort.* □ *It was cold comfort to the student that others had failed also.*

**come a cropper** to have a misfortune; to fail. (Literally, to fall off one's horse.) □ *Bob invested all his money in the shares market just before it fell. Did he come a cropper!* □ *Jane was out all night before she took her exams. She really came a cropper.*

**come away empty-handed** to return without anything. □ *All right, go gambling if you must. Don't come away empty-handed, though.* □ *Go to the bank and ask for the loan again. This time try not to come away empty-handed.*

**come down in the world** to lose one's social position or financial standing. □ *Mr. Jones has really come down in the world since he lost his job.* □ *If I were unemployed, I'm certain I'd come down in the world, too.*

**come down to earth** to become realistic or practical, especially after a period of day-dreaming; to become alert to what is going on around one. (Informal.) □ *You have very good ideas, John, but you must come down to earth. We can't possibly afford any of your suggestions.* □ *Pay attention to what is going on. Come down to earth and join the discussion.*

**come down with something** to become ill with some disease. □ *I'm afraid I'm coming down with a cold.* □ *I'll probably come down with pneumonia.*

**come from far and wide** to come from many different places. □ *Everyone was there. They came from far and wide.* □ *We have foods that come from far and wide.*

**come full circle** to return to the original position or state of affairs. □ *The family sold the house generations ago, but the wheel has come full circle and one of their descendants lives there now.* □ *The employers' power was reduced by the unions at one point, but the wheel has come full circle again.*

**come home to roost** to return to cause trouble (for someone). □ *As I feared, all my problems came home to roost.* □ *His lies finally came home to roost. His wife discovered his adultery.*

**come in for something** to receive something; to acquire something. □ *Mary came in for a tremendous amount of money when her aunt died.* □ *Her new play has come in for a lot of criticism.*

**come into something** to inherit something. □ *Jane came into a small fortune when her aunt died.* □ *Mary does not come into her inheritance until she comes of age.*

**come of age** to reach an age when one is old enough to own property, get married, and sign legal contracts. □ *When Jane comes of age, she will buy her own car.* □ *Sally, who came of age last month, entered into an agreement to purchase a house.*

**come off second-best** to be in second place or worse; to be the loser. □ *You can fight with your brother if you like, but you'll come off second-best.* □ *Why do I always come off second-best in an argument with you?*

**come out in the wash** to work out all right. (Informal. This means that problems or difficulties will go away as dirt goes away in the process of washing.) □ *Don't worry about their accusation. It'll all come out in the wash.* □ *This trouble will go away. It'll come out in the wash.*

**come out of nowhere** to appear suddenly. □ *Suddenly, a container lorry came out of nowhere.* □ *The storm came out of nowhere, and we were unprepared.*

**come out of one's shell** to become more friendly; to be more sociable. □ *Ann, you should come out of your shell and spend more time with your friends.* □ *Come out of your shell, Tom. Go out and make some friends.*

**(come) rain or shine** no matter whether it rains or the sun shines. (Informal.) □ *Don't worry. I'll be there come rain or shine.* □ *We'll hold the picnic—rain or shine.*

**come round 1.** finally to agree or consent (to something). □ *I thought he'd never agree, but in the end he came round.* □ *She came round only after we argued for an hour.* **2.** to return to consciousness; to wake up. □ *He came round after we threw cold water in his face.*

□ *The boxer was knocked out, but came round in a few seconds.* **3.** to come for a visit; to stop by (somewhere). □ *Why don't you come round about eight? I'll be home then.* □ *Come round some week-end when you aren't busy.*

**come to a bad end** to have a disaster, perhaps one which is deserved or expected; to die an unfortunate death. □ *I just know that the young man will come to a bad end.* □ *The miserly shopkeeper came to a bad end and was declared bankrupt.*

**come to a head** to come to a crucial point; to come to a point when a problem must be solved. □ *Remember my problem with my neighbours? Well, last night the whole thing came to a head.* □ *The battle between the two factions of the town council came to a head yesterday.*

**come to an untimely end** to come to an early death. □ *Poor Mr. Jones came to an untimely end in a car accident.* □ *The older brother came to an untimely end, but the twin boys lived to a ripe old age.*

**come to a pretty pass** to develop into a bad, unfortunate, or difficult situation. □ *Things have come to a pretty pass when people have to beg in the streets.* □ *When parents are afraid of their children, things have come to a pretty pass.*

**come to grief** to fail or be unsuccessful; to have trouble or grief. □ *The artist wept when her canvas came to grief.* □ *The wedding party came to grief when the bride passed out.*

**come to light** to become known; to be discovered. □ *Some interesting facts about your past have just come to light.* □ *If too many bad things come to light, you may lose your job.*

**come to the fore** to become obvious or prominent; to become important. □ *The question of salary has now come to the fore.* □ *Since his great showing in court, my solicitor has really come to the fore in his profession.*

**conspicuous by one's absence** having one's absence noticed (at an event). □ *We missed you last night. You were conspicuous by your absence.* □ *How could the bride's father miss the wedding party? He was certainly conspicuous by his absence.*

**contradiction in terms** a seeming contradiction in the wording of something. □ *A wealthy pauper is a contradiction in terms.* □ *A straight-talking politician may seem a contradiction in terms.*

**cook someone's goose** to damage or ruin someone. (Informal.)  
 *I cooked my own goose by not showing up on time.*  *Sally cooked Bob's goose for treating her the way he did.*

**cook the books** to cheat in bookkeeping; to make the accounts appear to balance when they do not.  *Jane was sent to jail for cooking the books of her mother's shop.*  *It's hard to tell whether she really cooked the books or just didn't know how to add.*

**cool one's heels** to wait impatiently (for someone). (Informal.)  
 *I spent all afternoon cooling my heels in the waiting room while the doctor talked on the telephone.*  *All right. If you can't behave properly, just sit down here and cool your heels until I call you.*

**cost a pretty penny** to cost a lot of money.  *I'll bet that diamond cost a pretty penny.*  *You can be sure that house cost a pretty penny.*

**cost the earth** to cost an enormous sum of money. (Compare with pay the earth.)  *That huge car must have cost the earth!*  *Do I look as though I can afford a house that costs the earth?*

**count heads** to count people.  *I'll tell you how many people are here after I count heads.*  *Everyone is here. Let's count heads so we can order the drinks.*

**crack a bottle** to open a bottle. (Informal.)  *Let's crack a bottle of champagne to celebrate.*  *We always crack a bottle of port at Christmas.*

**cramp someone's style** to limit someone in some way.  *Having her young sister with her rather cramped her style on the dance floor.*  
 *To ask him to keep regular hours would really be cramping his style.*

**cross a bridge before one comes to it** to worry excessively about something before it happens.  *There is no sense in crossing that bridge before you come to it.*  *She's always crossing bridges before coming to them. She needs to learn to relax.*

**cross one's heart (and hope to die)** to pledge or vow that the truth is being told.  *It's true, cross my heart and hope to die.*  *It's really true—cross my heart.*

**cross swords (with someone)** to enter into an argument with someone.  *I don't want to cross swords with Tom.*  *The last time we crossed swords, we had a terrible time.*

**cross the Rubicon** to do something which inevitably commits one to a following course of action. (The crossing of the River Rubicon by Julius Caesar inevitably involved him in a war with the Senate in 49 B.C.) □ *Jane crossed the Rubicon by signing the contract.* □ *Find another job before you cross the Rubicon and resign from this one.*

**crux of the matter** the central issue of the matter. (*Crux* is Latin for “cross.”) □ *All right, this is the crux of the matter.* □ *It’s about time that we looked at the crux of the matter.*

**cry one’s eyes out** to cry very hard. □ *When we heard the news, we cried our eyes out with joy.* □ *She cried her eyes out after his death.*

**cry over spilled milk** to be unhappy about having done something which cannot be undone. (*Spilled* can also be spelled *spilt*.) □ *I’m sorry that you broke your bicycle, Tom. But there is nothing that can be done now. Don’t cry over spilled milk.* □ *Ann is always crying over spilt milk.*

**cry wolf** to cry out for help or to complain about something when nothing is really wrong. □ *Pay no attention. She’s just crying wolf again.* □ *Don’t cry wolf too often. No one will come.*

**culture vulture** someone whom one considers to be excessively interested in the (classical) arts. □ *She won’t go to a funny film. She’s a real culture vulture.* □ *They watch only highbrow television. They’re culture vultures.*

**cupboard love** affection shown to someone just because of the things, such as food or clothes, they supply. □ *She doesn’t love her husband. It’s just cupboard love.* □ *Her affection for her foster-parents is a pretence—simply cupboard love.*

**curl up (and die)** to retreat and die; to shrink away because one is very embarrassed. □ *When I heard you say that, I could have curled up and died.* □ *Her mother’s praises made her want to curl up.*

**curry favour (with someone)** to try to win favour from someone. □ *The solicitor tried to curry favour with the judge.* □ *It’s silly to curry favour. Just act yourself.*

**cut a fine figure** to look good; to look elegant. □ *Tom really cuts a fine figure on the dance-floor.* □ *Bill cuts a fine figure since he bought some new clothes.*

**cut a long story short** to bring a story to an end. (A formula which introduces a summary of a story or a joke.) □ *And—to cut a long story short—I never got back the money that I lent him.* □ *If I can cut a long story short, let me say that everything worked out fine.*

**cut and dried** fixed; determined beforehand; usual and uninteresting. □ *I find your writing quite boring. It's too cut and dried.* □ *The lecture was, as usual, cut and dried. It was the same thing we've heard for years.* □ *Our plans are all cut and dried; you can't contribute anything now.*

**cut and thrust** intense competition. (From sword-fighting.) □ *Peter tired of the cut and thrust of business.* □ *The cut and thrust of the stock-market is not for John.*

**cut both ways** to affect both sides of an issue equally. □ *Remember your suggestion that costs should be shared cuts both ways. You will have to pay as well.* □ *If our side cannot take along supporters to the game, then yours cannot either. The rule has to cut both ways.*

**cut corners** to reduce efforts or expenditures; to do things poorly or incompletely. (From the phrase *cut the corner*, meaning to avoid going to an intersection to turn.) □ *You cannot cut corners when you are dealing with public safety.* □ *Don't cut corners, Sally. Let's do the thing properly.*

**cut it (too) fine** to allow scarcely enough time, money, etc., in order to accomplish something. □ *You're cutting it too fine if you want to catch the bus. It leaves in five minutes.* □ *Joan had to search her pockets for money for the bus fare. She really cut it fine.*

**cut no ice** to have no effect; to make no sense; to have no influence. □ *That idea cuts no ice. It won't help at all.* □ *It cuts no ice that your mother is the director.*

**cut one's coat according to one's cloth** AND **cut one's coat to suit one's cloth** to plan one's aims and activities in line with one's resources and circumstances. □ *We would like a bigger house, but we must cut our coat according to our cloth.* □ *They can't afford a holiday abroad—they have to cut their coat to suit their cloth.*

**cut one's coat to suit one's cloth** See cut one's coat according to one's cloth.

**cut one's eye-teeth on something** to have done something since one was very young; to have much experience at something. □ *Do I know about cars? I cut my eye-teeth on cars.* □ *I cut my eye-teeth on Bach. I can whistle everything he wrote.*

**cut one's teeth on something** to gain one's early experiences on something. □ *You can cut your teeth on this project before getting involved in a more major one.* □ *The young police officers cut their teeth on minor crimes.*

**cut someone dead** to ignore someone totally. □ *Joan was just about to speak to James when he cut her dead.* □ *Jean cut her former husband dead.*

**cut someone down to size** to make a person more humble. □ *John's remarks really cut me down to size.* □ *Jane is too conceited. I think her new managing director will cut her down to size.*

**cut someone to the quick** to hurt someone's feelings very badly. (Can be used literally when *quick* refers to the tender flesh at the base of finger- and toe-nails.) □ *Your criticism cut me to the quick.* □ *Tom's sharp words to Mary cut her to the quick.*

**cut teeth** [for a baby or young person] to grow teeth. □ *Billy is cross because he's cutting teeth.* □ *Ann cut her first tooth this week.*



# D

**daily dozen** physical exercises done every day. (Informal.) □ *My brother always feels better after his daily dozen.* □ *She would rather do a daily dozen than go on a diet.*

**daily grind** the everyday work routine. (Informal.) □ *I'm getting very tired of the daily grind.* □ *When my holiday was over, I had to go back to the daily grind.*

**damn someone or something with faint praise** to criticize someone or something indirectly by not praising enthusiastically. □ *The critic did not say that he disliked the play, but he damned it with faint praise.* □ *Mrs. Brown is very proud of her son's achievements, but damns her daughter's with faint praise.*

**damp squib** something which fails to be as successful or exciting as it promised to be. (Informal.) □ *The charity ball was a bit of a damp squib.* □ *The much-publicized protest turned out to be a damp squib.*

**dance attendance on someone** to be always ready to tend to someone's wishes or needs. □ *That young woman has three men dancing attendance on her.* □ *Her father expects her to dance attendance on him day and night.*

**Darby and Joan** an old married couple living happily together. (From a couple so-called in eighteenth-century ballads.) □ *Her parents are divorced, but her grandparents are like Darby and Joan.* □ *It's good to see so many Darby and Joans at the party, but it needs some young couples to liven it up.*

**dark horse** someone whose abilities, plans, or feelings are little known to others. (From horse-racing.) □ *It's difficult to predict who will win the prize—there are two or three dark horses in the tournament.* □ *You're a dark horse! We didn't know you ran marathons!*

**Davy Jones's locker** the bottom of the sea, especially when it is the final resting place for someone or something. (From seamen's name for the evil spirit of the sea.) □ *They were going to sail around the world, but ended up in Davy Jones's locker.* □ *Most of the gold from that trading ship is in Davy Jones's locker.*

**daylight robbery** [an instance of] the practice of blatantly or grossly overcharging. (Informal.) □ *It's daylight robbery to charge that amount of money for a hotel room!* □ *The cost of renting a car at that place is daylight robbery.*

**dead and buried** gone forever. (Refers literally to persons and figuratively to ideas and other things.) □ *Now that Uncle Bill is dead and buried, we can read his will.* □ *That way of thinking is dead and buried.*

**dead centre** at the exact centre of something. □ *The arrow hit the target dead centre.* □ *When you put the flowers on the table, put them dead centre.*

**dead on one's or its feet** exhausted; worn out; no longer effective or successful. (Informal.) □ *Ann is so tired. She's really dead on her feet.* □ *He can't teach well any more. He's dead on his feet.* □ *This inefficient company is dead on its feet.*

**dead set against someone or something** totally opposed to someone or something. □ *I'm dead set against the new rates proposal.* □ *Everyone is dead set against the MP.*

**dead to the world** sleeping very soundly. (Informal.) □ *He spent the whole plane journey dead to the world.* □ *Look at her sleeping. She's dead to the world.*

**death to something** having a harmful effect on something; liable to ruin something. □ *This road is terribly bumpy. It's death to tyres.* □ *Stiletto heels are death to those tiles.*

**die a natural death** [for something] to fade away or die down. □ *I expect that all this excitement about computers will die a natural death.* □ *Most fads die a natural death.*

**die laughing** to laugh very long and hard. (Informal.) □ *The joke was so funny that I almost died laughing.* □ *The play was meant to be funny, but the audience didn't exactly die laughing.*

**die of a broken heart** to die of emotional distress, especially grief over a lost love. □ *I was not surprised to hear of her death. They say she died of a broken heart.* □ *In the film, the heroine appeared to die of a broken heart, but the audience knew she was poisoned.*

**die of boredom** to suffer from boredom; to be very bored. □ *I shall die of boredom if I stay here alone all day.* □ *We sat there and listened politely, even though we were dying of boredom.*

**dig one's own grave** to be responsible for one's own downfall or ruin. □ *The manager tried to get rid of his assistant, but he dug his own grave. He got the sack himself.* □ *The government has dug its own grave with the new taxation bill. It won't be re-elected.*

**dine out on something** to be asked to social gatherings because of the information one has. □ *She's been dining out on the story of her promotion for months.* □ *The journalist dines out on all the gossip he acquires.*

**dirt cheap** extremely cheap. (Informal.) □ *Buy some more of those plums. They're dirt cheap.* □ *In Italy, the peaches are dirt cheap.*

**dirty look** a look or glance expressing disapproval or dislike. (Especially with *get, give, receive*.) □ *I stopped whistling when I saw the dirty look on her face.* □ *The child who sneaked received dirty looks from the other children.* □ *Ann gave me a dirty look.* □ *I gave her a dirty look back.*

**do a double take** to react with surprise; to have to look twice to make sure that one really saw correctly. (Informal.) □ *When the boy led a goat into the park, everyone did a double take.* □ *When the doctor saw that the man had six toes, she did a double take.*

**do an about-face** to make a total reversal of opinion or action. □ *Without warning, the government did an about-face on taxation.* □ *It had done an about-face on the question of rates last year.*

**dog in the manger** one who prevents others from enjoying a privilege that one does not make use of or enjoy oneself. (From one of Aesop's fables in which a dog—which cannot eat hay—lay in the hay-rack [manger] and prevented the other animals from eating the hay.) □ *Jane is a real dog in the manger. She cannot drive, but she will not lend anyone her car.* □ *If Martin were not such a dog in the manger, he would let his brother have that evening suit he never wears.*

**do justice to something 1.** to do something well; to represent or portray something accurately.  *Sally really did justice to the contract negotiations.*  *This photograph doesn't do justice to the beauty of the mountains.* **2.** to eat or drink a great deal. (Informal.)  *Bill always does justice to the evening meal.*  *The guests didn't do justice to the roast pig. There were nearly ten pounds of it left over.*

**done to a turn** cooked just right.  *Yummy! This meat is done to a turn.*  *I like it done to a turn, not too well done and not too raw.*

**donkey's ages** AND **donkey's years** a very long time. (Informal.)  *The woman hasn't been seen for donkey's ages.*  *We haven't had a holiday in donkey's years.*

**donkey's years** See donkey's ages.

**donkey-work** hard or boring work. (Informal.)  *His wife picks flowers, but he does all the donkey-work in the garden.*  *I don't only baby-sit. I do all the donkey-work around the house.*

**do one's bit** to do one's share of the work; to do whatever one can do to help.  *Everybody must do their bit to help get things under control.*  *I always try to do my bit. How can I help this time?*

**dose of one's own medicine** the same kind of, usually bad, treatment which one gives to other people. (Often with *get* or *have*.)  *Sally is never very friendly. Someone is going to give her a dose of her own medicine someday and ignore her.*  *The thief didn't like getting a dose of his own medicine when his car was stolen.*

**do someone down** to do something to someone's disadvantage.  *He really did me down when he applied for the same job.*  *Don't expect Mr. Black to help you. He enjoys doing people down.*

**do someone good** to benefit someone.  *A nice hot bath really does me good.*  *It would do you good to lose some weight.*

**do someone proud** to treat someone generously. (Informal.)  *What a good hotel. The conference has done us proud.*  *He certainly did his daughter proud. The wedding reception cost a fortune.*

**do someone's heart good** to make someone feel good emotionally. (Informal.)  *It does my heart good to hear you talk that way.*  *When she sent me a get-well card, it really did my heart good.*

**do the trick** to do exactly what needs to be done; to be satisfactory for a purpose. (Informal.) □ *Push the car just a little more to the left. There, that does the trick.* □ *If you give me two pounds, I'll have enough to do the trick.*

**double Dutch** language or speech that is difficult or impossible to understand. □ *This book on English grammar is written in double Dutch. I can't understand a word.* □ *Try to find a lecturer who speaks slowly, not one who speaks double Dutch.*

**doubting Thomas** someone who will not easily believe something without strong proof or evidence. (From the biblical account of the apostle Thomas, who would not believe that Christ had risen from the grave until he had touched Him.) □ *Mary won't believe that I have a dog until she sees him. She's such a doubting Thomas.* □ *This school is full of doubting Thomases. They want to see his new bike with their own eyes.*

**down at heel** shabby; run-down; [of a person] poorly dressed. □ *The tramp was really down at heel.* □ *Tom's house needs paint. It looks down at heel.* ALSO: **down-at-heel** □ *Look at that down-at-heel tramp.*

**down in the mouth** sad-faced; depressed and unsmiling. □ *Ever since the party was cancelled, Barbara has been looking down in the mouth.* □ *Bob has been down in the mouth since his girlfriend left.*

**down on one's luck** without any money; unlucky. (Euphemistic for *poor* or *penniless*.) □ *Can you lend me twenty pounds? I've been down on my luck lately.* □ *The gambler had to get a job because he had been down on his luck and didn't earn enough money to live on.*

**down to earth** practical; realistic; not theoretical; not fanciful. □ *Her ideas for the boutique are always very down to earth.* □ *Those philosophers are anything but down to earth.* ALSO: **down-to-earth** □ *She's far too dreamy. We want a more down-to-earth person.*

**drag one's feet** to act very slowly, often deliberately. □ *The government are dragging their feet on this bill because it will lose votes.* □ *If the planning department hadn't dragged their feet, the building would have been built by now.*

**draw a blank** to get no response; to find nothing. (Informal.) □ *I asked him about Tom's financial problems, and I just drew a blank.* □ *We looked in the files for an hour, but we drew a blank.*

**draw a line between something and something else** to separate two things; to distinguish or differentiate between two things. (The *a* can be replaced with *the*.) □ *It's necessary to draw a line between bumping into people and striking them.* □ *It's very hard to draw the line between slamming a door and just closing it loudly.*

**draw a red herring** to introduce information which diverts attention from the main issue. (See also *red herring*.) □ *The accountant drew several red herrings to prevent people from discovering that he had embezzled the money.* □ *The government, as always, will draw a red herring whenever there is a monetary crisis.*

**draw blood** to hit or bite (a person or an animal) and make a wound that bleeds. □ *The dog chased me and bit me hard, but it didn't draw blood.* □ *The boxer landed just one punch and drew blood immediately.*

**dream come true** a wish or a dream which has become a reality. □ *Going to Hawaii is like having a dream come true.* □ *Having you for a friend is a dream come true.*

**dressed (up) to the nines** dressed in one's best clothes. (Informal. Very high on a scale of one to ten.) □ *The applicants for the job were all dressed up to the nines.* □ *The wedding party were dressed to the nines.*

**dressing down** a scolding. □ *After that dressing down I won't be late again.* □ *The boss gave Fred a real dressing down for breaking the machine.*

**drive a hard bargain** to work hard to negotiate prices or agreements in one's own favour. □ *All right, sir, you drive a hard bargain. I'll sell you this car for £12,450.* □ *You drive a hard bargain, Jane, but I'll sign the contract.*

**drive someone up the wall** to annoy or irritate someone. (Informal.) □ *Stop whistling that tune. You're driving me up the wall.* □ *All his talk about moving to London nearly drove me up the wall.*

**drop a bombshell** to announce shocking or startling news. (Informal.) □ *They really dropped a bombshell when they announced that the president had cancer.* □ *Friday is a good day to drop a bombshell like that. It gives the business world the week-end to recover.*

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**drop back** to go back or remain back; to fall behind. □ *As the crowd moved forward, the weaker ones dropped back.* □ *She was winning the race at first, but soon dropped back.*

**drop in one's tracks** to stop or collapse from exhaustion; to die suddenly. □ *If I keep working this way, I'll drop in my tracks.* □ *Uncle Bob was working in the garden and dropped in his tracks. We are all sorry that he's dead.*

**drop someone** to stop being friends with someone, especially with one's boyfriend or girlfriend. (Informal.) □ *Bob finally dropped Jane. I don't know what he saw in her.* □ *I'm surprised that she didn't drop him first.*

**drown one's sorrows** to try to forget one's problems by drinking a lot of alcohol. (Informal.) □ *Bill is in the bar drowning his sorrows.* □ *Jane is at home drowning her sorrows after losing her job.*

**dry run** an attempt; a rehearsal. □ *We had better have a dry run for the official ceremony tomorrow.* □ *The children will need a dry run before their procession in the pageant.*

# E

**eager beaver** someone who is very enthusiastic; someone who works very hard. □ *New volunteers are always eager beavers.* □ *The young assistant gets to work very early. She's a real eager beaver.*

**eagle eye** careful attention; an intently watchful eye. (From the sharp eyesight of the eagle.) □ *The pupils wrote their essays under the eagle eye of the headmaster.* □ *The umpire kept his eagle eye on the ball.*

**early bird** someone who gets up or arrives early or starts something very promptly, especially someone who gains an advantage of some kind by so doing. □ *The Smith family are early birds. They caught the first ferry.* □ *I was an early bird and got the best selection of flowers.*

**eat humble pie** to act very humbly, especially when one has been shown to be wrong; to accept humiliation. □ *I think I'm right, but if I'm wrong, I'll eat humble pie.* □ *You think you're so smart. I hope you have to eat humble pie.*

**eat like a bird** to eat only small amounts of food; to peck at one's food. □ *Jane is very slim because she eats like a bird.* □ *Bill is trying to lose weight by eating like a bird.*

**eat like a horse** to eat large amounts of food. (Informal.) □ *No wonder he's so fat. He eats like a horse.* □ *John works like a horse and eats like a horse, so he never gets fat.*

**eat one's hat** a phrase telling the kind of thing that one would do if a very unlikely event were actually to happen. □ *I'll eat my hat if you get a rise.* □ *He said he'd eat his hat if she got elected.*

**eat one's heart out 1.** to be very sad (about someone or something). □ *Bill spent a lot of time eating his heart out after his divorce.* □ *Sally ate her heart out when she had to sell her house.* **2.** to be envious (of someone or something). (Informal.) □ *Do you like my new*



watch? Well, eat your heart out. It was the last one in the shop. □ Eat your heart out, Jane! I've got a new girlfriend now.

**eat one's words** to have to take back one's statements; to confess that one's predictions were wrong. □ *You shouldn't say that to me. I'll make you eat your words.* □ *John was wrong about the election and had to eat his words.*

**eat out of someone's hands** to do what someone else wants; to obey someone eagerly. (Often with *have*.) □ *Just wait! I'll have everyone eating out of my hands. They'll do whatever I ask.* □ *The treasurer has everyone eating out of his hands.* □ *A lot of people are eating out of his hands.*

**eat someone out of house and home** to eat a lot of food (in someone's home); to bring someone to the point of financial ruin by eating all the food in the person's house. (Informal.) □ *Billy has a huge appetite. He almost eats us out of house and home.* □ *When the young people come home from college, they always eat us out of house and home.*

**either feast or famine** either too much (of something) or not enough (of something). (Also without *either*.) □ *This month is very dry, and last month it rained almost every day. Our weather is either feast or famine.* □ *Sometimes we are busy, and sometimes we have nothing to do. It's feast or famine.*

**elbow-grease** physical exertion; hard work. (The "grease" may be the sweat that exertion produces.) □ *It'll take some elbow-grease to clean this car.* □ *Expensive polishes are all very well, but this floor needs elbow-grease.*

**eleventh-hour decision** a decision made at the last possible minute. □ *Eleventh-hour decisions are seldom satisfactory.* □ *The treasurer's eleventh-hour decision was made in a great hurry, but it turned out to be correct.*

**enough is as good as a feast** a saying that means one should be satisfied if one has enough of something to meet one's needs, and one should not seek more than one needs. □ *We have enough money to live on, and enough is as good as a feast.* □ *I cannot understand why they want a larger house. Enough is as good as a feast.*

**enter the lists** to begin to take part in a contest or argument. □ *He had decided not to stand for Parliament, but entered the lists at*

*the last minute.* □ *The family disagreement had almost been resolved when the grandfather entered the lists.*

**escape someone's notice** to go unnoticed; not to have been noticed. (Usually a way to point out that someone has failed to see or respond to something.) □ *I suppose my earlier request escaped your notice, so I'm writing again.* □ *I'm sorry. Your letter escaped my notice.*

**everything but the kitchen sink** almost everything one can think of. □ *When Sally went off to college, she took everything but the kitchen sink.* □ *When you take a baby on holiday, you have to pack everything but the kitchen sink.*

**everything from A to Z** almost everything one can think of. □ *She knows everything from A to Z about decorating.* □ *The biology exam covered everything from A to Z.*

**every time one turns around** frequently; at every turn; with annoying frequency. □ *Somebody asks me for money every time I turn around.* □ *Something goes wrong with Bill's car every time he turns around.*

**(every) Tom, Dick, and Harry** everyone without discrimination; ordinary people. (Not necessarily males.) □ *The golf club is very exclusive. They don't let any Tom, Dick, or Harry join.* □ *Mary's sending out very few invitations. She doesn't want every Tom, Dick, and Harry turning up.*

**expecting (a child)** pregnant. (A euphemism.) □ *Tommy's mother is expecting a child.* □ *Oh, I didn't know she was expecting.*

**expense is no object** See money is no object.

**extend one's sympathy (to someone)** to express sympathy to someone. (A very polite and formal way to tell someone that you are sorry about a death in the family.) □ *Please permit me to extend my sympathy to you and your children. I'm very sorry to hear of the death of your husband.* □ *Let's extend our sympathy to Bill Jones, whose father died this week.*

**eyeball to eyeball** person to person; face to face. (Informal.) □ *The discussions will have to be eyeball to eyeball to be effective.* □ *Telephone conversations are a waste of time. We need to talk eyeball to eyeball.*

# F

**face the music** to receive punishment; to accept the unpleasant results of one's actions. (Informal.) □ *Mary broke a dining-room window and had to face the music when her father got home.* □ *After failing a maths test, Tom had to go home and face the music.*

**face value** outward appearance; what something first appears to be. (From the value printed on the "face" of a coin or banknote.) □ *Don't just accept her offer at face value. Think of the implications.* □ *Joan tends to take people at face value, and so she is always getting hurt.*

**fair crack of the whip** a fair share of something; a fair opportunity of doing something. □ *He doesn't want to do all the overtime. He only wants a fair crack of the whip.* □ *They were supposed to share the driving equally, but James refused to give Ann a fair crack of the whip.*

**fair do's** fair and just treatment [done to someone]. (Informal.) □ *It's hardly fair do's to treat her like that.* □ *It's not a question of fair do's. He treats everyone in the same way.* ALSO: **Fair do's!** Be fair!; Be reasonable! □ *Fair do's! You said you would lend me your bike if I took your books home.* □ *I know I said I'd baby-sit tonight, but fair do's—I hate to work late.*

**fair game** someone or something that it is quite permissible to attack. □ *I don't like seeing articles exposing people's private lives, but politicians are fair game.* □ *Journalists always regard film-stars as fair game.*

**fall about** to laugh heartily. (Informal.) □ *We fell about at the antics of the clown.* □ *The audience were falling about during the last act of the comedy.*

**fall apart at the seams** to break into pieces; to fall apart. □ *This old car is about ready to fall apart at the seams.* □ *The plan won't succeed. It's falling apart at the seams already.*

**fall between two stools** to come somewhere between two possibilities and so fail to meet the requirements of either. □ *The material is not suitable for an academic book, and it is not suitable for a popular one either. It falls between two stools.* □ *He tries to be both teacher and friend, but falls between two stools.*

**fall by the wayside** to give up and quit before the end (of something); not to succeed. (As if one became exhausted and couldn't finish a foot-race.) □ *John fell by the wayside and didn't finish college.* □ *Many people start out to train for a career in medicine, but some of them fall by the wayside.*

**fall down on the job** to fail to do something properly; to fail to do one's job adequately. (Informal.) □ *The team kept losing because the coach was falling down on the job.* □ *Tom was sacked because he fell down on the job.*

**fall foul of someone or something** to do something that annoys or offends someone or something; to do something that is contrary to the rules. □ *He has fallen foul of the police more than once.* □ *The political activists fell foul of the authorities.* □ *I hope I don't fall foul of your sister. She doesn't like me.* □ *John fell foul of the law.*

**fall from grace** to cease to be held in favour, especially because of some wrong or foolish action. □ *He was the teacher's prize pupil until he fell from grace by failing the history exam.* □ *Mary was the favourite grandchild until she fell from grace by running away from home.*

**fall into line** to conform. □ *If you are going to work here, you will have to fall into line.* □ *He likes to do as he pleases. He hates having to fall into line.*

**fancy someone's chances** to have confidence in someone's [including one's own] ability to be successful. (Informal.) □ *We all think she will refuse to go out with him, but he certainly fancies his chances.* □ *The other contestants are so talented that I don't fancy his chances at all.*

**far cry from something** a thing which is very different from something else. □ *What you did was a far cry from what you said you were*

going to do. □ *The song they played was a far cry from what I call music.*

**feast one's eyes (on someone or something)** to look at someone or something with pleasure, envy, or admiration. □ *Just feast your eyes on that beautiful juicy steak!* □ *Yes, feast your eyes. You won't see one like that again for a long time.*

**feather in one's cap** an honour; something of which one can be proud. □ *Getting a new client was really a feather in my cap.* □ *It was certainly a feather in the journalist's cap to get an interview with the president.*

**feather one's (own) nest** to use power and prestige selfishly to provide for oneself, often immorally or illegally. □ *The mayor seemed to be helping people, but was really feathering her own nest.* □ *The building contractor used a lot of public money to feather his nest.*

**feel fit** to feel well and healthy. □ *If you want to feel fit, you must eat the proper food and get enough rest.* □ *I hope I still feel fit when I get old.*

**feel it beneath one (to do something)** to feel that one would be humbling oneself or reducing one's status to do something. □ *Tom feels it beneath him to scrub the floor.* □ *Ann feels it beneath her to carry her own luggage.* □ *I would do it, but I feel it beneath me.*

**feel like a million dollars** to feel well and healthy, both physically and mentally. □ *A quick swim in the morning makes me feel like a million dollars.* □ *What a beautiful day! It makes you feel like a million dollars.*

**feel like a new person** to feel refreshed and renewed, especially after getting well or getting dressed up. □ *I bought a new suit, and now I feel like a new person.* □ *Bob felt like a new person when he got out of the hospital.*

**feel something in one's bones** to sense something; to have an intuition about something. (Informal.) □ *The train will be late. I feel it in my bones.* □ *I failed the test. I feel it in my bones.*

**fiddle while Rome burns** to do nothing or something trivial while something disastrous happens. (From a legend that the emperor Nero played the lyre while Rome was burning.) □ *The Opposition doesn't seem to be doing anything to stop this terrible parliamentary*

*bill. It's fiddling while Rome burns. □ The doctor should have sent for an ambulance right away instead of examining her. He was just fiddling while Rome burned.*

**fighting chance** a good possibility of success, especially if every effort is made. □ *They have at least a fighting chance of winning the race. □ The patient could die, but he has a fighting chance since the operation.*

**fight shy of something** to avoid something; to keep from doing something. □ *She fought shy of borrowing money from her father, but had to in the end. □ He's always fought shy of marrying.*

**fill dead men's shoes** See step into dead men's shoes.

**fill someone's shoes** to take the place of some other person and perform satisfactorily in that role. (As if you were wearing the other person's shoes.) □ *I don't know how we'll be able to do without you. No one can fill your shoes. □ It'll be difficult to fill Jane's shoes. She did her job very well.*

**fill the bill** to be exactly the thing that is needed. □ *Ah, this steak is great. It really fills the bill. □ This new pair of shoes fills the bill nicely.*

**find it in one's heart to do something** to have the courage or compassion to do something; to persuade oneself to do something. □ *She couldn't find it in her heart to refuse to come home to him. □ Could you really find it in your heart to send her away?*

**find one's feet** to become used to a new situation or experience. □ *She was lonely at first when she left home, but she is finding her feet now. □ It takes time to learn the office routine, but you will gradually find your feet.*

**find one's own level** to find the position or rank to which one is best suited. (As water "seeks its own level.") □ *You cannot force junior staff to be ambitious. They will all find their own level. □ The new pupil is happier in the lower class. It was just a question of letting her find her own level.*

**find one's tongue** to be able to talk. (Informal.) □ *Tom was speechless for a moment. Then he found his tongue. □ Ann was unable to find her tongue. She sat there in silence.*

**find time to catch one's breath** See get time to catch one's breath.

**fine kettle of fish** AND **pretty kettle of fish** a real mess; an unsatisfactory situation. □ *The dog has eaten the steak we were going to have for dinner. This is a fine kettle of fish!* □ *This is a pretty kettle of fish. It's below freezing outside, and the boiler won't work.*

**fine state of affairs** an unpleasant state of affairs. □ *This is a fine state of affairs, and it's all your fault.* □ *What a fine state of affairs you've got us into.*

**fish for compliments** to try to get someone to pay you a compliment. (Informal.) □ *When she showed me her new dress, I could tell that she was fishing for a compliment.* □ *Tom was certainly fishing for compliments when he modelled his new haircut for his friends.*

**fish in troubled waters** to involve oneself in a difficult, confused, or dangerous situation, especially with a view to gaining an advantage. □ *Frank is fishing in troubled waters by buying more shares in that firm. They are supposed to be in financial difficulties.* □ *The firm could make more money by selling armaments abroad, but they would be fishing in troubled waters.*

**fit for a king** splendid; of a very high standard. □ *What a delicious meal. It was fit for a king.* □ *Our room at the hotel was fit for a king.*

**fit someone in(to something)** to succeed with difficulty in putting someone into a schedule. □ *The doctor is busy, but I can try to fit you into the appointment book.* □ *Yes, here's a free appointment. I can fit you in.*

**fix someone up (with something)** to arrange to provide someone with something. (Informal.) □ *We fixed John up with a room for the night.* □ *The usher fixed us up with seats at the front of the theatre.* □ *We thanked the usher for fixing us up.*

**flash in the pan** something that draws a lot of attention for a very brief time. (Informal.) □ *I'm afraid that my success as a painter was just a flash in the pan.* □ *Tom had hoped to be a singer, but his career was only a flash in the pan.*

**flea in one's ear** a severe scolding. (Informal.) □ *I got a flea in my ear when I tried to give Pat some advice.* □ *Margaret was only trying to help the old lady, but she came away with a flea in her ear.*

**flesh and blood** 1. a living human body, especially with reference to its natural limitations; a human being. □ *This cold weather is more*

*than flesh and blood can stand. □ Carrying £300 is beyond mere flesh and blood. 2. one's own relations; one's own kin. □ That's no way to treat one's own flesh and blood. □ I want to leave my money to my own flesh and blood.*

**flight of fancy** an idea or suggestion that is out of touch with reality or possibility. □ *What is the point in indulging in flights of fancy about foreign holidays when you cannot even afford the rent? □ We are tired of her flights of fancy about marrying a millionaire.*

**flog a dead horse** to try to continue discussing or arousing interest in something that already has been fully discussed or that is no longer of interest. □ *Stop arguing! You have won your point. You are just flogging a dead horse. □ There's no point in putting job-sharing on the agenda. We've already voted against it four times. Why flog a dead horse?*

**fly a kite** to spread rumours or suggestions about something, such as a new project, in order to find out people's attitudes to it. □ *The government is flying a kite with these stories of a new airport. □ No official proposal has been made about redundancies. The management is flying a kite by dropping hints.*

**fly-by-night** irresponsible; untrustworthy. (Refers to a person who sneaks away secretly in the night.) □ *The carpenter we employed was a fly-by-night worker who did a very bad job of work. □ You shouldn't deal with a fly-by-night merchant.*

**flying visit** a very short, often unexpected visit. □ *She paid us a flying visit before leaving town. □ Very few people saw her in the office. It was just a flying visit.*

**fly in the face of someone or something** to disregard, defy, or show disrespect for someone or something. □ *John loves to fly in the face of tradition. □ Ann made it a practice to fly in the face of standard procedures.*

**fly in the ointment** a small, unpleasant matter which spoils something; a drawback. □ *We enjoyed the play, but the fly in the ointment was not being able to find our car afterwards. □ It sounds like a good idea, but there must be a fly in the ointment somewhere.*

**foam at the mouth** to be very angry. (Informal. Related to a "mad dog"—a dog with rabies—which foams at the mouth.) □ *Bob was*



*furious—foaming at the mouth. I've never seen anyone so angry. □ Bill foamed at the mouth in sheer rage.*

**follow one's heart** to act according to one's feelings; to obey one's sympathetic or compassionate inclinations. □ *I couldn't decide what to do, so I just followed my heart. □ I trust that you will follow your heart in this matter.*

**follow one's nose 1.** to go straight ahead, the direction in which one's nose is pointing. (Informal.) □ *The town that you want is straight ahead on this motorway. Just follow your nose. □ The chief's office is right around the corner. Turn left and follow your nose. 2.* to follow a smell to its source. (Informal.) □ *The kitchen is at the back of the building. Just follow your nose. □ There was a bad smell in the basement—probably a dead mouse. I followed my nose until I found it.*

**follow suit** to follow in the same pattern; to follow someone else's example. (From card-games.) □ *Mary went to work for a bank, and Jane followed suit. Now they are both head cashiers. □ The Smiths went out to dinner, but the Browns didn't follow suit. They ate at home.*

**food for thought** something to think about. □ *I don't like your idea very much, but it's food for thought. □ Your lecture was very good. It contained much food for thought.*

**fool's paradise** a condition of apparent happiness that is based on false assumptions and will not last. (Treated as a place grammatically.) □ *They think they can live on love alone, but they are living in a fool's paradise. □ The inhabitants of the island feel politically secure, but they are living in a fool's paradise. They could be invaded at any time.*

**fools rush in (where angels fear to tread)** people with little experience or knowledge often get involved in difficult or delicate situations which wiser people would avoid. □ *I wouldn't ask Jean about her divorce, but Kate did. Fools rush in, as they say. □ Only the newest member of the committee questioned the chairman's decision. Fools rush in where angels fear to tread.*

**foot the bill** to pay the bill; to pay (for something). □ *Let's go out and eat. I'll foot the bill. □ If the insurance firm goes bankrupt, don't worry. The government will foot the bill.*

**forbidden fruit** someone or something that one finds attractive or desirable partly because the person or thing is unobtainable. (From the fruit in the garden of Eden that was forbidden to Adam by God.)

□ *Jim is in love with his sister-in-law only because she's forbidden fruit.*

□ *The boy watches that programme only when his parents are out. It's forbidden fruit.*

**force someone's hand** to force one to do something that one is unwilling to do or sooner than one wants to do it. (Refers to a handful of cards in card-playing.) □ *We didn't know what she was doing until Tom forced her hand.* □ *The committee didn't want to reveal their plans so soon, but we forced their hand.*

**for days on end** for many days without a break. □ *We kept on travelling for days on end.* □ *Doctor, I've had this pain for days on end.*

**forget oneself** to forget one's manners or training. (Said in formal situations in reference to bad table manners or bad taste.) □ *Sorry, Mother, I forgot myself. I didn't mean to use a swear-word.* □ *John, we are going out to dinner tonight. Please don't forget yourself and gulp down your food.*

**forgive and forget** to forgive someone (for something) and forget that it ever happened. □ *I'm sorry we quarrelled, John. Let's forgive and forget. What do you say?* □ *It was nothing. We'll just have to forgive and forget.*

**for sale** See on sale.

**for the record** so that (one's own version of) the facts will be known; so there will be a record of a particular fact. □ *I'd like to say—for the record—that at no time have I ever accepted a bribe from anyone.* □ *For the record, I've never been able to get anything done around city hall without bribing someone.*

**foul one's own nest** to harm one's own interests; to bring disadvantage upon oneself. □ *He tried to discredit a fellow MP with the prime minister, but just succeeded in fouling his own nest.* □ *The boss really dislikes Mary. She certainly fouled her own nest when she spread those rumours about him.*

**foul play** illegal activity; a criminal act. □ *The police investigating the death suspect foul play.* □ *Foul play cannot be ruled out.*

**free and easy** casual. □ *John is so free and easy. How can anyone be so relaxed?* □ *Now, take it easy. Just act free and easy. No one will know you're nervous.*

**(fresh fields and) pastures new** new places; new activities. (From a line in Milton's poem *Lycidas*.) □ *I used to like living here, but it's fresh fields and pastures new for me now.* □ *Peter has decided to leave teaching. He's looking for fresh fields and pastures new.* □ *It's all very well to seek pastures new, but think of the unemployment situation.*

**from pillar to post** from one place to another or to a series of other places. □ *My father was in the army, and we moved from pillar to post, year after year.* □ *I went from pillar to post trying to find a telephone.*

**from rags to riches** from poverty to wealth. □ *The princess used to be quite poor. She certainly moved from rags to riches when she married.* □ *When I inherited the money, I went from rags to riches.*

**from stem to stern** from one end to another. (Refers to the front and back ends of a ship. Also used literally in reference to ships.) □ *Now, I have to clean the house from stem to stern.* □ *I polished my car carefully from stem to stern.*

**from the word go** from the beginning. (Informal.) □ *I knew about the problem from the word go.* □ *She was doing badly in the class from the word go.*

**from the year dot** AND **since the year dot** for a very long time; since very far back in time. (Informal.) □ *Mr. Jones worked there from the year dot.* □ *I've known Mike since the year dot.*

**full of oneself** conceited; self-important. □ *Mary's very unpopular because she's so full of herself.* □ *She doesn't care about other people's feelings. She's too full of herself.*

**full of the devil** always making mischief. (Informal.) □ *Tom is a lot of fun, but he's certainly full of the devil.* □ *I've never seen a child get into so much mischief. He's really full of the devil.*

**full steam ahead** forward at the greatest speed possible; with as much energy and enthusiasm as possible. (From an instruction given on a steamship.) □ *It will have to be full steam ahead for everybody if the factory gets this order.* □ *It's going to be full steam ahead for me this year. I take my final exams.*

**fun and games** **1.** playing around; someone's lively behaviour. (Informal.) □ *All right, Bill, the fun and games are over. It's time to get down to work.* □ *I'm tired of your fun and games. Go away and read a book.* **2.** difficulties; trouble. □ *There will be fun and games when her father sees the broken window.* □ *There will be fun and games if the children are home late.*

# G

**game at which two can play** a manner of competing which two competitors can use; a strategy that competing sides can both use. □ *The mayor shouted at the town council, “Politics is a game at which two can play.”* □ *“Flattery is a game at which two can play,” said John as he returned Mary’s compliment.* ALSO: **two can play at that game** two people can compete, using the same strategy. □ *I’m sorry you’re being so hard to deal with. Two can play at that game.*

**generous to a fault** too generous. □ *My favourite uncle is generous to a fault.* □ *Sally—always generous to a fault—gave away her sandwiches.*

**get a black eye** to get a bruise near the eye from being struck. (Note: *Get* can be replaced with *have*. See the variations in the examples. *Get* usually means to become, to acquire, or to cause. *Have* usually means to possess, to be, or to have resulted in.) □ *I got a black eye from walking into a door.* □ *I have a black eye where John hit me.* ALSO: **give someone a black eye** to hit someone near the eye so that a dark bruise appears. □ *John became angry and gave me a black eye.*

**get above oneself** to think or behave as though one is better or more important than one is. □ *John has been getting a bit above himself since he was promoted. He never goes for a drink with his old colleagues.* □ *There was no need for her to get above herself just because she married a wealthy man.*

**get a clean bill of health** [for someone] to be pronounced healthy by a doctor. (Also with *have*. See the note at **get a black eye**. From the fact that ships were given a clean bill of health before sailing only after the absence of infectious disease was certified.) □ *Sally got a clean bill of health from the doctor.* □ *Now that Sally has a clean bill of health, she can go back to work.* ALSO: **give someone a clean**

**bill of health** [for a doctor] to pronounce someone well and healthy. □ *The doctor gave Sally a clean bill of health.*

**get a good run for one's money** to receive what one deserves, expects, or wants; to be well compensated for effort, money, etc., spent. (Informal. Also with *have*.) □ *If Bill gets a good run for his money, he will be satisfied.* □ *Even if she does get the sack now, she's had a good run for her money. She's been there for years.*

**get a lucky break** to have good fortune; to receive a bit of luck. (Informal. Also with *have*. See the note at **get a black eye**.) □ *Mary really got a lucky break when she got that job.* □ *After losing three times, John finally had a lucky break.*

**get a lump in one's throat** to have the feeling of something in one's throat—as if one were going to cry; to become emotional or sentimental. (Also with *have*. See the note at **get a black eye**.) □ *Whenever they play the national anthem, I get a lump in my throat.* □ *I have a lump in my throat because my friends are going away.*

**get a slap on the wrist** to get a light punishment (for doing something wrong). (Informal.) □ *He created quite a disturbance, but he only got a slap on the wrist.* □ *I thought I'd just get a slap on the wrist for speeding, but I got fined £200.*

**get a start** to receive training or a big opportunity in beginning one's career. □ *She got a start in show business in Manchester.* □ *She got a start in modelling when she was only four.* ALSO: **give someone a start** to give one training or a big opportunity in beginning one's career. □ *My career began when my father gave me a start in his act.*

**get a tongue-lashing** to receive a severe scolding. □ *I really got a tongue-lashing when I got home.* □ *She got a terrible tongue-lashing from her mother.* ALSO: **give someone a tongue-lashing** to give someone a severe scolding. □ *I gave Bill a real tongue-lashing when he got home late.*

**get away (from it all)** to get away from one's work or daily routine; to go on a holiday. □ *I just love the summer when I can take time off and get away from it all.* □ *Yes, that's the best time to get away.*

**get a word in (edgeways)** to succeed in saying something when other people are talking and one is being ignored. (Often in the negative.) □ *It was such an exciting conversation that I could hardly get*

a word in edgeways. □ *Mary talks so fast that nobody can get a word in edgeways.*

**get back on one's feet** to become independent again; to become able to move around again. (Note the variations with *own* and *two* in the examples.) □ *He was sick for a while, but now he's getting back on his feet.* □ *My parents helped a lot when I lost my job. I'm glad I'm back on my own feet now.* □ *It feels great to be back on my own two feet again.*

**get butterflies in one's stomach** to get a nervous feeling in one's stomach. (Informal. Also with *have*. See the note at **get a black eye**.) □ *Whenever I have to go on stage, I get butterflies in my stomach.* □ *She always has butterflies in her stomach before a test.* ALSO: **give one butterflies in one's stomach** to cause someone to have a nervous stomach. □ *Exams give me butterflies in my stomach.*

**get by (on a shoe-string)** to manage to live (on very little money). □ *For the last two years, we have had to get by on a shoe-string.* □ *With so little money, it's hard to get by.*

**get carried away** to be overcome by emotion or enthusiasm (in one's thinking or actions). □ *Calm down, Jane. Don't get carried away.* □ *Here, Bill. Take this money and go to the sweet-shop, but don't get carried away.*

**get cold feet** to become timid or frightened. (Also with *have*. See the note at **get a black eye**.) □ *I usually get cold feet when I have to speak in public.* □ *John got cold feet and wouldn't run in the race.* □ *I can't give my speech now. I have cold feet.*

**get credit (for something)** to receive praise or recognition for one's role in something. (Especially with *a lot of*, *much*, etc., as in the examples.) □ *Mary should get a lot of credit for the team's success.* □ *Each of the team captains should get credit.* ALSO: **give someone credit (for something)** to praise or recognize someone for doing something. □ *The coach gave Mary a lot of credit.* □ *The director gave John much credit for his fine performance.*

**get down to brass tacks** to begin to talk about important things. (Informal.) □ *Let's get down to brass tacks. We've wasted too much time chatting.* □ *Don't you think that it's about time to get down to brass tacks?*

**get down to business** to begin to get serious; to begin to negotiate or conduct business. □ *All right, everyone. Let's get down to business. There has been enough playing around.* □ *When the president and vice-president arrive, we can get down to business.*

**get in someone's hair** to bother or irritate someone. (Informal.) □ *Billy is always getting in his mother's hair.* □ *I wish you'd stop getting in my hair.*

**get into full swing** to move into the peak of activity; to start moving fast or efficiently. (Informal.) □ *In the summer months, things really get into full swing around here.* □ *We go skiing in the mountains each winter. Things get into full swing there in November.*

**get into the swing of things** to join in the routine or the activities. (Informal.) □ *Come on, Bill. Try to get into the swing of things.* □ *John just couldn't seem to get into the swing of things.*

**get nowhere fast** not to make progress; to get nowhere. (Informal.) □ *I can't seem to make any progress. No matter what I do, I'm just getting nowhere fast.* □ *Come on. Go faster! We're getting nowhere fast.*

**get off lightly** to receive very little punishment (for doing something wrong). □ *It was a serious crime, but Mary got off lightly.* □ *Billy's punishment was very light. Considering what he did, he got off lightly.*

**get off to a flying start** to have a very successful beginning to something. □ *The new business got off to a flying start with those export orders.* □ *We shall need a large donation from the local council if the charity is to get off to a flying start.*

**get one's come-uppance** to get a reprimand; to get the punishment one deserves. □ *Tom is always insulting people, but he finally got his come-uppance. Bill hit him.* □ *I hope I don't get my come-uppance like that.*

**get one's fill of someone or something** to receive enough of someone or something. (Also with *have*. See the note at **get a black eye**.) □ *You'll soon get your fill of Tom. He can be quite a pest.* □ *I can never get my fill of shrimps. I love them.* □ *Three weeks of visiting grandchildren is enough. I've had my fill of them.*



**get one's fingers burned** to have a bad experience. (Also used literally.) □ *I tried that once before and got my fingers burned. I won't try it again.* □ *If you buy shares and get your fingers burned, you then tend to leave your money in the bank.*

**get one's foot in the door** to achieve a favourable position (for further action); to take the first step in a process. (People selling things from door to door used to block the door with a foot, so it could not be closed on them. Also with *have*. See the note at **get a black eye**.) □ *I think I could get the position if I could only get my foot in the door.* □ *It pays to get your foot in the door. Try to get an appointment with the managing director.* □ *I have a better chance now that I have my foot in the door.*

**get one's just deserts** to get what one deserves. □ *I feel better now that Jane got her just deserts. She really insulted me.* □ *Bill got back exactly the treatment which he gave out. He got his just deserts.*

**get one's money's worth** to get everything that has been paid for; to get the best quality for the money paid. □ *Weigh that pack of meat before you buy it. Be sure you're getting your money's worth.* □ *The show was so bad we felt we hadn't got our money's worth.*

**get one's nose out of someone's business** to stop interfering in someone else's business; to mind one's own business. (Informal.) □ *Go away! Get your nose out of my business!* □ *Bob just can't seem to get his nose out of other people's business.* ALSO: **keep one's nose out of someone's business** to refrain from interfering in someone else's business. □ *Let John have his privacy, and keep your nose out of my business, too!*

**get one's second wind** (Also with *have*. See the note at **get a black eye**.) **1.** for one's breathing to become stabilized after exerting oneself for a short time. □ *John was having a hard time running until he got his second wind.* □ *"At last," thought Ann, "I have my second wind. Now I can really swim fast."* **2.** to become more active or productive (after becoming tired for a time.) □ *I usually get my second wind early in the afternoon.* □ *Mary is a better worker now that she has her second wind.*

**get one's teeth into something** to start on something seriously, especially a difficult task. (Informal.) □ *Come on, Bill. You have to get your teeth into your biology.* □ *I can't wait to get my teeth into this problem.*

**get on the good side of someone** to get into someone's favour.

□ *You had better behave properly if you want to get on the good side of Mary.* □ *If you want to get on the good side of your teacher, you must do your homework.* ALSO: **keep on the good side of someone** to stay in someone's favour. □ *You have to work hard to keep on the good side of the manager.*

**get out of the wrong side of the bed** to get up in the morning in a bad mood. □ *What's wrong with you? Did you get out of the wrong side of the bed today?* □ *Excuse me for being cross. I got out of the wrong side of the bed.*

**get someone off the hook** to free someone from an obligation.

(Informal.) □ *Thanks for getting me off the hook. I didn't want to attend that meeting.* □ *I couldn't get Tom off the hook by myself.* ALSO:

**get off the hook** to get free from an obligation. □ *She did everything she could to get off the hook.* □ *I couldn't get off the hook by myself.*

**get someone's number** to find out about a person; to learn the key to understanding a person. (Informal. Also with *have*. See the note at **get a black eye**.) □ *I'm going to get your number if I can. You're a real puzzle.* □ *I've got Tom's number. He's ambitious.*

**get something off one's chest** to tell something that has been bothering you. (Also with *have*. See the note at **get a black eye**.) □ *I have to get this off my chest. I broke your window with a stone.* □ *I knew I'd feel better when I had that off my chest.*

**get something out of one's system** to be rid of the desire to do something; to do something that you have been wanting to do so that you are not bothered by wanting to do it any more. □ *I bought a new car. I've been wanting to for a long time. I'm glad I finally got that out of my system.* □ *I can't get it out of my system! I want to go back to university and get a degree.*

**get something under one's belt** (Informal. Also with *have*. See the note at **get a black eye**.) **1.** to eat or drink something. □ *I'd feel a lot better if I had a cool drink under my belt.* □ *Come in out of the cold and get a nice warm meal under your belt.* **2.** to learn something well; to assimilate some information; to get work done. □ *I have to study tonight. I have to get a lot of algebra under my belt.* □ *I have to get all these reports under my belt before I go home.*

**get the ball rolling** See start the ball rolling.

**get the brush-off** to be ignored or sent away; to be rejected. (Informal.) □ *Don't talk to Tom. You'll just get the brush-off.* □ *I went up to her and asked for a date, but I got the brush-off.*

**get the hang of something** to learn how to do something; to learn how something works. (Informal. Also with *have*. See the note at **get a black eye**.) □ *As soon as I get the hang of this computer, I'll be able to work faster.* □ *Now that I have the hang of starting the car in cold weather, I won't have to get up so early.*

**get the last laugh** to laugh at or ridicule someone who has laughed at or ridiculed you; to put someone in the same bad position that you were once in. (Also with *have*. See the note at **get a black eye**.) □ *John laughed when I got a D on the final exam. I got the last laugh, though. He failed the course.* □ *Mr. Smith said I was foolish when I bought an old building. I had the last laugh when I sold it a month later for twice what I paid for it.*

**get the runaround** to receive a series of excuses, delays, and referrals. (Informal.) □ *You'll get the runaround if you ask to see the manager.* □ *I hate it when I get the runaround.* ALSO: **give someone the runaround** to give someone a series of excuses, delays, and referrals. □ *If you ask to see the manager, they'll give you the runaround.*

**get the shock of one's life** to receive a serious (emotional) shock. (Also with *have*. See the note at **get a black eye**.) □ *I opened the telegram and got the shock of my life.* □ *I had the shock of my life when I won £5,000.*

**get the show on the road** to get (something) started. (Informal.) □ *Hurry up! Let's get the show on the road.* □ *If you don't get the show on the road now, we'll never finish today.*

**get time to catch one's breath** AND **find time to catch one's breath** to find enough time to relax or behave normally. (See also **catch one's breath**.) □ *When things slow down around here, I'll get time to catch my breath.* □ *Sally was so busy she couldn't find time to catch her breath.*

**getting on (in years)** growing older. □ *Grandfather is getting on in years.* □ *Yes, he's really getting on.*

**get to one's feet** to stand up, sometimes in order to address the audience. □ *On a signal from the director, the singers got to their feet.* □ *I was so weak, I could hardly get to my feet.*

**get to the bottom of something** to get an understanding of the causes of something. □ *We must get to the bottom of this problem immediately.* □ *There is clearly something wrong here, and I want to get to the bottom of it.*

**get under someone's skin** to bother or irritate someone. (Informal.) □ *John is so annoying. He really gets under my skin.* □ *I know he's a nuisance, but don't let him get under your skin.*

**get what is coming to one** to get what one deserves, usually something bad. □ *If you cheat, you'll get into trouble. You'll get what's coming to you.* □ *Bill got what was coming to him when Ann left him.* ALSO: **give one what is coming to one** to give one what one deserves. □ *Jim gave Bill what was coming to him.*

**get wind of something** to hear about something; to receive information about something. (Informal.) □ *I just got wind of the job vacancy and have applied.* □ *Wait until the treasurer gets wind of this. Somebody is going to get in trouble.*

**gild the lily** to add ornament or decoration to something which is pleasing in its original state; to attempt to improve something which is already fine the way it is. (Often refers to flattery or exaggeration.) □ *Your house has lovely brickwork. Don't paint it. That would be gilding the lily.* □ *Oh, Sally. You're beautiful the way you are. You don't need make-up. You would be gilding the lily.*

**give a good account of oneself** to do (something) well or thoroughly. □ *John gave a good account of himself when he gave his speech last night.* □ *Mary was not hungry, and she didn't give a good account of herself at dinner.*

**give as good as one gets** to give as much as one receives. □ *John can hold his own in a fight. He can give as good as he gets.* □ *Sally usually wins a formal debate. She gives as good as she gets.*

**give credit where credit is due** to give credit to someone who deserves it; to acknowledge or thank someone who deserves it. □ *We must give credit where credit is due. Thank you very much, Sally.* □ *Let's give credit where credit is due. Mary is the one who wrote the report, not Jane.*

**give ground** to retreat (literally or figuratively). □ *When I argue with Mary, she never gives ground.* □ *I approached the barking dog, but it wouldn't give ground.*

**give it to someone straight** to tell something to someone clearly and directly. (Informal.) □ *Come on, give it to me straight. I want to know exactly what happened.* □ *Quit wasting time, and tell me. Give it to me straight!*

**give of oneself** to be generous with one's time and concern. □ *Tom is very good with children because he gives of himself.* □ *If you want to have more friends, you have to learn to give of yourself.*

**give one one's marching orders** to sack someone; to dismiss someone from employment. (Informal.) □ *Tom has proved unsatisfactory. I decided to give him his marching orders.* □ *We might even give Sally her marching orders, too.*

**give oneself airs** to act in a conceited or superior way. □ *Sally is always giving herself airs. You'd think she had royal blood.* □ *Come on, John. Don't behave so haughtily. Stop giving yourself airs.*

**give one's right arm (for someone or something)** to be willing to give something of great value for someone or something. □ *I'd give my right arm for a nice cool drink.* □ *I'd give my right arm to be there.* □ *Tom really admires John. Tom would give his right arm for John.*

**give someone a piece of one's mind** to reprimand or scold someone; to tell someone off. □ *I've had enough from John. I'm going to give him a piece of my mind.* □ *Sally, stop it, or I'll give you a piece of my mind.*

**give someone or something a wide berth** to keep a reasonable distance from someone or something. (Originally referred to sailing ships.) □ *The dog we are approaching is very bad-tempered. Better give it a wide berth.* □ *Give Mary a wide berth. She's in a very bad mood.*

**give someone pause for thought** to cause someone to stop and think. □ *When I see a golden sunrise, it gives me pause for thought.* □ *Witnessing an accident is likely to give all of us pause for thought.*

**give someone the shirt off one's back** to be very generous or solicitous towards someone. □ *Tom really likes Bill. He'd give Bill*

*the shirt off his back.* □ *John is so friendly that he'd give anyone the shirt off his back.*

**give someone tit for tat** to give someone something equal to what one has received; to exchange a series of things, one by one, with someone. (Informal.) □ *They took my car after I took theirs. It was tit for tat.* □ *He punched me, so I punched him. Every time he hit me, I hit him. I just gave him tit for tat.*

**give something a lick and a promise** to do something poorly—quickly and carelessly. (Informal.) □ *John! You didn't clean your room! You just gave it a lick and a promise.* □ *This time, Tom, comb your hair. It looks as if you just gave it a lick and a promise.*

**give something a miss** not to go to something; not to bother with something; to leave something alone. (Informal.) □ *Betty decided to give the fair a miss this year.* □ *I regretted having to give Monday's lecture a miss, but I was just too busy to attend.*

**give something one's best shot** to give a task one's best effort. (Informal. Often with *it*.) □ *I gave the project my best shot.* □ *Sure, try it. Give it your best shot!*

**give the devil her due** See give the devil his due.

**give the devil his due** AND **give the devil her due** to give your foe proper credit (for something). (This usually refers to a person who has acted in an evil way—like the devil.) □ *She's generally impossible, but I have to give the devil her due. She's always honest.* □ *John may squander money, but give the devil his due. He makes sure his family are well taken care of.*

**give the game away** to reveal a plan or strategy. (Informal.) □ *Now, all of you have to keep quiet. Please don't give the game away.* □ *If you keep giving out hints, you'll give the game away.*

**give up the ghost** **1.** to die; to release one's spirit. (Considered formal or humorous.) □ *The old man sighed, rolled over, and gave up the ghost.* □ *I'm too young to give up the ghost.* **2.** to quit; to cease trying. □ *Don't give up the ghost. Keep trying!* □ *The runner gave up the ghost and failed to complete the race.*

**give voice to something** to express a feeling or an opinion in words; to speak out about something. □ *The bird gave voice to its*

joy in the golden sunshine. □ *All the people gave voice to their anger with the government.*

**glut on the market** something on the market in great abundance. □ *Right now, small computers are a glut on the market.* □ *Some years ago, small transistor radios were a glut on the market.*

**glutton for punishment** someone who seems to like doing or seeking out difficult, unpleasant, or badly paid tasks. □ *If you work for this charity, you'll have to be a glutton for punishment and work long hours for nothing.* □ *Jane must be a real glutton for punishment. She's typing Bill's manuscript free of charge and he doesn't even thank her.*

**go against the grain** to go against the natural direction or inclination. □ *You can't expect me to help you cheat. That goes against the grain.* □ *Would it go against the grain for you to lend her money?*

**go back on one's word** to break a promise which one has made. □ *I hate to go back on my word, but I won't pay you £100 after all.* □ *Going back on your word makes you a liar.*

**go begging** to be unwanted or unused. (As if a thing were begging for an owner or a user.) □ *There is still food left. A whole lobster is going begging. Please eat some more.* □ *There are many excellent books in the library just going begging because people don't know they are there.*

**go broke** to run out of money and other assets. □ *This company is going to go broke if you don't stop spending money foolishly.* □ *I made some bad investments last year, and it looks as though I may go broke this year.*

**go by the board** to get ruined or lost. (This is a nautical expression meaning to fall or be washed overboard.) □ *I hate to see good food go by the board. Please eat up so we won't have to throw it out.* □ *Your plan has gone by the board. The entire project has been cancelled.*

**go down fighting** to continue the struggle until one is completely defeated. □ *I won't give up easily. I'll go down fighting.* □ *Sally, who is very determined, went down fighting.*

**go downhill** [for something] to decline and grow worse and worse. (Also used literally.) □ *This industry is going downhill. We lose money every year.* □ *As one gets older, one tends to go downhill.*

**go down in history** to be remembered as historically important.

□ *Wellington went down in history as a famous general.* □ *This is the greatest affair of the century. I bet it'll go down in history.*

**go down like a lead balloon** to fail, especially to fail to be funny.

□ *Your joke went down like a lead balloon.* □ *If that play was supposed to be a comedy, it went down like a lead balloon.*

**go Dutch** to share the cost of a meal or some other event with someone.

□ *I'll go out and eat with you if we can go Dutch.* □ *It's getting expensive to have Sally for a friend. She never wants to go Dutch.*

**goes without saying** [something] is so obvious that it need not be said.

□ *It goes without saying that you must keep the place clean.*  
□ *Of course. That goes without saying.*

**go for someone or something** to attack someone or something; to move or lunge towards someone or something.

□ *The dog went for the visitor and almost bit him.* □ *He went for the door and tried to break it down.*

**go from bad to worse** to progress from a bad state to a worse state.

□ *This is a terrible day. Things are going from bad to worse.* □ *My cold is awful. It went from bad to worse in just an hour.*

**go haywire** to go wrong; to malfunction; to break down. (Informal.)

□ *We were all organized, but our plans suddenly went haywire.*  
□ *There we were, driving along, when the engine went haywire. It was two hours before the breakdown lorry came.*

**go in for something** to take part in something; to enjoy (doing) something.

□ *John doesn't go in for sports.* □ *None of them seems to go in for swimming.*

**going great guns** going energetically or fast. (Informal.)

□ *I'm over my cold and going great guns.* □ *Business is great. We are going great guns selling icecream.*

**go in one ear and out the other** [for something] to be heard and then forgotten. (Informal.)

□ *Everything I say to you seems to go in one ear and out the other. Why don't you pay attention?* □ *I can't concentrate. Things people say to me just go in one ear and out the other.*



**go it alone** to do something by oneself. (Informal.) □ *Do you need help, or will you go it alone?* □ *I think I need a little more experience before I go it alone.*

**go like clockwork** to progress with regularity and dependability. □ *The building project is progressing nicely. Everything is going like clockwork.* □ *The elaborate pageant was a great success. It went like clockwork from start to finish.*

**good enough for someone or something** adequate or fine for someone or something. □ *This seat is good enough for me. I don't want to move.* □ *That table isn't good enough for my office.*

**good-for-nothing** a worthless person. □ *Tell that good-for-nothing to go home at once.* □ *Bob can't get a job. He's such a good-for-nothing.*

**good riddance (to bad rubbish)** [it is] good to be rid (of worthless persons or things). □ *She slammed the door behind me and said, "Good riddance to bad rubbish!"* □ *"Good riddance to you, madam," thought I.*

**go off at a tangent** to go off suddenly in another direction; suddenly to change one's line of thought, course of action, etc. (A reference to geometry. Plural: **go off at tangents**.) □ *Please stick to one subject and don't go off at a tangent.* □ *If Mary would settle down and deal with one subject she would be all right, but she keeps going off at tangents.*

**go off at half cock** to proceed without proper preparation; to speak (about something) without adequate knowledge. (Informal.) □ *Their plans are always going off at half cock.* □ *Get your facts straight before you make your presentation. There is nothing worse than going off at half cock.*

**go off the deep end** to become angry or hysterical; to lose one's temper. (Informal. Refers to going into a swimming-pool at the deep end—rather than the shallow end.) □ *Her father went off the deep end when she came in late.* □ *The teacher went off the deep end when she saw his work.*

**go over someone's head** [for the intellectual content of something] to be too difficult for someone to understand. □ *All that talk about computers went over my head.* □ *I hope my lecture didn't go over the pupils' heads.*

**go over something with a fine-tooth comb** AND **go through something with a fine-tooth comb; search something with a fine-tooth comb** to search through something very carefully. (As if one were searching for something very tiny which is lost in some kind of fibre.) □ *I can't find my calculus book. I went over the whole place with a fine-tooth comb.* □ *I searched this place with a fine-tooth comb and didn't find my ring.*

**go round in circles** to keep going over the same ideas or repeating the same actions, often resulting in confusion, without reaching a satisfactory decision or conclusion. □ *We're just going round in circles discussing the problems of the fête. We need to consult someone else to get a new point of view.* □ *Fred's trying to find out what's happened, but he's going round in circles. No one will tell him anything useful.*

**go sky-high** to go very high. (Informal.) □ *Prices go sky-high whenever there is inflation.* □ *Oh, it's so hot. The temperature went sky-high about midday.*

**go so far as to say something** to put something into words; to risk saying something. □ *I think that Bob is dishonest, but I wouldn't go so far as to say he's a thief.* □ *Red meat may be harmful in some cases, but I can't go so far as to say it causes cancer.*

**go the distance** AND **stay the distance** to do the whole amount; to play the entire game; to run the whole race. (Informal. Originally sports use.) □ *That horse runs fast. I hope it can go the distance.* □ *This is going to be a long, hard project. I hope I can go the distance.* □ *Jim changes jobs a lot. He never stays the distance.*

**go the whole hog** to do everything possible; to be extravagant. (Informal.) □ *Let's go the whole hog. Order steak and lobster.* □ *Show some restraint. Don't go the whole hog and leave yourself penniless.*

**go through something with a fine-tooth comb** See go over something with a fine-tooth comb.

**go through the motions** to make a feeble effort to do something; to pretend to do something. □ *Jane isn't doing her best. She's just going through the motions.* □ *Bill was supposed to be raking the garden, but he was just going through the motions.*

**go through the proper channels** to proceed by consulting the proper persons or offices. □ *If you want an answer to your question,*

*you'll have to go through the proper channels.* □ *Your application will have to go through the proper channels.*

**go to Davy Jones's locker** to go to the bottom of the sea; to drown. (Thought of as a nautical expression.) □ *My uncle was a sailor. He went to Davy Jones's locker during a terrible storm.* □ *My camera fell overboard and went to Davy Jones's locker.*

**go to hell** AND **go to the devil** to go away and stop bothering (someone). (Informal. Use caution with both phrases, and especially with *hell*.) □ *He told her to go to hell, that he didn't want her.* □ *Leave me alone! Go to the devil!*

**go to rack and ruin** to become ruined or destroyed, especially due to neglect. □ *That lovely old house on the corner is going to go to rack and ruin.* □ *My lawn is going to rack and ruin.*

**go to seed** See run to seed.

**go to someone's head** to make someone conceited; to make someone overly proud. □ *You did a fine job, but don't let it go to your head.* □ *He let his success go to his head, and soon he became a complete failure.*

**go to the devil** See go to hell.

**go to the limit** to do as much as is possible to do. □ *Okay, we can't afford it, but we'll go to the limit.* □ *How far shall I go? Shall I go to the limit?*

**go to the loo** See go to the toilet.

**go to the toilet** AND **go to the loo** to eliminate bodily wastes through defecation or urination. (*Loo* is an informal word meaning "toilet.") □ *The child needed to go to the toilet.* □ *After drinking so much, he had to go to the loo.*

**go to the wall** to be defeated; to fail in business. (Informal.) □ *During the recession, many small companies went to the wall.* □ *The company went to the wall because of that contract. Now it's broke and the employees are redundant.*

**go to town** to make a great effort; to work with energy or enthusiasm. (Informal.) □ *They really went to town on cleaning the house. It's spotless.* □ *You've really gone to town with the food for the party.*

**go to waste** to be wasted; to be unused (and therefore thrown away). □ *Eat your potatoes! Don't let them go to waste.* □ *He never practises on the piano. It's sad to see talent going to waste.*

**grasp the nettle** to tackle a difficult or unpleasant task with firmness and determination. □ *We must grasp the nettle and do something about our overspending.* □ *The education committee is reluctant to grasp the nettle of lack of textbooks.*

**Greek to me** See all Greek to me.

**green about the gills** See pale around the gills.

**green around the gills** See pale around the gills.

**green with envy** envious; jealous. □ *When Sally saw me with Tom, she turned green with envy. She likes him a lot.* □ *I feel green with envy whenever I see you in your new car.*

**grin and bear it** to endure something unpleasant with good humour. □ *There is nothing you can do but grin and bear it.* □ *I hate having to work for rude people. I suppose I have to grin and bear it.*

**grind to a halt** to slow to a stop. □ *By the end of the day, the factory had ground to a halt.* □ *The train ground to a halt, and we got out to stretch our legs.*

**grist to the mill** something which can be put to good use or which can bring advantage or profit. (Grist was corn brought to a mill to be ground and so kept the mill operating.) □ *Some of the jobs that we are offered are more interesting than others, but all is grist to the mill.* □ *The firm is having to sell rather ugly souvenirs, but they are grist to the mill and keep the firm in business.*

**grit one's teeth** to grind one's teeth together in anger or determination; to show determination. □ *I was so angry that all I could do was stand there and grit my teeth.* □ *All through the race, Sally was gritting her teeth. She was really determined.*

**grow on someone** [for something] to become commonplace to a person. (The *someone* is usually *one*, *someone*, *a person*, etc., not a specific person.) □ *That music is strange, but it grows on you.* □ *I didn't think I could ever get used to this town, but after a while it grows on one.*

# H

**hail-fellow-well-met** friendly to everyone; falsely friendly to everyone. (Usually said of males.) □ *Yes, he's friendly, sort of hail-fellow-well-met.* □ *He's not a very sincere person. Hail-fellow-well-met—you know the type.* □ *He's one of those hail-fellow-well-met people that you don't quite trust.*

**hail from somewhere** [for someone] to come originally from somewhere. (Informal.) □ *I'm from Edinburgh. Where do you hail from?* □ *I hail from the Southwest.*

**hair of the dog (that bit one)** an alcoholic drink taken when one has a hangover. (Informal.) □ *Oh, I have a terrible hangover. I need a hair of the dog.* □ *That's some hangover you've got there, Bob. Here, drink this. It's a hair of the dog that bit you.*

**hale and hearty** well and healthy. □ *Doesn't Ann look hale and hearty after the baby's birth?* □ *I don't feel hale and hearty. I'm really tired.*

**hand in glove (with someone)** very close to someone. □ *John is really hand in glove with Sally, although they pretend to be on different sides.* □ *The teacher and the headmaster work hand in glove.*

**hand it to someone** give credit to someone, often with some reluctance. (Informal. Often with *have to* or *must*.) □ *I must hand it to you. You did a fine job.* □ *We must hand it to Sally. She helped us a lot.*

**handle someone with kid gloves** to be very careful with a sensitive or touchy person. □ *Bill has become so sensitive. You really have to handle him with kid gloves.* □ *You don't have to handle me with kid gloves. I can take what you have to tell me.*

**hand-me-down** something, such as an article of used clothing, which has been “handed down,” or given, to someone because another person no longer needs it. (Informal.) □ *Why do I always*

*have to wear my brother's hand-me-downs? I want some new clothes.*

□ *This is a nice shirt. It doesn't look like a hand-me-down at all.*

**hand over fist** [for money and merchandise to be exchanged] very rapidly. □ *What a busy day. We took in money hand over fist.* □ *They were buying things hand over fist.*

**hand over hand** [moving] one hand after the other (again and again). □ *Sally pulled in the rope hand over hand.* □ *The man climbed the rope hand over hand.*

**hang by a hair** AND **hang by a thread** to be in an uncertain position; to depend on something very insubstantial. (Informal.) □ *Your whole argument is hanging by a thread.* □ *John hasn't yet failed geometry, but his fate is hanging by a hair.*

**hang by a thread** See hang by a hair.

**hang fire** to delay or wait; to be delayed. □ *I think we should hang fire and wait for other information.* □ *Our plans have to hang fire until we get planning permission.*

**hang in the balance** to be in an undecided state; to be between two equal possibilities. □ *The prisoner stood before the judge, his life hanging in the balance.* □ *The fate of the entire project is hanging in the balance.*

**hang on by an eyebrow** AND **hang on by one's eyebrows** to be just hanging on or just surviving. □ *He hasn't yet failed, but he is just hanging on by an eyebrow.* □ *The manager is just about to get sacked. She is hanging on by her eyebrows.*

**hang on by one's eyebrows** See hang on by an eyebrow.

**hang one's hat up somewhere** to take up residence somewhere. (Informal.) □ *George loves London. He's decided to buy a flat and hang his hat up there.* □ *Bill moves from place to place and never hangs his hat up anywhere.*

**hang on someone's every word** to listen carefully and obsessively to everything someone says. □ *He gave a great lecture. We hung on his every word.* □ *Look at the way John hangs on Mary's every word. He must be in love with her.*

**hang on to someone's coat-tails** to gain good fortune or success through another person's success, rather than through one's own

efforts.  *Bill isn't very creative, so he hangs on to John's coat-tails.*  
 *Some people just have to hang on to somebody else's coat-tails.*

**Hang on to your hat!** AND **Hold on to your hat!** Prepare for a sudden surprise or shock. (Informal.)  *Are you ready to hear the final score? Hang on to your hat! We won ten–nil!*  *Guess who got married. Hold on to your hat!*

**hard-and-fast rule** a strict rule.  *It's a hard-and-fast rule that you must be home by midnight.*  *You should have your project completed by the end of the month, but it's not a hard-and-fast rule.*

**hard cash** cash, not cheques or credit. (Informal.)  *I want to be paid in hard cash, and I want to be paid now!*  *No plastic money for me. I want hard cash.*

**hardly have time to breathe** to be very busy.  *This was such a busy day. I hardly had time to breathe.*  *They made him work so hard that he hardly had time to breathe.*

**hard on someone's heels** following someone very closely. (Informal.)  *I ran as fast as I could, but the dog was still hard on my heels.*  
 *Here comes Sally, and John is hard on her heels.*

**hard on the heels of something** soon after something. (Informal.)  *There was a rainstorm hard on the heels of the high winds.*  
 *They had a child hard on the heels of getting married.*

**hark(en) back to something** (*Harken* is an old form of *hark*, which is an old word meaning “listen.”) **1.** to have originated as something; to have started out as something.  *The word icebox harks back to the old-fashioned refrigerators which were cooled by ice.*  
 *Our modern breakfast cereals hark back to the porridge and gruel of our ancestors.* **2.** to remind one of something.  *Seeing a horse and buggy in the park harks back to the time when horses drew milk wagons.*  *Sally says it harkens back to the time when everything was delivered by horse-drawn wagon.*

**hate someone's guts** to hate someone very much. (Informal.)  *Oh, Bob is terrible. I hate his guts!*  *You may hate my guts for saying so, but I think you're getting grey hairs.*

**haul someone over the coals** to give someone a severe scolding.  *My mother hauled me over the coals for coming in late last night.*  
 *The manager hauled me over the coals for being late again.*

**have a bee in one's bonnet** to have an idea or a thought remain in one's mind; to have an obsession. □ *She has a bee in her bonnet about table manners.* □ *I had a bee in my bonnet about swimming. I couldn't stop wanting to go swimming.*

**have a big mouth** to be a gossiper; to be a person who tells secrets. (Informal.) □ *Mary has a big mouth. She told Bob what I was getting him for his birthday.* □ *You shouldn't say things like that about people all the time. Everyone will say you have a big mouth.*

**have a bone to pick (with someone)** to have a matter to discuss with someone; to have something to argue about with someone. □ *Look, Bill. I've got a bone to pick with you. Where is the money you owe me?* □ *I had a bone to pick with her, but she was so sweet that I forgot about it.* □ *Ted and Alice have a bone to pick.*

**have a brush with something** to have a brief contact with something; to have a brief experience of something, especially with the law. (Sometimes a close brush.) □ *Ann had a close brush with the law. She was nearly arrested for speeding.* □ *When I was younger, I had a brush with death in a car accident, but I recovered.*

**have a case (against someone)** to have much evidence which can be used against someone in court. (*Have* can be replaced with *build, gather, assemble*, etc.) □ *Do the police have a case against John?* □ *No, they don't have a case.* □ *They are trying to build a case against him.* □ *My solicitor is busy assembling a case against the other driver.*

**have a chip on one's shoulder** to feel resentful; to bear resentment. □ *What are you angry about? You always seem to have a chip on your shoulder.* □ *John has had a chip on his shoulder about the police ever since he got his speeding ticket.*

**have a down on someone** to treat someone in an unfair or hostile way; to have hostile feelings towards someone; to resent and oppose someone. □ *That teacher's had a down on me ever since I was expelled from another school.* □ *The supervisor has a down on anyone who refuses to work overtime.*

**have a familiar ring** [for a story or an explanation] to sound familiar. □ *Your excuse has a familiar ring. Have you done this before?* □ *This exam paper has a familiar ring. I think it has been copied.*

**have a foot in both camps** to have an interest in or to support each of two opposing groups of people. □ *The shop steward had been*



*promised promotion and so had a foot in both camps during the strike—workers and management. □ Mr. Smith has a foot in both camps in the parents/teachers dispute. He teaches maths, but he has a son at the school.*

**have a go (at something)** to give something a try. (Informal.) □ *I've never fished before, but I'd like to have a go at it. □ Great, have a go now. Take my fishing rod and give it a try.*

**have a good command of something** to know something well. □ *Bill has a good command of French. □ Jane has a good command of economic theory.*

**have a good head on one's shoulders** to have common sense; to be sensible and intelligent. □ *Mary doesn't do well in school, but she's got a good head on her shoulders. □ John has a good head on his shoulders and can be depended on to give good advice.*

**have a heart** to be compassionate; to be generous and forgiving. □ *Oh, have a heart! Give me some help! □ If Ann had a heart, she'd have made us feel more welcome.*

**have a heart of gold** to be generous, sincere, and friendly. □ *Mary is such a lovely person. She has a heart of gold. □ You think Tom stole your watch? Impossible! He has a heart of gold.*

**have a heart of stone** to be cold and unfriendly. □ *Sally has a heart of stone. She never even smiles. □ The villain in the play had a heart of stone. He was an ideal villain.*

**have a heart-to-heart (talk)** to have a sincere and intimate talk. □ *I had a heart-to-heart talk with my father before I went off to college. □ I have a problem, John. Let's sit down and have a heart-to-heart.*

**have a lot going for one** to have many things working to one's benefit. (Informal.) □ *Jane is so lucky. She has a lot going for her. □ He's made a mess of his life, even though he had a lot going for him.*

**have a low boiling-point** to get angry easily. (Informal.) □ *Be nice to John. He's upset and has a low boiling-point. □ Mr. Jones certainly has a low boiling-point. I hardly said anything, and he got angry.*

**have an axe to grind** to have something to complain about or discuss with someone. (Informal.) □ *Tom, I need to talk to you. I have an axe to grind. □ Bill and Bob went into the other room to discuss the matter. They each had an axe to grind.*

**have a near miss** nearly to crash or collide. □ *The planes—flying much too close—had a near miss.* □ *I had a near miss while driving over here.*

**have an itching palm** See have an itchy palm.

**have an itchy palm** AND **have an itching palm** to be in need of a tip; to tend to ask for tips. (Informal. As if placing money in the palm would stop its itching. Note the variations in the examples.) □ *All the waiters at that restaurant have itchy palms.* □ *The taxi-driver was troubled by an itching palm. Since he refused to carry my bags, I gave him nothing.*

**have another think coming** to have to rethink something because one was wrong the first time. (Informal.) □ *She's quite wrong. She's got another think coming if she wants to walk in here like that.* □ *You've got another think coming if you think you can treat me like that!*

**have an out** to have an excuse; to have a (literal or figurative) means of escape or avoiding something. (Informal.) □ *He's very clever. No matter what happens, he always has an out.* □ *I agreed to go to the party, but now I don't want to go. I wish I had an out.*

**have ants in one's pants** to become restless; to fidget. (Informal.) □ *Sit still! Have you got ants in your pants?* □ *The children have ants in their pants. It's time to go home.*

**have a penchant for doing something** to have a taste, desire, or inclination for doing something. □ *John has a penchant for eating fattening foods.* □ *Ann has a penchant for buying clothes.*

**have a price on one's head** to be wanted by the authorities, who have offered a reward for one's capture. (Informal.) □ *We captured a thief who had a price on his head, and the police gave us the reward.* □ *The crook was so mean, he turned in his own brother, who had a price on his head.*

**have a say (in something)** AND **have a voice (in something)** to have a part in making a decision. □ *I'd like to have a say in choosing the carpet.* □ *John wanted to have a voice in deciding on the result also.* □ *He says he seldom gets to have a say.*

**have a snowball's chance in hell** to have no chance at all. (A snowball would melt in hell. Use *hell* with caution.) □ *He has a snow-*

*ball's chance in hell of passing the test.* □ *You don't have a snowball's chance in hell of her agreeing to marry you.*

**have a soft spot for someone or something** to be fond of someone or something. □ *John has a soft spot for Mary.* □ *I have a soft spot for the countryside.*

**have a sweet tooth** to have the desire to eat many sweet foods—especially candy and pastries. □ *I have a sweet tooth, and if I don't watch it, I'll really get fat.* □ *John eats sweets all the time. He must have a sweet tooth.*

**have a thin time (of it)** to experience a difficult or unfortunate time, especially because of a shortage of money. □ *Jack had a thin time of it when he was a student. He didn't have enough to eat.* □ *The Browns had a thin time of it when the children were small and Mr. Brown was poorly paid.*

**have a voice (in something)** See *have a say (in something)*.

**have a word with someone** to speak to someone, usually privately. □ *The manager asked to have a word with me when I was not busy.* □ *John, could I have a word with you? We need to discuss something.*

**have bats in one's belfry** to be slightly crazy. □ *Poor old Tom has bats in his belfry.* □ *Don't act so silly, John. People will think you have bats in your belfry.*

**have been through the mill** to have been badly treated; to have suffered hardship or difficulties. (Informal.) □ *This has been a rough day. I've really been through the mill.* □ *She's quite well now, but she's been really through the mill with her illness.*

**have clean hands** to be guiltless. □ *Don't look at me. I have clean hands.* □ *The police took him in, but let him go again because he had clean hands.*

**have egg on one's face** to be embarrassed because of an error which is obvious to everyone. (Informal.) □ *Bob has egg on his face because he wore jeans to the affair and everyone else wore formal clothing.* □ *John was completely wrong about the weather for the picnic. It snowed! Now he has egg on his face.*

**have eyes in the back of one's head** to seem to be able to sense what is going on beyond one's vision. □ *My teacher seems to have*

*eyes in the back of her head.* □ *My teacher doesn't need to have eyes in the back of his head. He watches us very carefully.*

**have feet of clay** to have a defect of character. □ *All human beings have feet of clay. No one is perfect.* □ *Sally prided herself on her complete honesty. She was nearly fifty before she learned that she, too, had feet of clay.*

**have green fingers** to have the ability to grow plants well. □ *Just look at Mr. Simpson's garden. He has green fingers.* □ *My mother has green fingers when it comes to house-plants.*

**have half a mind to do something** to have almost decided to do something, especially something unpleasant. (Informal.) □ *I have half a mind to go off and leave you here.* □ *The cook had half a mind to serve cold chicken.*

**have (high) hopes of something** to be expecting something. □ *I have hopes of getting there early.* □ *We have high hopes that John and Mary will have a girl.*

**have it both ways** to have both of two seemingly incompatible things. (See also *want it both ways*.) □ *John wants the security of marriage and the freedom of being single. He wants to have it both ways.* □ *John thinks he can have it both ways—the wisdom of age and the vigour of youth.*

**have money to burn** to have lots of money; to have more money than one needs. (Informal.) □ *Look at the way Tom buys things. You'd think he had money to burn.* □ *If I had money to burn, I'd just put it in the bank.*

**have no business doing something** to be wrong to do something; to be extremely unwise to do something. □ *You have no business bursting in on me like that!* □ *You have no business spending money like that!*

**have none of something** to tolerate or endure no amount of something. □ *I'll have none of your talk about leaving school.* □ *We'll have none of your gossip.*

**have no staying-power** to lack endurance; not to be able to last. □ *Sally can swim fast for a short distance, but she has no staying-power.* □ *That horse can race fairly well, but it has no staying-power.*

**have one's back to the wall** to be in a defensive position; to be in (financial) difficulties. (Informal.) □ *He'll have to give in. He has his back to the wall.* □ *How can I bargain when I've got my back to the wall?*

**have one's ear to the ground** AND **keep one's ear to the ground** to listen carefully, hoping to get advance warning of something. □ *John had his ear to the ground, hoping to find out about new ideas in computers.* □ *Keep your ear to the ground for news of possible jobs.*

**have one's feet on the ground** AND **keep one's feet on the ground** to be or remain realistic or practical. □ *Sally will have no trouble keeping her feet on the ground even when she is famous.* □ *They are ambitious but have their feet firmly on the ground.*

**have one's finger in the pie** to be involved in something. □ *I like to have my finger in the pie so I can make sure things go my way.* □ *As long as John has his finger in the pie, things will happen slowly.*

**have one's hand in the till** to be stealing money from a company or an organization. (Informal. The *till* is a cash box or drawer.) □ *Mr. Jones had his hand in the till for years before he was caught.* □ *I think that the new shop assistant has her hand in the till. There is cash missing every morning.*

**have one's head in the clouds** to be unaware of what is going on. □ *"Bob, do you have your head in the clouds?" said the teacher.* □ *She walks around all day with her head in the clouds. She must be in love.*

**have one's heart in one's boots** to be very depressed; to have little or no hope. □ *My heart's in my boots when I think of going back to work.* □ *Jack's heart was in his boots when he thought of leaving home.*

**have one's nose in a book** to be reading a book; to read books all the time. (Informal.) □ *Bob has his nose in a book every time I see him.* □ *His nose is always in a book. He never gets any exercise.*

**have one's nose in the air** AND **keep one's nose in the air** to be conceited or aloof. □ *Mary always seems to have her nose in the air.* □ *She keeps her nose in the air and never notices him.*

**have one's wits about one** to concentrate; to have one's mind working. □ *You have to have your wits about you when you are dealing with John.* □ *She had to have her wits about her when living in the city.* ALSO: **keep one's wits about one** to keep one's mind operating, especially in a time of stress. □ *If Jane hadn't kept her wits about her during the fire, things would have been much worse.*

**have one's work cut out (for one)** to have a large and difficult task prepared for one. □ *They sure have their work cut out for them, and it's going to be hard.* □ *There is a lot for Bob to do. He has his work cut out.* ALSO: **one's work is cut out (for one)** one's task is prepared for one; one has a lot of work to do. □ *This is a big job. My work is certainly cut out for me.*

**have other fish to fry** to have other things to do; to have more important things to do. (Informal. *Other* can be replaced by *bigger*, *better*, *more important*, etc.) □ *I don't have time for your problems. I have other fish to fry.* □ *I won't waste time on your question. I have bigger fish to fry.*

**have seen better days** to be worn or worn out. (Informal.) □ *This coat has seen better days. I need a new one.* □ *Oh, my old legs ache. I've seen better days, but everyone has to grow old.*

**have someone in one's pocket** to have control over someone. (Informal.) □ *Don't worry about the mayor. She'll co-operate. I've got her in my pocket.* □ *John will do just what I tell him. I've got him and his brother in my pocket.*

**have someone on a string** to have someone waiting for one's decision or actions. (Informal.) □ *Sally has John on a string. He has asked her to marry him, but she hasn't replied yet.* □ *Yes, it sounds as if she has him on a string.* ALSO: **keep someone on a string** to keep someone waiting for a decision. □ *Sally kept John on a string for weeks while she made up her mind.* □ *Please don't keep me on a string waiting for a final decision.*

**have someone or something on 1.** [with *someone*] to kid or deceive someone. (Informal.) □ *You can't be serious. You're having me on!* □ *Bob is such a joker. He's always having someone on.* **2.** [with *something*] to have plans for a particular time. (Note the variation with *anything* in the examples.) □ *I can't get to your party. I have something on.* □ *I have something on almost every Saturday.* □ *Mary rarely has anything on during the week.*

**have someone's hide** to scold or punish someone. (Informal. Refers to skinning an animal.) □ *If you ever do that again, I'll have your hide.* □ *He said he'd have my hide if I entered his garage again.*

**have someone under one's thumb** to have control over someone; to dominate someone. □ *His wife has him under her thumb.* □ *The younger child has the whole family under his thumb.*

**have something at one's fingertips** to have all the knowledge or information one needs; to know something very well, so the knowledge is readily available and can be remembered quickly. □ *He has lots of gardening hints at his fingertips.* □ *They have all the tourist information at their fingertips.*

**have something coming to one** to deserve punishment for something. (Informal. See also *get what is coming to one*.) □ *Bill broke a window, so he has a reprimand coming to him.* □ *You've got a lot of criticism coming to you.*

**have something hanging over one's head** to have something bothering or worrying one; to have a deadline worrying one. (Informal. Also used literally.) □ *I keep worrying about being declared redundant. I hate to have something like that hanging over my head.* □ *I have a history essay hanging over my head. I must write it tonight because it's due tomorrow.*

**have something in hand** to be prepared to take action on something. □ *I have the matter in hand.* □ *The management has your complaint in hand.*

**have something in mind** to be thinking of something; to have an idea or image (of something) in one's mind. □ *I have something in mind for dinner.* □ *Do you have something in mind for your mother's birthday?*

**have something in stock** to have merchandise available and ready for sale. □ *Do you have extra-large sizes in stock?* □ *Of course, we have all sizes and colours in stock.*

**have something in store (for someone)** to have something planned for one's future. □ *Tom has a large inheritance in store for him when his uncle dies.* □ *I wish I had something like that in store.*

**have something on file** to have a written record of something in storage. □ *I'm certain I have your letter on file. I'll check again.* □ *We have your application on file somewhere.*

**have something on one's hands** to be burdened with something. □ *I run a record shop. I sometimes have a large number of unwanted records on my hands.* □ *I have too much time on my hands.*

**have something on the brain** to be obsessed with something. (Informal.) □ *They have good manners on the brain.* □ *Mary has money on the brain. She wants to earn as much as possible.*

**have something out (with someone)** to clear the air; to settle a disagreement or a complaint. (Informal.) □ *John has been angry with Mary for a week. He finally had it out with her today.* □ *I'm glad we are having this out today.*

**have something up one's sleeve** to have a secret or surprise plan or solution (to a problem). (Refers to cheating at cards by having a card hidden up one's sleeve.) □ *He hasn't lost yet. He has something up his sleeve.* □ *The manager has something up her sleeve. She'll surprise us with it later.*

**have the courage of one's convictions** to have enough courage and determination to carry out one's aims. □ *It's fine to have noble goals in life and to believe in great things. If you don't have the courage of your convictions, you'll never succeed.* □ *Others don't trust him, but I do. I have the courage of my convictions.*

**have the Midas touch** to have the ability to be successful, especially the ability to make money easily. (From the name of a legendary king whose touch turned everything to gold.) □ *Bob is a merchant banker and really has the Midas touch.* □ *The poverty-stricken boy turned out to have the Midas touch and was a millionaire by the time he was twenty-five.*

**have the right of way** to possess the legal right to occupy a particular space or proceed before others on a public roadway. □ *I had a traffic accident yesterday, but it wasn't my fault. I had the right of way.* □ *Don't pull out on to a motorway if you don't have the right of way.*

**have the time of one's life** to have a very good or entertaining time; to have the most exciting time in one's life. (Informal.) □ *What*



*a great party! I had the time of my life.* □ *We went to Florida last winter and had the time of our lives.*

**have the wherewithal (to do something)** to have the means to do something, especially money. □ *He has good ideas, but he doesn't have the wherewithal to carry them out.* □ *I could do a lot if only I had the wherewithal.*

**have to live with something** to have to endure something. □ *I have a slight limp in the leg that I broke last year. The doctor says I'll have to live with it.* □ *We don't like the new carpet in the living-room, but we'll have to live with it.*

**have too many irons in the fire** to be doing too many things at once. □ *Tom had too many irons in the fire and missed some important deadlines.* □ *It's better if you don't have too many irons in the fire.*

**have turned the corner** to have passed a critical point in a process. □ *The patient has turned the corner. She should begin to show improvement now.* □ *The project has turned the corner. The rest should be easy.*

**have what it takes** to have the courage, stamina, or ability (to do something). □ *Bill has what it takes. He can swim for miles.* □ *Tom won't succeed. He doesn't have what it takes.*

**head and shoulders above someone or something** clearly superior to someone. (Often with *stand*, as in the example.) □ *This wine is head and shoulders above that one.* □ *John stands head and shoulders above the others.*

**head over heels in love (with someone)** very much in love with someone. □ *John is head over heels in love with Mary.* □ *They are head over heels in love with each other.* □ *They are head over heels in love.*

**heads will roll** some people will get into trouble. (Informal. From the use of the guillotine to execute people.) □ *When company's end-of-year results are known, heads will roll.* □ *Heads will roll when the headmaster sees the damaged classroom.*

**heavy going** difficult to do, understand, or make progress with. (Informal.) □ *Jim finds maths heavy going.* □ *Talking to Mary is heavy going. She has nothing to say.*

**hell for leather** moving or behaving recklessly. (Informal.) □ *They took off after the horse thief, riding hell for leather.* □ *They ran hell for leather for the train.*

**help oneself** to take whatever one wants or needs. □ *Please have some sweets. Help yourself.* □ *When you go to a cafeteria, you help yourself to the food.* □ *Bill helped himself to dessert.*

**hem and haw** AND **hum and haw** to be uncertain about something; to be evasive; to say “ah” and “eh” when speaking—avoiding saying something meaningful. □ *Stop hemming and hawing. I want an answer.* □ *Don’t just hem and haw. Speak up. We want to hear what you think.* □ *Stop humming and hawing and say whether you are coming or not.* □ *Jean hummed and hawed for a long time before deciding to marry Henry.*

**here’s to someone or something** an expression used as a toast, wishing the best to someone or something. □ *Here’s to Jim and Mary! May they be very happy!* □ *Here’s to your new job!*

**hide one’s face in shame** to cover one’s face because of shame or embarrassment. □ *Mary was so embarrassed. She could only hide her face in shame.* □ *When Tom broke Ann’s crystal vase, he wanted to hide his face in shame.*

**hide one’s light under a bushel** to conceal one’s good ideas or talents. (A biblical theme.) □ *Jane has some good ideas, but she doesn’t speak very often. She hides her light under a bushel.* □ *Don’t hide your light under a bushel. Share your gifts with other people.*

**high and mighty** proud and powerful. (Informal. Especially with *be* or *act*.) □ *Why does the doctor always have to act so high and mighty?* □ *If Sally didn’t act so high and mighty, she’d have more friends.* □ *Don’t be so high and mighty!*

**high-flyer** a person who is ambitious or who is very likely to be successful. (Informal.) □ *Jack was one of the high-flyers of our university year and he is now in the Foreign Office.* □ *Tom is a high-flyer and has applied for the post of managing director.*

**hit a snag** to run into a problem. (Informal.) □ *We’ve hit a snag with the building project.* □ *I stopped working on the project when I hit a snag.*

**hitch a lift** See thumb a lift.

**hit it off (with someone)** to quickly become good friends with someone. (Informal.) □ *Look how John hit it off with Mary.* □ *Yes, they really hit it off.*

**hit rock bottom** to reach the lowest or worst point. (Informal.) □ *Our profits have hit rock bottom. This is our worst year ever.* □ *After my life hit rock bottom, I gradually began to feel much better. I knew that if there was going to be any change, it would be for the better.*

**hit (someone) below the belt** to do something unfair or unsporting to someone. (Informal. From boxing, where a blow below the belt line is not permitted. Also used literally.) □ *You really hit me below the belt when you told my sister about my health problems.* □ *In business, Bill is difficult to deal with. He hits below the belt.*

**hit someone (right) between the eyes** to become completely apparent; to surprise or impress someone. (Informal. Also with *right*, as in the examples. Also used literally.) □ *Suddenly, it hit me right between the eyes. John and Mary were in love.* □ *Then—as he was talking—the exact nature of the evil plan hit me between the eyes.*

**hit the bull's-eye 1.** to hit the centre area of a circular target. □ *The archer hit the bull's-eye three times in a row.* □ *I didn't hit the bull's-eye even once.* **2.** to achieve the goal perfectly. (Informal.) □ *Your idea really hit the bull's-eye. Thank you!* □ *Jill has a lot of insight. She hit the bull's-eye in her choice of flowers for my mother.*

**Hobson's choice** the choice between taking what is offered and getting nothing at all. (From the name of a stable owner in the seventeenth century who offered customers the hire of the horse nearest the door.) □ *We didn't really want that holiday cottage, but it was a case of Hobson's choice. We booked very late and there was nothing else left.* □ *If you want a yellow car, it's Hobson's choice. The garage has only one.*

**hold forth** to speak, usually at length. (Informal.) □ *The guide held forth about the city.* □ *I've never seen anyone who could hold forth so long.* □ *The professor held forth about economic theory for nearly an hour.*

**hold no brief for someone or something** not to care about someone or something; not to support someone or something; to dislike someone or something. □ *I hold no brief for people who cheat the company.* □ *My father says he holds no brief for the new plans.*

**hold one's fire 1.** to refrain from shooting (a gun, etc.). □ *The sergeant told the soldiers to hold their fire.* □ *Please hold your fire until I get out of the way.* **2.** to postpone one's criticism or commentary. (Informal.) □ *Now, now, hold your fire until I've had a chance to explain.* □ *Hold your fire, Bill. You're too quick to complain.*

**hold one's own 1.** to do as well as anyone else. □ *I can hold my own in a running race any day.* □ *She was unable to hold her own, and she had to leave.* **2.** [for someone] to remain in a stable physical condition. □ *Mary is still seriously ill, but she is holding her own.* □ *We thought Jim was holding his own after the accident, but he died suddenly.*

**hold one's peace** to remain silent. □ *Bill was unable to hold his peace any longer. "Don't do it!" he cried.* □ *Quiet, John. Hold your peace for a little while longer.*

**hold one's tongue** to refrain from speaking; to refrain from saying something unpleasant. □ *I felt like scolding her, but I held my tongue.* □ *Hold your tongue, John. You can't talk to me that way.*

**Hold on to your hat!** See Hang on to your hat!

**hold out the olive branch** to offer to end a dispute and be friendly; to offer reconciliation. (The olive branch is a symbol of peace and reconciliation. A biblical reference.) □ *Jill was the first to hold out the olive branch after our argument.* □ *I always try to hold out the olive branch to someone I have hurt. Life is too short for a person to bear grudges for very long.*

**hold true** [for something] to be true; [for something] to remain true. □ *Does this rule hold true all the time?* □ *Yes, it holds true no matter what.*

**hold water** to be able to be proved; to be correct or true. (Usually negative.) □ *Jack's story doesn't hold water. It sounds too unlikely.* □ *I don't think the police's theory will hold water. The suspect has an alibi.*

**hole-and-corner** AND **hole-in-the-corner** secretive; secret and dishonourable. □ *Jane is tired of the hole-and-corner affair with Tom. She wants him to marry her.* □ *The wedding was a hole-in-the-corner occasion because the bride's parents refused to have anything to do with it.*

**hole-in-the-corner** See hole-and-corner.

**holier-than-thou** excessively pious; acting as though one is more virtuous than other people. □ *Jack always adopts a holier-than-thou attitude to other people, but people say he has been in prison.* □ *Jane used to be holier-than-thou, but she is marrying Tom, who is a crook.*

**home and dry** having been successful in one's aims. □ *There is the cottage we are looking for. We are home and dry.* □ *We need £100 to reach our target. Then we are home and dry.*

**hope against hope** to have hope even when the situation appears to be hopeless. □ *We hope against hope that she'll see the right thing to do and do it.* □ *There is little point in hoping against hope, except that it makes you feel better.*

**horse of a different colour** See horse of another colour.

**horse of another colour** AND **horse of a different colour** another matter altogether. □ *I was talking about trees, not bushes. Bushes are a horse of another colour.* □ *Gambling is not the same as investing in the shares market. It's a horse of a different colour.*

**horse-play** physically active and frivolous play. (Informal.) □ *Stop that horse-play and get to work.* □ *I won't tolerate horse-play in my living-room.*

**horse sense** common sense; practical thinking. □ *Jack is no scholar but he has a lot of horse sense.* □ *Horse sense tells me I should not be involved in that project.*

**hot and bothered** excited; anxious. (Informal.) □ *Now don't get hot and bothered. Take it easy.* □ *John is hot and bothered about the tax rate increase.*

**hot on something** enthusiastic about something; very much interested in something; knowledgeable about something. (Informal.) □ *Meg's hot on animal rights.* □ *Jean is hot on modern ballet just now.*

**hot under the collar** very angry. (Informal.) □ *The solicitor was really hot under the collar when you told him you lost the contract.* □ *I get hot under the collar every time I think about it.*

**house-proud** extremely or excessively concerned about the appearance of one's house. □ *Mrs. Smith is so house-proud that she makes her guests take their shoes off at the front door.* □ *Mrs. Brown keeps plastic covers over her chairs. She's much too house-proud.*

**hue and cry** a loud public protest or opposition. □ *There was a hue and cry when the council wanted to build houses in the playing-field.* □ *The decision to close the local school started a real hue and cry.*

**hum and haw** See hem and haw.

**hush-money** money paid as a bribe to persuade someone to remain silent and not reveal certain information. (Informal.) □ *Bob gave his younger sister hush-money so that she wouldn't tell Jane that he had gone to the cinema with Sue.* □ *The crooks paid Fred hush-money to keep their whereabouts secret.*

# I

**ill at ease** uneasy; anxious. □ *I feel ill at ease about the interview.*  
□ *You look ill at ease. Do relax.*

**ill-gotten gains** money or other possessions acquired in a dishonest or illegal fashion. □ *Fred cheated at cards and is now living on his ill-gotten gains.* □ *Mary is also enjoying her ill-gotten gains. She deceived an old lady into leaving money to her in her will.*

**in a bad mood** sad; depressed; cross; with low spirits. □ *He's in a bad mood. He may shout at you.* □ *Please try to cheer me up. I'm in a bad mood.*

**in a bad way** in a critical or bad state. (Can refer to health, finances, mood, etc.) □ *Mr. Smith is in a bad way. He may have to go to hospital.* □ *My bank account is in a bad way. It needs some help from a millionaire.* □ *My life is in a bad way, and I'm depressed about it.*

**in a dead heat** [finishing a race] at exactly the same time; tied. □ *The two horses finished the race in a dead heat.* □ *They ended the contest in a dead heat.*

**in a fix** in a bad situation. (Informal. *In* can be replaced with *into*. See comment at **in a jam** and the examples below.) □ *I really got myself into a fix. I owe a lot of money on my car.* □ *John is in a fix because he lost his wallet.* □ *John certainly has got into a fix.*

**in a flash** quickly; immediately. □ *I'll be there in a flash.* □ *It happened in a flash. Suddenly my wallet was gone.*

**in a huff** in an angry or offended manner or state. (Informal. *In* can be replaced with *into*. See comment at **in a jam** and the examples below.) □ *He heard what we had to say, then left in a huff.* □ *She came in a huff and ordered us to bring her something to eat.* □ *She gets into a huff very easily.*

**in a jam** in a tight or difficult situation. (*In* can be replaced with *into* to show movement towards or into the state described by *a jam*. Especially *get into*.) □ *I'm in a jam. I owe a lot of money.* □ *Whenever I get into a jam, I ask my supervisor for help.*

**in a jiffy** very fast; very soon. (Informal.) □ *Just wait a minute. I'll be there in a jiffy.* □ *I'll be finished in a jiffy.*

**in all one's born days** ever; in all one's life. □ *I've never been so angry in all my born days.* □ *Have you ever heard such a thing in all your born days?*

**in all probability** very likely; almost certainly. □ *He'll be here on time in all probability.* □ *In all probability, they'll finish the work today.*

**in a mad rush** in a hurry. □ *I ran around all day today in a mad rush looking for a present for Bill.* □ *Why are you always in such a mad rush?*

**in a nutshell** in a few words; briefly; concisely. □ *I don't have time for the whole explanation. Please give it to me in a nutshell.* □ *Well, in a nutshell, we have to work late.*

**in a (pretty) pickle** in a mess; in trouble. (Informal. *In* can be replaced with *into*. See comment at **in a jam** and the examples below.) □ *John has got himself into a pickle. He has two dates for the party.* □ *Now we are in a pretty pickle. We are out of petrol.*

**in a quandary** uncertain about what to do; confused. (*In* can be replaced with *into*. See comment at **in a jam** and the examples below.) □ *Mary was in a quandary about which college to go to.* □ *I couldn't decide what to do. I was in such a quandary.* □ *I got myself into a quandary about where to go on holiday.*

**in arrears** overdue; late, especially in reference to bills and money. □ *This bill is three months in arrears. It must be paid immediately.* □ *I was in arrears on my car payments, so the bank threatened to take my car away.*

**in a sense** in a way. □ *In a sense, cars make life better.* □ *But, in a sense, they also make life worse.*

**in a split second** in an instant. □ *The lightning struck, and in a split second the house burst into flames.* □ *Just wait. I'll be there in a split second.*



**in a stage whisper** in a loud whisper which everyone can hear. □ *John said in a stage whisper, "This play is boring."* □ *"When do we eat?" asked Billy in a stage whisper.*

**in a stew (about someone or something)** upset or bothered about someone or something. (Informal. *In* can be replaced with *into*. See comment at **in a jam** and the examples below.) □ *I'm in such a stew about my dog. She ran away last night.* □ *Now, now. Don't be in a stew. She'll be back when she gets hungry.* □ *I hate to get into a stew worrying about my children.*

**in a (tight) spot** caught in a problem; in a jam. (Informal. *In* can be replaced with *into*. See comment at **in a jam** and the examples below.) □ *Look, John, I'm in a tight spot. Can you lend me £20?* □ *I'm in a spot too. I need £300.* □ *He's always getting into a tight spot financially.*

**in at the kill** present at the end of some activity, usually an activity with negative results. (Literally, present when a hunted animal is put to death. Informal when used about any other activity.) □ *I went to the final hearing on the proposed ring-road. I knew it would be shouted down strongly, and I wanted to be in at the kill.* □ *The judge will sentence the criminal today, and I'm going to be in at the kill.*

**in black and white** official, in writing or printing. (Said of something, such as an agreement or a statement, which has been recorded in writing. *In* can be replaced with *into*. See comment at **in a jam** and the examples below.) □ *I have it in black and white that I'm entitled to three weeks' holiday each year.* □ *It says right here in black and white that oak trees produce acorns.* □ *Please put the agreement into black and white.*

**in broad daylight** publicly visible in the daytime. □ *The thief stole the car in broad daylight.* □ *There they were, selling drugs in broad daylight.*

**inch along (something)** to move slowly along something little by little. □ *The cat inched along the carpet towards the mouse.* □ *Traffic was inching along.*

**in clover** with good fortune; in a very good situation, especially financially. (Informal.) □ *If I get this contract, I'll be in clover for the rest of my life.* □ *I have very little money saved, so when I retire I won't exactly be in clover.*

**in deep water** in a dangerous or vulnerable situation; in a serious situation; in trouble. (As if one were swimming in or had fallen into water which is over one's head. *In* can be replaced with *into*. See comment at **in a jam** and the examples below.) □ *John is having trouble with his wife. He's in deep water.* □ *Bill is in deep water in the algebra class. He's almost failing.* □ *He really got himself into deep water when he ran away from school.*

**in dribs and drabs** in small irregular quantities. (*In* can be replaced with *by*.) □ *The cheques for the charity are coming in in dribs and drabs.* □ *The members of the orchestra arrived by dribs and drabs.*

**in fear and trembling** with anxiety or fear; with dread. □ *In fear and trembling, I went into the room to take the exam.* □ *The witness left the courtroom in fear and trembling.*

**in fine feather** in good humour; in good health. (*In* can be replaced with *into*. See comment at **in a jam** and the examples below.) □ *Hello, John. You appear to be in fine feather.* □ *Of course I'm in fine feather. I get lots of sleep.* □ *Good food and lots of sleep put me into fine feather.*

**in force** in a very large group. □ *The entire group arrived in force.* □ *The mosquitoes will attack in force this evening.*

**in full swing** in progress; operating or running without restraint. (Informal. *In* can be replaced with *into*. See comment at **in a jam** and the examples below.) □ *We can't leave now! The party is in full swing.* □ *Our programme to help the starving people is in full swing. You should see results soon.* □ *Just wait until our project gets into full swing.*

**in high gear** (*In* can be replaced with *into*. See comment at **in a jam** and the examples below.) **1.** [for a machine, such as a car] to be set in its highest gear, giving the greatest speed. □ *When my car is in high gear, it goes very fast.* □ *You can't start out in high gear. You must work up through the low ones.* □ *You don't go into high gear soon enough.* **2.** very fast and active. (Informal.) □ *When Jane is in high gear, she's a superb athlete.* □ *When Jane changed into high gear, I knew she'd win the race.*

**in (just) a second** in a very short period of time. □ *I'll be there in a second.* □ *I'll be with you in just a second. I'm on the telephone.*

**in league (with someone)** in co-operation with someone; in a conspiracy with someone. □ *The mayor is in league with the Coun-*

*cil Treasurer. They are misusing public money.* □ *Those two have been in league for years.*

**in leaps and bounds** See by leaps and bounds.

**in less than no time** very quickly. □ *I'll be there in less than no time.* □ *Don't worry. This won't take long. It'll be over in less than no time.*

**in lieu of something** in place of something; instead of something. (The word *lieu* occurs only in this phrase.) □ *They gave me roast beef in lieu of steak.* □ *We gave money to charity in lieu of sending flowers to the funeral.*

**in luck** fortunate; lucky. □ *You want a red one? You're in luck. There is one red one left.* □ *I had an accident, but I was in luck. It was not serious.*

**in mint condition** in perfect condition. (Refers to the perfect state of a coin which has just been minted. *In* can be replaced with *into*. See comment at **in a jam** and the examples below.) □ *This is a fine car. It runs well and is in mint condition.* □ *We found a first edition in mint condition and decided to buy it.* □ *We put our house into mint condition before we sold it.*

**in name only** nominally; not actual, only by terminology. □ *The president is head of the country in name only.* □ *Mr. Smith is the managing director of the Smith Company in name only. Mrs. Smith handles all the business affairs.*

**in no mood to do something** not to feel like doing something; to wish not to do something. □ *I'm in no mood to cook dinner tonight.* □ *Mother is in no mood to put up with our arguing.*

**in one ear and out the other** [for something to be] ignored; [for something to be] unheard or unheeded. (Informal. *In* can be replaced with *into*. See the explanation at **in a jam** and the examples below.) □ *Everything I say to you goes into one ear and out the other!* □ *Bill just doesn't pay attention. Everything is in one ear and out the other.*

**in one's birthday suit** See in the altogether.

**in one's blood** See in the blood.

**in one's book** in one's opinion. (Informal.) □ *He's okay in my book.*  
□ *In my book, this is the best that money can buy.*

**in one's cups** drunk. □ *She doesn't make much sense when she's in her cups.* □ *The speaker—who was in his cups—could hardly be understood.*

**in one's mind's eye** in one's mind. (Refers to visualizing something in one's mind.) □ *In my mind's eye, I can see trouble ahead.* □ *In her mind's eye, she could see a beautiful building beside the river. She decided to design such a building.*

**in one's opinion** according to one's belief or judgement. □ *In my opinion, that is a very ugly picture.* □ *That isn't a good idea in my opinion.*

**in one's (own) backyard** (figuratively) very close to one. (Informal.) □ *That kind of thing is quite rare. Imagine it happening right in your backyard.* □ *You always think of something like that happening to someone else. You never expect to find it in your own backyard.*

**in one's own time** not while one is at work. □ *My employer made me write the report in my own time. That's not fair.* □ *Please make your personal telephone calls in your own time.*

**in one's right mind** sane; rational and sensible. (Often in the negative. See also out of one's mind.) □ *That was a stupid thing to do. You're not in your right mind.* □ *You can't be in your right mind! That sounds crazy!*

**in one's second childhood** being interested in things or people which normally interest children. □ *My father bought himself a toy train, and my mother said he was in his second childhood.* □ *Whenever I go to the river and throw stones, I feel as though I'm in my second childhood.*

**in one's spare time** in one's leisure time; in the time not reserved for doing something else. □ *I write novels in my spare time.* □ *I'll try to paint the house in my spare time.*

**in other words** said in another, simpler way. □ *Cease! Desist! In other words, stop!* □ *Our cash flow is negative, and our assets are worthless. In other words, we are broke.*

**in over one's head** with more difficulties than one can manage. (Informal.) □ *Calculus is very hard for me. I'm in over my head.* □ *Ann is too busy. She's really in over her head.*

**in part** partly; to a lesser degree or extent. □ *I was not there, in part because of my disagreement about the purpose of the meeting, but I also had a previous appointment.* □ *I hope to win, in part because I want the prize money.*

**in place** in the proper place or location. □ *Everything was in place for the ceremony.* □ *It's good to see everything in place again.*

**in plain English** in simple, clear, and straightforward language. (*In* can be replaced with *into*. See comment at **in a jam** and the examples below.) □ *That's too confusing. Please say it again in plain English.* □ *Tell me again in plain English.* □ *Please put it into plain English.*

**in progress** happening now; taking place at this time. □ *You can't go into that room. There is a meeting in progress.* □ *Please tell me about the work you have in progress.*

**in Queer Street** in a difficult situation, especially because of lack of money. (Informal.) □ *We're in Queer Street. We've no money to pay the rent.* □ *No wonder Jack's in Queer Street. He spends more than he earns.*

**in rags** in worn-out and torn clothing. □ *The beggars were in rags.* □ *I think the new casual fashions make you look as though you're in rags.*

**in seventh heaven** in a very happy state. □ *Ann was really in seventh heaven when she got a car of her own.* □ *I'd be in seventh heaven if I had a million pounds.*

**(in) single file** queued up, one behind the other; in a queue that is one person or one thing wide. (*In* can be replaced with *into*. See comment at **in a jam** and the examples below.) □ *Have you ever seen ducks walking in single file?* □ *No, do they usually walk single file?* □ *Please march in single file.* □ *Please get into single file.*

**in stock** readily available, as with goods in a shop. □ *I'm sorry, I don't have that in stock. I'll have to order it for you.* □ *We have all our Christmas merchandise in stock now.*

**instrumental in doing something** playing an important part in doing something. □ *John was instrumental in getting the contract to*

*build the new building.* □ *Our MP was instrumental in defeating the proposal.*

**in the air** everywhere; all about. (Also used literally.) □ *There is such a feeling of joy in the air.* □ *We felt a sense of tension in the air.*

**in the altogether** AND **in the buff; in the raw; in one's birthday suit** naked; nude. (Informal.) □ *We often went swimming in the altogether down at the lake.* □ *The museum has a painting of some ladies in the buff.* □ *Bill says he sleeps in the raw.* □ *It's too cold in here to sleep in your birthday suit.*

**in the balance** in an undecided state. □ *He is waiting for the operation. His life is in the balance.* □ *With his fortune in the balance, John rolled the dice.*

**in the best of health** very healthy. □ *Bill is in the best of health. He eats well and exercises.* □ *I haven't been in the best of health. I think I have the flu.*

**in the blood** AND **in one's blood** built into one's personality or character. □ *John's a great runner. It's in his blood.* □ *The whole family is very athletic. It's in the blood.*

**in the buff** See in the altogether.

**in the dark (about someone or something)** uninformed about someone or something; ignorant about someone or something. □ *I'm in the dark about who is in charge around here.* □ *I can't imagine why they are keeping me in the dark.* □ *You won't be in the dark long. I'm in charge.* □ *She's in the dark about how this machine works.*

**in the doghouse** in trouble; in (someone's) disfavour. (Informal.) □ *I'm really in the doghouse. I was late for an appointment.* □ *I hate being in the doghouse all the time. I don't know why I can't stay out of trouble.*

**in the doldrums** sluggish; inactive; in low spirits. □ *He's usually in the doldrums in the winter.* □ *I had some bad news yesterday which put me in the doldrums.*

**in the family** restricted to one's own family, as with private or embarrassing information. (Especially with *keep*.) □ *Don't tell anyone else about the bankruptcy. Please keep it in the family.* □ *He told only his brother because he wanted it to remain in the family.*

**in the family way** pregnant. (Informal.) □ *I've heard that Mrs. Smith is in the family way.* □ *Our daughter is in the family way.*

**in the flesh** really present; in person. □ *I've heard that the Queen will be here in the flesh.* □ *Is she really here? In the flesh?* □ *The old man wanted to see the Pope in the flesh.*

**in the lap of luxury** in luxurious surroundings. □ *John lives in the lap of luxury because his family is very wealthy.* □ *When I retire, I'd like to live in the lap of luxury.*

**in the light of something** because of certain knowledge; considering something. (As if knowledge or information shed light on something.) □ *In the light of what you have told us, I think we must abandon the project.* □ *In the light of the shop assistant's rudeness, we didn't return to that shop.*

**in the limelight** at the centre of attention. (*In* can be replaced with *into*. See comment at **in a jam** and the examples below. *Limelight* is an obsolete form of *spotlight*, and the word occurs only in this phrase.) □ *John will do almost anything to get himself into the limelight.* □ *All elected officials spend a lot of time in the limelight.*

**in the line of duty** as part of one's expected (military, police, or other) duties. □ *When soldiers fight people in a war, it's in the line of duty.* □ *Police officers have to do things they may not like in the line of duty.*

**in the long run** over a long period of time; ultimately. □ *We'd be better off in the long run buying a car instead of hiring one.* □ *In the long run, we'd be happier in the South.*

**in the market (for something)** wanting to buy something. □ *I'm in the market for a video recorder.* □ *If you have a boat for sale, we're in the market.*

**in the middle of nowhere** in a very remote place. (Informal. *In* can be replaced with *into*. See comment at **in a jam** and the examples below.) □ *We found a nice place to eat, but it's out in the middle of nowhere.* □ *To get to my house, you have to drive into the middle of nowhere.*

**in the money** wealthy. (Informal.) □ *John is really in the money. He's worth millions.* □ *If I am ever in the money, I'll be generous to others.*

**in the near future** in the time immediately ahead. □ *I don't plan to go to Florida in the near future.* □ *What do you intend to do in the near future?*

**in the nick of time** just in time; at the last possible instant; just before it is too late. □ *The doctor arrived in the nick of time. The patient's life was saved.* □ *I reached the airport in the nick of time.*

**in the offing** happening at some time in the future. □ *There is a big investigation in the offing, but I don't know when.* □ *It's hard to tell what's in the offing if you don't keep track of things.*

**in the peak of condition** See in the pink (of condition).

**in the pink (of condition)** AND **in the peak of condition** in very good health; in very good condition, physically and emotionally. (Informal. *In* can be replaced with *into*. See comment at in a jam and the examples below.) □ *The garden is lovely. All the flowers are in the pink of condition.* □ *Jane has to exercise hard to get into the peak of condition.* □ *She's been ill, but she's in the pink now.*

**in the public eye** publicly; visible to all; conspicuous. (*In* can be replaced with *into*. See comment at in a jam and the examples below.) □ *Elected officials find themselves constantly in the public eye.* □ *The mayor made it a practice to get into the public eye as much as possible.*

**in the raw** See in the altogether.

**in the same boat** in the same situation; having the same problem. □ *"I'm broke. Can you lend me twenty pounds?" "Sorry. I'm in the same boat."* □ *Jane and Mary are both in the same boat. They both have been called to the boss's office.*

**in the same breath** [stated or said] almost at the same time. □ *He told me I was lazy, but then in the same breath he said I was doing a good job of work.* □ *The teacher said that the pupils were working hard and, in the same breath, that they were not working hard enough.*

**in the soup** in a bad situation. (Informal.) □ *Now I'm really in the soup. I broke Mrs. Franklin's window.* □ *The child's always in the soup. He attracts trouble.*

**in the swim (of things)** fully involved in or participating in events or happenings. (The *in* can be replaced with *into*. See the explanation at in a jam and the examples below.) □ *I've been ill, but soon*



*I'll be back in the swim of things.* □ *He can't wait to grow up and get into the swim of things.* □ *Mary loves to be in the swim socially.*

**in the wind** about to happen. (Also used literally.) □ *There are some major changes in the wind. Expect these changes to happen soon.* □ *There is something in the wind. We'll find out what it is soon.*

**in thing (to do)** the fashionable thing to do. (Informal. In this phrase, the word *in* is always stressed.) □ *Eating low-fat food is the in thing to do.* □ *Bob is very old-fashioned. He never does the in thing.*

**in this day and age** presently; currently; nowadays. □ *You don't expect people to be polite in this day and age.* □ *Young people don't care for their parents in this day and age.*

**into the bargain** in addition to what was agreed on. □ *I bought a car, and they threw a trailer into the bargain.* □ *When I bought the house, I asked the seller to include the furniture into the bargain.*

**in turn 1.** one at a time in sequence. □ *Each of us can read the book in turn.* □ *We cut the hair of every child in turn.* **2.** in return (for doing something). □ *I took Sally out to lunch, and she took me out in turn.* □ *They invited us to their house in turn.*

**in two shakes of a lamb's tail** in a very short time. □ *Jane returned in two shakes of a lamb's tail.* □ *Fred was able to solve the problem in two shakes of a lamb's tail.*

**in vain** for no purpose; with no success. □ *They rushed her to the hospital, but they did it in vain.* □ *We tried in vain to get her there on time.* □ *They tried and tried, but their efforts were in vain.*

**iron hand in a velvet glove** a strong, ruthless type of control that gives the appearance of being gentle and liberal. □ *In that family, it is a case of the iron hand in a velvet glove. The father looks gentle and loving, but he is a tyrant.* □ *It is a case of the iron hand in a velvet glove in that country. The president pretends to be liberal, but his people have little freedom.*

# J

**jack-of-all-trades** someone who can do several different jobs instead of specializing in one. □ *John can do plumbing, joinery, and roofing—a real jack-of-all-trades. He isn't very good at any of them.* □ *Take your car to a trained mechanic, not a jack-of-all-trades.*

**jam tomorrow** good things in the future. (It is suggested that the future never comes. From Lewis Carroll's *Through the Looking-Glass*, in which the White Queen offers Alice “jam every other day . . . jam tomorrow and jam yesterday but never jam today.”) □ *The politicians promised the people jam tomorrow during the hard times.* □ *Jack was tired of working for a firm that kept promising him a large salary in the future—jam tomorrow.*

**Jekyll and Hyde** someone with both an evil and a good personality. (From *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* by Robert Louis Stevenson.) □ *Bill thinks Mary is so soft and gentle, but she can be very cruel—she is a real Jekyll and Hyde.* □ *Jane doesn't know that Fred is a Jekyll and Hyde. She sees him only when he is being kind and generous, but he can be very mean and miserly.*

**job lot** a mixed collection of varying quality. (Informal.) □ *Mike found a valuable vase in that job lot he bought at the auction.* □ *There was nothing but junk in the job lot that I bought.*

**Job's comforter** someone who makes matters worse when trying to comfort or console someone. (Biblical.) □ *Jane is a Job's comforter. She told me how many other people were looking for jobs when I lost mine.* □ *John's a Job's comforter, too. He told Mary that there were lots of other unattached girls in the district when her engagement was broken off.*

**jockey for position** to try to push or manoeuvre one's way into an advantageous position at the expense of others. □ *All the staff in that firm are jockeying for position. They all want the manager's job.*

□ *It is unpleasant working for a firm where people are always jockeying for position.*

**johnny-come-lately** someone who joins in (something) after it is under way. □ *Don't pay any attention to Sally. She's just a johnny-come-lately and doesn't know what she's talking about.* □ *We've been here for thirty years. Why should some johnny-come-lately tell us what to do?*

**joking apart** being serious for a moment; in all seriousness. □ *I know I laugh at him but, joking apart, he's a very clever scientist.* □ *I know I threatened to leave and go round the world, but, joking apart, I need a holiday.*

**jolly someone along** to keep someone happy and satisfied in order to obtain compliance with one's wishes. □ *If you jolly Jim along, he will help you with the garden.* □ *You'll have to jolly Bert along if you want his help. If he's in a bad mood, he'll refuse.*

**jump at the chance (to do something)** AND **leap at the chance (to do something); jump at the opportunity (to do something); leap at the opportunity (to do something)** to take advantage of a chance to do something. (*To do something* can be replaced with *of doing something*.) □ *John jumped at the chance to go to England.* □ *I don't know why I didn't jump at the opportunity myself.* □ *I should have leapt at the chance.*

**jump at the opportunity (to do something)** See **jump at the chance (to do something)**.

**jump down someone's throat** AND **jump on someone** to scold someone severely. (Informal.) □ *If I disagree with them, my parents will jump down my throat.* □ *Don't jump on me! I didn't do it!*

**jumping-off point** a point or place from which to begin a venture. □ *The local library is a good jumping-off point for your research.* □ *The office job in that firm would be a good jumping-off point for a job in advertising.*

**jump on someone** See **jump down someone's throat**.

**jump out of one's skin** to react strongly to shock or surprise. (Informal. Usually with *nearly*, *almost*, etc.) □ *Oh! You really scared me. I nearly jumped out of my skin.* □ *Bill was so startled he almost jumped out of his skin.*

**jump the gun 1.** to start before the starting signal, as in a race. (Informal. Originally used in sports contests which are started by firing a gun.) □ *We all had to start the race again because Jane jumped the gun.* □ *When we took the test, Tom jumped the gun and started early.* **2.** to start before the starting time. (Figurative on sense 1.) □ *You jumped the gun with your proposal.* □ *We jumped the gun and turned in our application early.*

**just the job** exactly what is required. (Informal.) □ *Those pills were just the job for Jean's headache.* □ *That jacket was just the job for wet weather.*

**just what the doctor ordered** exactly what is required, especially for health or comfort. □ *That meal was delicious, Bob. Just what the doctor ordered.* □ *A glass of cold water would be just what the doctor ordered.*

# K

**keen on someone or something** enthusiastic about someone or something. □ *I'm not too keen on going to London.* □ *Sally is fairly keen on getting a new job.* □ *Mary isn't keen on her new assignment.*

**keep a civil tongue (in one's head)** to speak decently and politely. □ *Please, John. Don't talk like that. Keep a civil tongue in your head.* □ *John seems unable to keep a civil tongue.*

**keep an eye out (for someone or something)** to watch for the arrival or appearance of someone or something. (The *an* can be replaced by *one's*.) □ *Please keep an eye out for the bus.* □ *Keep an eye out for rain.* □ *Okay. I'll keep my eye out.*

**keep a stiff upper lip** to be cool and unmoved by unsettling events. □ *John always keeps a stiff upper lip.* □ *Now, Billy, don't cry. Keep a stiff upper lip.*

**keep a straight face** to make one's face stay free from laughter or smiling. □ *It's hard to keep a straight face when someone tells a funny joke.* □ *I knew it was John who played the trick. He couldn't keep a straight face.*

**keep a weather eye open** to watch for something (to happen); to be on the alert (for something); to be on guard. □ *Some trouble is brewing. Keep a weather eye open.* □ *Try to be more alert. Learn to keep a weather eye open.*

**keep body and soul together** to feed, clothe, and house oneself. □ *I hardly have enough money to keep body and soul together.* □ *How the old man was able to keep body and soul together is beyond me.*

**keep house** to manage a household. □ *I hate to keep house. I'd rather live in a tent than keep house.* □ *My grandmother kept house for nearly sixty years.*

**keep in with someone** to remain friendly with a person, especially a person who might be useful. (Informal.) □ *Jack keeps in with Jane because he likes to borrow her car.* □ *The children keep in with Peter because his father has a sweet-shop.*

**keep late hours** to stay up or stay out until very late. □ *I'm always tired because I keep late hours.* □ *If I didn't keep late hours, I wouldn't sleep so late in the morning.*

**keep one's cards close to one's chest** See play one's cards close to one's chest.

**keep one's chin up** to keep one's spirits high; to act brave and confident. (Informal.) □ *Keep your chin up, John. Things will get better.* □ *Just keep your chin up and tell the judge exactly what happened.*

**keep one's distance (from someone or something)** to maintain a respectful or cautious distance from someone or something. (The distance can be figurative or literal.) □ *Keep your distance from John. He's in a bad mood.* □ *Keep your distance from the fire.* □ *Okay. I'll tell Sally to keep her distance, too.*

**keep one's ear to the ground** See have one's ear to the ground.

**keep oneself to oneself** to remain private; not to mix with other people very much. □ *We never see our neighbours. They keep themselves to themselves.* □ *Jean used to go out a lot, but she has kept herself to herself since her husband died.*

**keep one's eye on the ball** to remain alert to the events occurring around one. (Informal.) □ *If you want to get along in this office, you're going to have to keep your eye on the ball.* □ *Bill would do better in his classes if he would just keep his eye on the ball.*

**keep one's feet on the ground** See have one's feet on the ground.

**keep one's hand in (something)** to retain one's control of something. □ *I want to keep my hand in the business.* □ *Mrs. Johnson has retired from the library, but she still wants to keep her hand in. She works part-time.*

**keep one's head above water** to stay ahead of one's problems; to keep up with one's work or responsibilities. (Also used literally. Also with *have*.) □ *I can't seem to keep my head above water. Work just keeps piling up.* □ *Now that I have more space to work in, I can easily keep my head above water.*

**keep one's mouth shut (about someone or something)** to keep quiet about someone or something; to keep a secret about someone or something. (Informal.) □ *They told me to keep my mouth shut about the problem or I'd be in big trouble.* □ *I think I'll keep my mouth shut.*

**keep one's nose in the air** See have one's nose in the air.

**keep one's nose to the grindstone** to keep busy doing one's work. (Also with *have* and *get*, as in the examples.) □ *The manager told me to keep my nose to the grindstone or be sacked.* □ *I've had my nose to the grindstone ever since I started working here.* □ *If the other people in this office would get their noses to the grindstone, more work would get done.*

**keep one's own counsel** to keep one's thoughts and plans to oneself; not to tell other people about one's thoughts and plans. □ *Jane is very quiet. She tends to keep her own counsel.* □ *I advise you to keep your own counsel.*

**keep one's side of the bargain** to do one's part as agreed; to attend to one's responsibilities as agreed. □ *Tom has to learn to cooperate. He must keep his side of the bargain.* □ *If you don't keep your side of the bargain, the whole project will fail.*

**keep one's wits about one** See under have one's wits about one.

**keep one's word** to uphold one's promise. □ *I told her I'd be there to collect her, and I intend to keep my word.* □ *Keeping one's word is necessary in the legal profession.*

**keep someone in line** to make certain that someone behaves properly. (Informal.) □ *It's very hard to keep Bill in line. He's sort of rowdy.* □ *The teacher had to struggle to keep the class in line.*

**keep someone in stitches** to cause someone to laugh loud and hard, over and over. (Informal. Also with *have*. See the examples.) □ *The comedian kept us in stitches for nearly an hour.* □ *The teacher kept the class in stitches, but the pupils didn't learn anything.* □ *The clown had the crowd in stitches.*

**keep someone on a string** See under have someone on a string.

**keep someone on tenterhooks** to keep someone anxious or in suspense. (Also with *have*. See the examples.) □ *Please tell me now.*

*Don't keep me on tenterhooks any longer! □ Now that we have her on tenterhooks, shall we let her worry, or shall we tell her?*

**keep someone posted** to keep someone informed (of what is happening); to keep someone up to date. □ *If the price of corn goes up, I need to know. Please keep me posted. □ Keep her posted about the patient's condition.*

**keep something under one's hat** to keep something a secret; to keep something in one's mind (only). (Informal. If the secret stays under your hat, it stays in your mind.) □ *Keep this under your hat, but I'm getting married. □ I'm getting married, but keep it under your hat.*

**keep something under wraps** to keep something concealed (until some future time). □ *We kept the plan under wraps until after the election. □ The car company kept the new model under wraps until most of the old models had been sold.*

**keep the ball rolling** See under start the ball rolling.

**keep the home fires burning** to keep things going at one's home or other central location. □ *My uncle kept the home fires burning when my sister and I went to school. □ The manager stays at the office and keeps the home fires burning while I'm out selling our products.*

**keep the lid on something** to restrain something; to keep something quiet or under control. (Informal.) □ *The politician worked hard to keep the lid on the scandal. □ Try to keep the lid on the situation. Don't let it get out of hand.*

**keep the wolf from the door** to maintain oneself at a minimal level; to keep from starving, freezing, etc. □ *I don't make a lot of money, just enough to keep the wolf from the door. □ We have a small amount of money saved, hardly enough to keep the wolf from the door.*

**kick oneself (for doing something)** to regret doing something. (Informal.) □ *I could just kick myself for going off and not locking the car door. Now the car's been stolen. □ James felt like kicking himself when he missed the train.*

**kick one's heels** to be kept waiting for someone or something; to have nothing to do. (Informal.) □ *They left me kicking my heels while they had lunch. □ Mary is just kicking her heels until the university re-opens.*



**kick up a fuss** AND **kick up a row** to become a nuisance; to misbehave and disturb (someone). (Informal. *Row* rhymes with *cow*.)  
 □ *The customer kicked up such a fuss about the food that the manager came to apologize.* □ *I kicked up such a row that they kicked me out.*

**kick up a row** See *kick up a fuss*.

**kick up one's heels** to act in a frisky way; to be lively and have fun. (Informal.) □ *I like to go to an old-fashioned dance and really kick up my heels.* □ *For an old man, your uncle is really kicking up his heels by going on a cruise.*

**kids' stuff** a very easy task. (Informal.) □ *Climbing that hill is kids' stuff.* □ *Driving an automatic car is kids' stuff.*

**kill the fatted calf** to prepare an elaborate banquet (in someone's honour). (From the biblical story recounting the return of the prodigal son.) □ *When Bob got back from college, his parents killed the fatted calf and threw a great party.* □ *Sorry this meal isn't much, John. We didn't have time to kill the fatted calf.*

**kill time** to waste time. (Informal.) □ *Stop killing time. Get to work!* □ *We went over to the record shop just to kill time.*

**kiss of death** an act that puts an end to someone or something. (Informal.) □ *The mayor's veto was the kiss of death for the new law.* □ *Fainting on stage was the kiss of death for my acting career.*

**knit one's brow** to wrinkle one's brow, especially by frowning. □ *The woman knitted her brow and asked us what we wanted from her.* □ *While he read his book, John knitted his brow occasionally. He must not have agreed with what he was reading.*

**knock about (somewhere)** AND **knock around (somewhere)** to travel around; to act as a vagabond. (Informal.) □ *I'd like to take off a year and knock about Europe.* □ *If you're going to knock around, you should do it when you're young.*

**knock around (somewhere)** See *knock about (somewhere)*.

**knock people's heads together** to scold some people; to get some people to do what they are supposed to be doing. (Informal.) □ *If you children don't quieten down and go to sleep, I'm going to come up there and knock your heads together.* □ *The government is in a mess. We need to go down to London and knock the ministers' heads together.*

**knock someone cold 1.** to knock someone out. (Informal.) □ *The blow knocked the boxer cold.* □ *The attacker knocked the old man cold.* **2.** to stun someone; to shock someone. □ *The news of his death knocked me cold.* □ *Pat was knocked cold by the imprisonment of her son.*

**knock someone dead** to put on a stunning performance or display for someone. (Informal. *Someone* is often replaced by *'em* from *them*.) □ *This band is going to do great tonight. We're going to knock them dead.* □ *"See how your sister is all dressed up!" said Bill. "She's going to knock 'em dead."*

**knock someone down with a feather** to push over a person who is stunned, surprised, or awed by something extraordinary. □ *I was so surprised, you could have knocked me down with a feather.* □ *When she heard the news, you could have knocked her down with a feather.*

**know all the tricks of the trade** to possess the skills and knowledge necessary to do something. (Also without *all*.) □ *Tom can repair car engines. He knows the tricks of the trade.* □ *If I knew all the tricks of the trade, I could be a better plumber.*

**know a thing or two (about someone or something)** to be well informed about someone or something; to know something, often something unpleasant, about someone or something. (Informal.) □ *I know a thing or two about cars.* □ *I know a thing or two about Mary that would really shock you.*

**know one's ABC** to know the alphabet; to know the most basic things (about something). (Informal.) □ *Bill can't do it. He doesn't even know his ABC.* □ *You can't expect to write novels when you don't know your ABC.*

**know one's place** to know and accept the behaviour appropriate to one's position or status in life. □ *I know my place. I won't speak unless spoken to.* □ *People around here are expected to know their place. You have to follow all the rules.*

**know the ropes** to know how to do something. (Informal.) □ *I can't do the job because I don't know the ropes.* □ *Ask Sally to do it. She knows the ropes.* ALSO: **show someone the ropes** to tell or show someone how something is to be done. □ *Since this was my first day on the job, the manager spent a lot of time showing me the ropes.*

# L

**labour of love** a task which is either unpaid or poorly paid and which one does simply for one's own satisfaction or pleasure or to please someone whom one likes or loves. □ *Jane made no money out of the biography she wrote. She was writing about the life of a friend, and the book was a labour of love.* □ *Mary hates knitting, but she made a sweater for her boyfriend. What a labour of love!*

**lady-killer** a man who likes to flirt and make love to women, and who is popular with them. □ *Fred used to be a real lady-killer, but now women laugh at him.* □ *Jack's wife doesn't know that he's a lady-killer who goes out with other women.*

**lag behind (someone or something)** to fall behind someone or something; to linger behind someone or something. □ *John always lags behind the person marching in front of him.* □ *"Don't lag behind!" shouted the leader.*

**lame duck** someone or something that is helpless, useless, or inefficient. □ *Jack is always having to help his brother, who is a lame duck.* □ *The best firms will survive, but the lame ducks will not.*

**land a blow (somewhere)** to strike someone or something with the hand or fist. □ *Bill landed a blow on Tom's chin.* □ *When Bill wasn't looking, Tom landed a blow.*

**land of Nod** sleep. (Humorous. From the fact that people sometimes nod when they are falling asleep. This is a pun, because the *land of Nod* is also the name of a place referred to in the Bible.) □ *The baby is in the land of Nod.* □ *Look at the clock! It's time we were all in the land of Nod.*

**land on both feet** See *land on one's feet*.

**land on one's feet** AND **land on both feet** to recover satisfactorily from a trying situation or a setback. (Informal.) □ *Her first year*

*was terrible, but she landed on both feet.* □ *It's going to be a hard day. I only hope I land on my feet.*

**last but not least** last in sequence, but not last in importance. (Often said in introductions.) □ *The speaker said, "And now, last but not least, I'd like to present Bill Smith, who will give us some final words."* □ *And last but not least, here is the owner of the firm.*

**last-ditch effort** a final effort; the last possible attempt. □ *I made one last-ditch effort to get her to stay.* □ *It was a last-ditch effort. I didn't expect it to work.*

**late in life** when one is old. □ *She injured her hip running. She's taken to exercising rather late in life.* □ *Isn't it rather late in life to buy a house?*

**late in the day** far on in a project or activity; too late in a project or activity for action, decisions, etc., to be taken. □ *It was a bit late in the day for him to apologize.* □ *It's late in the day to change the plans.*

**laugh something out of court** to dismiss something as ridiculous. □ *The committee laughed the suggestion out of court.* □ *Jack's request for a large salary increase was laughed out of court.*

**laugh up one's sleeve** to laugh secretly; to laugh quietly to oneself. (Informal.) □ *Jane looked very serious, but I knew she was laughing up her sleeve.* □ *They pretended to admire her singing voice, but they were laughing up their sleeves at her. She screeches.*

**law unto oneself** one who makes one's own laws or rules; one who sets one's own standards of behaviour. □ *You can't get Bill to follow the rules. He's a law unto himself.* □ *Jane is a law unto herself. She's totally unwilling to co-operate.*

**lay about one** to strike at people and things in all directions around one; to hit everyone and everything near one. □ *When the police tried to capture the robber, he laid about him wildly.* □ *In trying to escape, the prisoner laid about him and injured several people.*

**lay down the law** **1.** to state firmly what the rules are (for something). □ *Before the meeting, the managing director laid down the law. We all knew exactly what to do.* □ *The way she laid down the law means that I'll remember her rules.* **2.** to express one's opinions with force. □ *When the teacher caught us, he really laid down the law.* □ *Poor Bob. He really got it when his mother laid down the law.*

**lay something on the line** to speak very firmly and directly about something. □ *She was very angry. She laid it on the line, and we had no doubt about what she meant.* □ *All right, you lot! I'm going to lay it on the line. Don't ever do that again if you know what's good for you.*

**lay the table** See set the table.

**lead a dog's life** to lead a miserable life. □ *Poor Jane really leads a dog's life.* □ *I've been working so hard. I'm tired of leading a dog's life.*

**lead someone by the nose** to force someone to go somewhere (with you); to lead someone by coercion. (Informal.) □ *John had to lead Tom by the nose to get him to the opera.* □ *I'll go, but you'll have to lead me by the nose.*

**lead someone (on) a merry chase** AND **lead someone (on) a merry dance** to lead someone in a purposeless pursuit. □ *What a waste of time. You really led me on a merry chase.* □ *Jane led Bill a merry dance trying to find an antique lamp.*

**lead someone (on) a merry dance** See lead someone (on) a merry chase.

**lead someone to believe something** to imply something to someone; to cause someone to believe something untrue, without lying. □ *But you led me to believe that this watch was guaranteed!* □ *Did you lead her to believe that she was employed as a cook?*

**lead someone to do something** to cause someone to do something. □ *This agent led me to purchase a worthless piece of land.* □ *My illness led me to resign.*

**lead someone up the garden path** to deceive someone. □ *Now, be honest with me. Don't lead me up the garden path.* □ *That swindler really led her up the garden path.*

**leap at the chance (to do something)** See jump at the chance (to do something).

**leap at the opportunity (to do something)** See jump at the chance (to do something).

**learn something by heart** to learn something so well that it can be written or recited without thinking; to memorize something. □ *The director told me to learn my speech by heart.* □ *I had to go over*

*it many times before I learned it by heart.* ALSO: **know something by heart** to know something perfectly; to have memorized something perfectly. □ *I know my speech by heart.* □ *I went over and over it until I knew it by heart.*

**learn something by rote** to learn something without giving any thought to what is being learned. □ *I learned history by rote, and then I couldn't pass the examination, which required me to think.* □ *If you learn things by rote, you'll never understand them.*

**learn the ropes** to learn how to do something; to learn how to work something. (Informal.) □ *I'll be able to do my job very well as soon as I learn the ropes.* □ *John is very slow to learn the ropes.*

**leave a bad taste in someone's mouth** [for something] to leave a bad feeling or memory with someone. (Informal.) □ *The whole business about the missing money left a bad taste in his mouth.* □ *It was a very nice affair, but something about it left a bad taste in my mouth.*

**leave no stone unturned** to search in all possible places. (As if one might find something under a rock.) □ *Don't worry. We'll find your stolen car. We'll leave no stone unturned.* □ *In searching for a nice place to live, we left no stone unturned.*

**leave oneself wide open for something** AND **leave oneself wide open to something** to invite criticism or joking about oneself; to fail to protect oneself from criticism or ridicule. □ *Yes, that was a harsh remark, Jane, but you left yourself wide open to it.* □ *I can't complain about your joke. I left myself wide open for it.*

**leave oneself wide open to something** See **leave oneself wide open for something**.

**leave someone holding the baby** to leave someone with the responsibility for something, especially something difficult or unpleasant, often when it was originally someone else's responsibility. (Informal. Note passive use in the examples.) □ *We all promised to look after the house when the owner was away, but I was left holding the baby on my own.* □ *It was her brother who promised to finish the work, and it was he who then left her holding the baby.*

**leave someone in the lurch** to leave someone waiting on or anticipating your actions. □ *Where were you, John? You really left me in*

*the lurch.* □ *I didn't mean to leave you in the lurch. I thought we had cancelled our meeting.*

**leave well alone** See let well alone.

**leave word (with someone)** to leave a message with someone (who will pass the message on to someone else). □ *If you decide to go to the convention, please leave word with my secretary.* □ *Leave word before you go.* □ *I left word with your brother. Didn't he give you the message?*

**left, right, and centre** everywhere; to an excessive extent. (Informal.) □ *John lent money left, right, and centre.* □ *Mary spent her money on clothes, left, right, and centre.*

**lend (someone) a hand** to give someone some help, not necessarily with the hands. □ *Could you lend me a hand with this piano? I need to move it across the room.* □ *Could you lend a hand with this maths problem?* □ *I'd be happy to lend a hand.*

**less than pleased** displeased. □ *We were less than pleased to learn of your comments.* □ *Bill was less than pleased at the outcome of the election.*

**let down one's hair** See let one's hair down.

**let off steam** AND **blow off steam** to release excess energy or anger. (Informal.) □ *Whenever John gets a little angry, he blows off steam by jogging.* □ *Don't worry about John. He's just letting off steam. He won't sack you.*

**let one's hair down** AND **let down one's hair** to become less formal and more intimate, and to begin to speak frankly. (Informal.) □ *Come on, Jane, let your hair down and tell me all about it.* □ *I have a problem. Do you mind if I let down my hair?*

**let someone have it** to strike someone or attack someone verbally. (Informal.) □ *I really let Tom have it. I told him he had better not do that again if he knows what's good for him.* □ *Bob let John have it—right on the chin.*

**let someone off (the hook)** to release someone from a responsibility. (Informal.) □ *Please let me off the hook for Saturday. I have other plans.* □ *Okay, I'll let you off.*

**let something ride** to allow something to continue or remain as it is. (Informal.) □ *It isn't the best plan, but we'll let it ride.* □ *I disagree with you, but I'll let it ride.*

**let something slide** to neglect something. (Informal.) □ *John let his lessons slide.* □ *Jane doesn't let her work slide.*

**let something slip (out)** to tell a secret by accident. □ *I didn't let it slip out on purpose. It was an accident.* □ *John let the plans slip when he was talking to Bill.*

**let the cat out of the bag** AND **spill the beans** to reveal a secret or a surprise by accident. (Informal.) □ *When Bill glanced at the door, he let the cat out of the bag. We knew then that he was expecting someone to arrive.* □ *We are planning a surprise party for Jane. Don't let the cat out of the bag.* □ *It's a secret. Try not to spill the beans.*

**let the chance slip by** to lose the opportunity (to do something). □ *When I was younger, I wanted to become a doctor, but I let the chance slip by.* □ *Don't let the chance slip by. Do it now!*

**let the grass grow under one's feet** to do nothing; to stand still. □ *Mary doesn't let the grass grow under her feet. She's always busy.* □ *Bob is too lazy. He's letting the grass grow under his feet.*

**let well alone** AND **leave well alone** to leave things as they are (and not try to improve them). □ *There isn't much more you can accomplish here. Why don't you just let well alone?* □ *This is as good as I can do. I'll stop and leave well alone.*

**lick one's lips** to show eagerness or pleasure about a future event. (Informal. From the habit of people licking their lips when they are about to enjoy eating something.) □ *The children licked their lips at the sight of the cake.* □ *The author's readers were licking their lips in anticipation of her new novel.* □ *The journalist was licking his lips when he went off to interview the disgraced politician.*

**lick something into shape** AND **whip something into shape** to put something into good condition, usually with difficulty. (Informal.) □ *I have to lick this report into shape this morning.* □ *Let's all lend a hand and whip this house into shape. It's a mess.*

**lie down on the job** to do one's job poorly or not at all. (Informal.) □ *Tom was sacked because he was lying down on the job.* □ *The*



*telephonist was not answering the phone. She was lying down on the job.*

**lie through one's teeth** to lie boldly. (Informal.) □ *I knew she was lying through her teeth, but I didn't want to say so just then.* □ *I'm not lying through my teeth! I never do!*

**life (and soul) of the party** the type of person who is lively and helps make a party fun and exciting. □ *Bill is always the life and soul of the party. Be sure to invite him.* □ *Bob isn't exactly the life of the party, but he's polite.*

**like a bolt out of the blue** suddenly and without warning. (Refers to a bolt of lightning coming out of a clear blue sky.) □ *The news came to us like a bolt out of the blue.* □ *Like a bolt out of the blue, the managing director came and sacked us all.*

**like a fish out of water** awkward; in a foreign or unaccustomed environment. □ *At a formal dance, John is like a fish out of water.* □ *Mary was like a fish out of water at the bowling tournament.*

**like a sitting duck** AND **like sitting ducks** unguarded; unsuspecting and unaware. □ *He was waiting there like a sitting duck—a perfect target for a mugger.* □ *The soldiers were standing at the top of the hill like sitting ducks. It's a wonder they weren't all killed.*

**like looking for a needle in a haystack** engaged in a hopeless search. □ *Trying to find a white dog in the snow is like looking for a needle in a haystack.* □ *I tried to find my lost contact lens on the beach, but it was like looking for a needle in a haystack.*

**like one of the family** as if someone (or a pet) were a member of one's family. (Informal.) □ *We treat our dog like one of the family.* □ *We are very happy to have you stay with us, Bill. I hope you don't mind if we treat you like one of the family.*

**like sitting ducks** See like a sitting duck.

**likes of someone** the type of person that someone is; anyone like someone. (Informal. Almost always in a negative sense.) □ *I don't like Bob. I wouldn't do anything for the likes of him.* □ *Nobody wants the likes of him around.*

**like water off a duck's back** without any apparent effect. □ *Insults rolled off John like water off a duck's back.* □ *There's no point in scolding the children. It's like water off a duck's back.*

**lion's share (of something)** the larger share of something. □ *The elder boy always takes the lion's share of the food.* □ *Jim was supposed to divide the cake in two equal pieces, but he took the lion's share.*

**listen to reason** to yield to a reasonable argument; to take the reasonable course. □ *Please listen to reason, and don't do something you'll regret.* □ *She got into trouble because she wouldn't listen to reason and was always late.*

**live and let live** not to interfere with other people's business or preferences. □ *I don't care what they do! Live and let live, I always say.* □ *Your parents are strict. Mine prefer to live and let live.*

**live by one's wits** to survive by being clever. □ *When you're in the kind of business I'm in, you have to live by your wits.* □ *John was orphaned at the age of ten and grew up living by his wits.*

**live from hand to mouth** to live in poor circumstances; to be able to get only what one needs for the present and not save for the future. (Informal.) □ *When both my parents were out of work, we lived from hand to mouth.* □ *We lived from hand to mouth during the war. Things were very difficult.*

**live in an ivory tower** to be aloof or separated from the realities of living. (*Live* can be replaced by certain other expressions meaning to dwell or spend time, as in the examples.) □ *If you didn't spend so much time in your ivory tower, you'd know what people really think!* □ *Many professors are said to live in ivory towers. They don't know what the real world is like.*

**live off the fat of the land** to live in a very affluent or luxurious way. (Biblical.) □ *If I had a million pounds, I'd invest it and live off the fat of the land.* □ *Jean married a wealthy man and lived off the fat of the land.*

**live on borrowed time** to live longer than circumstances warrant; to live longer than expected; to remain in a situation longer than circumstances warrant. □ *John has a terminal disease. He's living on borrowed time.* □ *The student's living on borrowed time. If he doesn't pass this exam, he will be asked to go.*

**load off one's mind** relief from something which has been worrying one. (Informal.) □ *It will be a load off Jane's mind when her mother leaves hospital.* □ *You aren't going to like what I'm going to say, but it will be a load off my mind.*

**lock horns (with someone)** to get into an argument with someone. (Informal.) □ *Let's settle this peacefully. I don't want to lock horns with your lawyer.* □ *The judge doesn't want to lock horns either.*

**lock, stock, and barrel** everything. □ *We had to move everything out of the house—lock, stock, and barrel.* □ *We lost everything—lock, stock, and barrel—in the fire.*

**look as if butter wouldn't melt in one's mouth** to appear to be very innocent, respectable, honest, etc. □ *Sally looks as if butter wouldn't melt in her mouth, but she is going out with a married man.* □ *The child looks as though butter wouldn't melt in his mouth, but he bullies the other children.*

**look daggers at someone** to give someone an unpleasant or nasty look. □ *Tom must have been angry with Ann from the way he was looking daggers at her.* □ *Don't you dare look daggers at me! I haven't done anything.*

**look forward to something** to anticipate something with pleasure. □ *I'm really looking forward to your visit next week.* □ *We all look forward to your new book on gardening.*

**look like a million dollars** to look very good. □ *Oh, Sally, you look like a million dollars.* □ *Your new hair-do looks like a million dollars.*

**look like the cat that swallowed the canary** AND **look like the cat that swallowed the cream** to appear self-satisfied, as if one had just had a great success. □ *After the meeting John looked like the cat that swallowed the canary. I knew he must have been a success.* □ *What happened? You look like the cat that swallowed the canary.* □ *Jean must have won. She looks like the cat that swallowed the cream.*

**look like the cat that swallowed the cream** See look like the cat that swallowed the canary.

**look the other way** to ignore (something) on purpose. □ *John could have prevented the problem, but he looked the other way.* □ *By looking the other way, he actually made the problem worse.*

**look to one's laurels** to take care not to lower or diminish one's reputation or position, especially in relation to that of someone else potentially better. □ *With the arrival of the new member of the football team, James will have to look to his laurels to remain the highest*

scorer. □ *The older members of the team will have to look to their laurels when young people join.*

**look up to someone** to view someone with respect and admiration. □ *Bill really looks up to his father.* □ *Everyone in the class looked up to the teacher.*

**loom large** to be of great importance, especially when referring to a possible problem, danger, or threat. □ *The exams were looming large.* □ *Eviction was looming large when the students could not pay their rent.*

**lord it over someone** to dominate someone; to direct and control someone. □ *Mr. Smith seems to lord it over his wife.* □ *The old man lords it over everyone in the office.*

**lose face** to lose status; to become less respectable. □ *John is more afraid of losing face than losing money.* □ *Things will go better if you can explain to him where he was wrong without making him lose face.*

**lose heart** to lose one's courage or confidence. □ *Now, don't lose heart. Keep trying.* □ *What a disappointment! It's enough to make one lose heart.*

**lose one's grip** to lose control (over something). □ *I can't seem to run things like I used to. I'm losing my grip.* □ *They replaced the board of directors because it was losing its grip.*

**lose one's reason** to lose one's power of reasoning, possibly in anger. □ *I was so confused that I almost lost my reason.* □ *Bob seems to have lost his reason when he struck John.*

**lose one's temper** to become angry. □ *Please don't lose your temper. It's not good for you.* □ *I'm sorry that I lost my temper.*

**lose one's train of thought** to forget what one was talking or thinking about. □ *Excuse me, I lost my train of thought. What was I talking about?* □ *You made the speaker lose her train of thought.*

**lost in thought** busy thinking. □ *I'm sorry, I didn't hear what you said. I was lost in thought.* □ *Bill—lost in thought as always—went into the wrong room.*

**lost on someone** having no effect on someone; wasted on someone. (Informal.) □ *The joke was lost on Jean. She didn't understand*

it. □ *The humour of the situation was lost on Mary. She was too upset to see it.*

**love at first sight** love established when two people first see one another. □ *Bill was standing at the door when Ann opened it. It was love at first sight.* □ *It was love at first sight when they met, but it didn't last long.*

**lovely weather for ducks** rainy weather. □ *It's raining and it's lovely weather for ducks.* □ *I don't like this weather, but it's lovely weather for ducks.*

**lower one's sights** to set one's goals or aims lower. □ *Even though you get frustrated, don't lower your sights.* □ *I shouldn't lower my sights. If I work hard, I can do what I want.*

**lower one's voice** to speak more softly. □ *Please lower your voice, or you'll disturb the people who are working.* □ *He wouldn't lower his voice, so everyone heard what he said.*

**lucky dip** a situation in which one is given no choice in what one is given, what happens, etc. (From the name of a fairground side-show in which children choose a parcel at random from a tub of bran.) □ *The allocation of jobs is a lucky dip. You can't choose.* □ *Which coach you go back to school on is a lucky dip.*

# M

**maiden speech** a first public speech, especially a British Member of Parliament's first speech to the House of Commons. □ *The new MP makes his maiden speech tonight.* □ *Our professor made her maiden speech to the conference yesterday.*

**maiden voyage** the first voyage of a ship or boat. □ *The liner sank on its maiden voyage.* □ *Jim is taking his yacht on its maiden voyage.*

**make a beeline for someone or something** to head straight towards someone or something. (Informal.) □ *Billy came into the kitchen and made a beeline for the biscuits.* □ *After the game, we all made a beeline for John, who was serving cold drinks.*

**make a clean breast of something** to confess something. □ *You'll feel better if you make a clean breast of it. Now tell us what happened.* □ *I was forced to make a clean breast of the whole affair.*

**make a clean sweep** to do something completely or thoroughly, with no exceptions. (Informal.) □ *The managing director decided to sack everybody, so he made a clean sweep.* □ *The council decided to make a clean sweep and repair all the roads in the district.*

**make a comeback** to return to one's former (successful) career. (Informal.) □ *After ten years in retirement, the singer made a comeback.* □ *You're never too old to make a comeback.*

**make a face** See pull a face.

**make a go of it** to make something work out all right. (Informal.) □ *It's a tough situation, but Ann is trying to make a go of it.* □ *We don't like living here, but we have to make a go of it.*

**make a great show of something** to make something obvious; to do something in a showy fashion. □ *Ann made a great show of wiping up the drink that John spilled.* □ *Jane displayed her irritation*

*at our late arrival by making a great show of serving the overcooked dinner.*

**make a mountain out of a molehill** to make a major issue out of a minor one; to exaggerate the importance of something. □ *Come on, don't make a mountain out of a molehill. It's not that important.* □ *Mary is always making mountains out of molehills.*

**make a name for oneself** to make oneself famous; to become famous. □ *Sally wants to work hard and make a name for herself.* □ *It's hard to make a name for oneself without a lot of talent and hard work.*

**make an example of someone** to punish someone as a public warning to others. □ *The judge decided to make an example of John, so he fined him the full amount.* □ *The teacher made an example of Mary, who disturbed the class constantly with her whispering. She sent Mary out of the room.*

**make a pitch for someone or something** to say something in support of someone or something; to attempt to promote or advance someone or something. (Informal.) □ *Bill is making a pitch for his friend's new product again.* □ *The theatrical agent came in and made a pitch for her client.*

**make a point of (doing) something** to make an effort to do something. □ *Please make a point of posting this letter. It's very important.* □ *The hostess made a point of thanking me for bringing flowers.*

**make (both) ends meet** to manage to live on a small amount of money. □ *It's hard these days to make ends meet.* □ *I have to work overtime to make both ends meet.*

**make cracks (about someone or something)** to ridicule or make jokes about someone or something. (Informal.) □ *Please stop making cracks about my haircut. It's the new style.* □ *Some people can't help making cracks. They are just rude.*

**make do (with someone or something)** to do as well as possible with someone or something. □ *You'll have to make do with less money next year. The economy is very weak.* □ *We'll have to make do with John even though he's a slow worker.* □ *Yes, we'll have to make do.*

**make eyes at someone** to flirt with someone. □ *Tom spent all afternoon making eyes at Ann.* □ *How could they sit there in class making eyes at each other?*

**make fun of someone or something** to ridicule someone or something. □ *Please stop making fun of me. It hurts my feelings.* □ *Billy teases and makes fun of people a lot, but he means no harm.*

**make good as something** to succeed in a particular role. □ *I hope I make good as a teacher.* □ *John made good as a soccer player.*

**make good money** to earn a large amount of money. (Informal.) □ *Ann makes good money at her job.* □ *I don't know what she does, but she makes good money.*

**make good time** to proceed at a fast or reasonable rate. (Informal.) □ *On our trip to Brighton, we made good time.* □ *I'm making good time, but I have a long way to go.*

**make it worth someone's while** to make something profitable enough for someone to do. □ *If you deliver this parcel for me, I'll make it worth your while.* □ *The boss said he'd make it worth our while if we worked late.*

**make light of something** to treat something as if it were unimportant or humorous. □ *I wish you wouldn't make light of his problems. They're quite serious.* □ *I make light of my problems, and that makes me feel better.*

**make merry** to have fun; to have an enjoyable time. □ *The guests certainly made merry at the wedding.* □ *The children were making merry in the garden.*

**make mischief** to cause trouble. □ *Bob loves to make mischief and get other people into trouble.* □ *Don't believe what Mary says. She's just trying to make mischief.*

**make no bones about something** to have no hesitation in saying or doing something; to be open about something. (Something is often *it*.) □ *Fred made no bones about his dislike of games.* □ *Make no bones about it, Mary is a great singer.*

**make nothing of it** not to understand something; not to get the significance of something. □ *I could make nothing of his statement.* □ *I saw him leave, but I made nothing of it.*



**make oneself at home** to make oneself comfortable as if one were in one's own home. □ *Please come in and make yourself at home.* □ *I'm glad you're here. During your visit, just make yourself at home.*

**make or break someone** to improve or ruin someone. (Informal.) □ *The army will either make or break him.* □ *It's a tough assignment, and it will either make or break her.*

**make someone look good** to cause someone to appear successful or competent (especially when this is not the case). □ *John arranges all his affairs to make himself look good.* □ *The manager didn't like the quarterly report because it didn't make her look good.*

**make someone's blood boil** to make someone very angry. (Informal.) □ *It just makes my blood boil to think of the amount of food that gets wasted in this house.* □ *Whenever I think of that dishonest man, it makes my blood boil.*

**make someone's blood run cold** to shock or horrify someone. □ *The terrible story in the newspaper made my blood run cold.* □ *I could tell you things about prisons which would make your blood run cold.*

**make someone's hair stand on end** to cause someone to be very frightened. (Informal.) □ *The horrible scream made my hair stand on end.* □ *The ghost story made our hair stand on end.*

**make someone's head spin** See **make someone's head swim**.

**make someone's head swim** AND **make someone's head spin**  
**1.** to make someone dizzy or disoriented. □ *Riding in your car so fast makes my head spin.* □ *Breathing the gas made my head swim.* **2.** to confuse or overwhelm someone. □ *All these numbers make my head swim.* □ *The physics lecture made my head spin.*

**make someone's mouth water** to make someone hungry (for something); to make someone desirous of something. (Informal.) □ *That beautiful salad makes my mouth water.* □ *Talking about food makes my mouth water.* □ *Seeing those holiday brochures makes my mouth water.*

**make something from scratch** to make something by starting with the basic ingredients. (Informal.) □ *We made the cake from scratch, not using a cake mix.* □ *I didn't have a ladder, so I made one from scratch.*

**make something to order** to put something together only when someone requests it. (Usually said about clothing.) □ *This shop only makes suits to order.* □ *Our shirts fit perfectly because each one is made to order.*

**make the feathers fly** See make the fur fly.

**make the fur fly** AND **make the feathers fly** to cause a fight or an argument. (Informal.) □ *When your mother gets home and sees what you've done, she'll really make the fur fly.* □ *When those two get together, they'll make the feathers fly. They hate each other.*

**make the grade** to be satisfactory; to be what is expected. (Informal.) □ *I'm sorry, but your work doesn't exactly make the grade.* □ *Jack will never make the grade as a teacher.*

**make up for lost time** to do much of something; to make up for not doing much before; to do something fast. □ *At the age of sixty, Bill learned to play golf. Now he plays it all the time. He's making up for lost time.* □ *Because we spent too much time eating lunch, we have to drive faster to make up for lost time. Otherwise we won't arrive when we should.*

**mark my word(s)** remember what I'm telling you. □ *Mark my word, you'll regret this.* □ *This whole project will fail—mark my words.*

**matter-of-fact** businesslike; unfeeling. □ *Don't expect a lot of sympathy from Ann. She's very matter-of-fact.* □ *Don't be so matter-of-fact. It hurts my feelings.*

**matter of life and death** a matter of great urgency; an issue that will decide between living and dying. (Usually an exaggeration; sometimes humorous.) □ *We must find a doctor. It's a matter of life and death.* □ *I must have some water. It's a matter of life and death.*

**matter of opinion** the question of how good or bad someone or something is. □ *It's a matter of opinion how good the company is. John thinks it's great and Fred thinks it's poor.* □ *How efficient the committee is is a matter of opinion.*

**mealy-mouthed** not frank or direct. (Informal.) □ *Jane's too mealy-mouthed to tell Frank she dislikes him. She just avoids him.* □ *Don't be so mealy-mouthed. It's better to speak plainly.*

**meet one's end** to die. □ *The dog met his end under the wheels of a car.* □ *I hope I don't meet my end until I'm one hundred years old.*

**meet one's match** to meet one's equal. □ *John played tennis with Bill yesterday, and it looks as if John has finally met his match.* □ *Listen to Jane and Mary argue. I always thought that Jane was aggressive, but she has finally met her match.*

**meet one's Waterloo** to meet one's final and insurmountable challenge. (Refers to Napoleon at Waterloo.) □ *This teacher is being very hard on Bill, unlike the previous one. It seems that Bill has met his Waterloo.* □ *John was more than Sally could handle. She had finally met her Waterloo.*

**meet someone half-way** to offer to compromise with someone. □ *No, I won't give in, but I'll meet you half-way.* □ *They settled the argument by agreeing to meet each other half-way.*

**melt in one's mouth** to taste very good. (Informal.) □ *This cake is so good it'll melt in your mouth.* □ *John said that the food didn't exactly melt in his mouth.*

**mend (one's) fences** to restore good relations (with someone). (Also used literally.) □ *I think I had better get home and mend my fences. I had an argument with my daughter this morning.* □ *Sally called up her uncle to apologize and try to mend fences.*

**mend one's ways** to improve one's behaviour. □ *John used to be very wild, but he's mended his ways.* □ *You'll have to mend your ways if you go out with Mary. She hates people to be late.*

**method in one's madness** [for there to be] purpose in what one is doing. (From Shakespeare's *Hamlet*.) □ *What I'm doing may look strange, but there is method in my madness.* □ *Wait until she finishes; then you'll see that there is method in her madness.*

**middle-of-the-road** half-way between two extremes, especially political extremes. □ *Jane is very left-wing, but her husband is politically middle-of-the-road.* □ *I don't want to vote for either the left-wing or the right-wing candidate. I prefer someone with more middle-of-the-road views.*

**milk of human kindness** natural kindness and sympathy shown to others. (From Shakespeare's play *Macbeth*.) □ *Mary is completely hard and selfish—she has no milk of human kindness in her.* □ *Roger is too full of the milk of human kindness, and people take advantage of him.*

**millstone around one's neck** a continual burden or handicap. □ *This huge and expensive house is a millstone around my neck.* □ *Bill's huge family is a millstone around his neck.*

**mind one's own business** to attend only to the things that personally concern one. □ *Leave me alone, Bill. Mind your own business.* □ *I'd be fine if John would mind his own business.*

**mind one's P's and Q's** to mind one's manners. □ *When we go to the mayor's reception, please mind your P's and Q's.* □ *I always mind my P's and Q's when I eat at formal restaurants.*

**mind you** you must also take into consideration the fact that .... □ *He's very well dressed, but mind you he's got plenty of money to buy clothes.* □ *Jean is unfriendly to me, but mind you she's never very nice to anyone.*

**mine of information** someone or something that is full of information. □ *Grandfather is a mine of information about World War I.* □ *The new encyclopaedia is a positive mine of useful information.*

**miss the point** to fail to understand the point. □ *I'm afraid you missed the point. Let me explain it again.* □ *You keep explaining, and I keep missing the point.*

**mixed bag** a varied collection of people or things. (Refers to a bag of game brought home after a day's hunting.) □ *The new pupils are a mixed bag—some bright, some positively stupid.* □ *The furniture I bought is a mixed bag. Some of it is valuable and the rest is worthless.*

**moment of truth** the point at which someone has to face the reality or facts of a situation. □ *The moment of truth is here. Turn over your exam papers and begin.* □ *Now for the moment of truth, when we find out whether we have got planning permission or not.*

**money for jam** AND **money for old rope** payment for very little; money very easily obtained. (Informal.) □ *Baby-sitting is money for jam if the child does not wake up.* □ *Jack finds getting paid to care-take the house money for old rope.*

**money for old rope** See money for jam.

**money is no object** AND **expense is no object** it does not matter how much something costs. □ *Please show me your finest car. Money is no object.* □ *I want the finest earrings you have. Don't worry about how much they cost because expense is no object.*

**money talks** money gives one power and influence to help get things done or get one's own way. (Informal.) □ *Don't worry, I have a way of getting things done. Money talks.* □ *I can't compete against rich old Mrs. Jones. She'll get her way because money talks.*

**monkey business** peculiar or out of the ordinary activities, especially mischievous or illegal ones. □ *There's been some monkey business in connection with the firm's accounts.* □ *Bob left the firm quite suddenly. I think there was some monkey business between him and the boss's wife.*

**More fool you!** You are extremely foolish! □ *More fool you for agreeing to lend John money.* □ *You've offered to work for nothing. More fool you!*

**more's the pity** it is a great pity or shame; it is sad. □ *Jack can't come, more's the pity.* □ *Jane had to leave early, more's the pity.*

**move heaven and earth to do something** to make a major effort to do something. □ *"I'll move heaven and earth to be with you, Mary," said Bill.* □ *I had to move heaven and earth to get there on time.*

**much ado about nothing** a lot of excitement about nothing. (This is the title of a play by Shakespeare.) □ *All the commotion about the new law turned out to be much ado about nothing.* □ *Your complaints always turn out to be much ado about nothing.*

**much of a muchness** very alike or similar; not much different. □ *I don't mind whether we go to the restaurant in the high street or the one by the cinema. They're much of a muchness.* □ *We can go via Edinburgh or Glasgow. The two journeys are much of a muchness.*

**much sought after** wanted or desired very much. □ *This kind of crystal is much sought after. It's very rare.* □ *Sally is a great singer. She's much sought after.*

**mum's the word** don't spread the secret. (Informal.) □ *Don't tell anyone what I told you. Remember, mum's the word.* □ *Okay, mum's the word. Your secret is safe with me.*

# N

**nail in someone's or something's coffin** something which will harm or destroy someone or something. □ *Every word of criticism that Bob said about the firm was a nail in his coffin. I knew the boss would sack him.* □ *Losing the export order was the final nail in the company's coffin.*

**nail one's colours to the mast** to commit oneself to a particular course of action or to a particular point of view. (A ship's flag—its colours—could not be lowered to indicate surrender when it was nailed to the mast.) □ *Fred nailed his colours to the mast by publicly declaring for strike action.* □ *Mary really believes in socialism, but she refuses to nail her colours to the mast and join the Labour Party.*

**naked eye** the human eye, unassisted by optics such as a telescope, microscope, or spectacles. □ *I can't see the bird's markings with the naked eye.* □ *The scientist could see nothing in the liquid with the naked eye, but with the aid of a microscope, she identified the bacteria.*

**name of the game** the goal or purpose; the important or central thing. (Informal.) □ *The name of the game is sell. You must sell, sell, sell if you want to make a living.* □ *Around here, the name of the game is look out for yourself.*

**near the bone** AND **near the knuckle** (Informal.) **1.** coming too close to mentioning something which should not be mentioned, for example because it might hurt or offend someone. □ *Jack's remark about prisons was a bit near the bone. Jane's father is on trial just now.* □ *Mike's speech about traffic safety was near the knuckle. Joan—who just had a serious car crash—was in the first row of the audience.* **2.** rather indecent. □ *The comedian's jokes were a bit near the bone.* □ *Uncle Fred's stories are always near the knuckle.*

**near the knuckle** See near the bone.

**neck and neck** exactly even, especially in a race or a contest. (Informal.) □ *John and Tom finished the race neck and neck.* □ *Mary and Ann were neck and neck in the spelling contest.*

**needs must** if it is absolutely necessary for something to be done, then it must be done. □ *I don't want to sell the car, but needs must. I can't afford to run it.* □ *Needs must. Mary'll have to go out to work now that her husband's died.*

**neither fish nor fowl** not any recognizable thing. □ *The car that they drove up in was neither fish nor fowl. It must have been made out of spare parts.* □ *This proposal is neither fish nor fowl. I can't tell what you're proposing.*

**neither hide nor hair** no sign or indication (of someone or something). □ *We could find neither hide nor hair of him. I don't know where he is.* □ *I could see neither hide nor hair of the children.*

**never darken my door again** See not to darken someone's door.

**never fear** do not worry; have confidence. □ *I'll be there on time—never fear.* □ *I'll help you, never fear.*

**never had it so good** [have] never had so much good fortune. (Informal.) □ *No, I'm not complaining. I've never had it so good.* □ *Mary is pleased with her new job. She's never had it so good.*

**never in one's life** not in one's experience. □ *Never in my life have I been so insulted!* □ *He said that he had never in his life seen such an ugly painting.*

**never mind** forget it; pay no more attention (to something). □ *I wanted to talk to you, but never mind. It wasn't important.* □ *Never mind. I'm sorry to bother you.*

**new lease of life** a renewed and revitalized outlook on life. □ *Getting the offer of employment gave James a new lease of life.* □ *When I got out of the hospital, I felt I had a new lease of life.*

**new one on someone** something one has not heard before and that one is not ready to believe. (Informal. The *someone* is often *me*.) □ *Jack's poverty is a new one on me. He always seems to have plenty of money.* □ *The firm's difficulties are a new one on me. I thought that they were doing very well.*

**night on the town** a night of celebrating (at one or more places in a town). (Informal.)  *Did you enjoy your night on the town?*  *After we got the contract signed, we celebrated with a night on the town.*

**night-owl** someone who usually stays up very late. (Informal.)  *Ann's a real night-owl. She never goes to bed before 2 a.m. and sleeps until midday.*  *Jack's a night-owl and is at his best after midnight.*

**nine days' wonder** something that is of interest to people only for a short time.  *Don't worry about the story about you in the newspaper. It'll be a nine days' wonder and then people will forget.*  *The elopement of Jack and Ann was a nine days' wonder. Now people never mention it.*

**nine-to-five job** a job with regular and normal hours.  *I wouldn't want a nine-to-five job. I like the freedom I have as my own employer.*  *I used to work night-shifts, but now I have a nine-to-five job.*

**nip something in the bud** to put an end to something at an early stage.  *John is getting into bad habits, and it's best to nip them in the bud.*  *There was trouble in the classroom, but the teacher nipped it in the bud.*

**nobody's fool** a sensible and wise person who is not easily deceived.  *Mary's nobody's fool. She knows Jack would try to cheat her.*  *Ann looks as though she's not very bright, but she's nobody's fool.*

**no hard feelings** no anger or resentment. (Informal. No can be replaced with *any*.)  *I hope you don't have any hard feelings.*  *No, I have no hard feelings.*

**no holds barred** with no restraints. (Informal. From wrestling.)  *I intend to argue it out with Mary, no holds barred.*  *When Ann negotiates a contract, she goes in with no holds barred and comes out with a good contract.*

**no ifs or buts about it** absolutely no discussion, dissension, or doubt about something.  *I want you there exactly at eight, no ifs or buts about it.*  *This is the best television set available for the money, no ifs or buts about it.*

**no love lost between someone and someone else** AND **no love lost between people** no friendship wasted between someone and someone else (because they are enemies).  *Ever since their big argument, there has been no love lost between Tom and Bill.*  *You can*



tell by the way that Jane is acting towards Ann that there is no love lost between them.

**none the wiser** not knowing any more.  *I was none the wiser about the project after the lecture. It was a complete waste of time.*  *Ann tried to explain the situation tactfully to Jack, but in the end, he was none the wiser.*

**none the worse for wear** no worse because of use or effort.  *I lent my car to John. When I got it back, it was none the worse for wear.*  *I had a hard day today, but I'm none the worse for wear.*

**none too something** not very; not at all.  *The towels in the bathroom were none too clean.*  *It was none too warm in their house.*

**no skin off someone's nose** no difficulty for someone; no concern of someone.  *It's no skin off my nose if she wants to act that way.*  *She said it was no skin off her nose if we wanted to sell the house.*

**no sooner said than done** done quickly and obediently. (Informal.)  *When Sally asked for someone to open the window, it was no sooner said than done.*  *As Jane opened the window, she said, "No sooner said than done."*

**no spring chicken** not young (any more). (Informal.)  *I don't get around very well any more. I'm no spring chicken, you know.*  *Even though John is no spring chicken, he still plays tennis twice a week.*

**Not a bit (of it).** Not at all.  *Am I unhappy? Not a bit.*  *She said she was not disappointed. Not a bit, in fact.*  *You needn't apologize—not a bit of it.*

**not able** See the entries beginning with *can't* as well as those listed below.

**not able to call one's time one's own** too busy; so busy as not to be in charge of one's own schedule. (Informal. *Not able to* is often expressed as *can't*.)  *It's been so busy around here that I haven't been able to call my time my own.*  *She can't call her time her own these days.*

**not able to see the wood for the trees** allowing many details of a problem to obscure the problem as a whole. (*Not able to* is often expressed as *can't*.)  *The solution is obvious. You missed it because you can't see the wood for the trees.*  *She suddenly realized that she hadn't been able to see the wood for the trees.*

**not able to wait 1.** too anxious to wait; excited (about something in the future). (*Not able to* is often expressed as *can't*.) □ *I'm so excited. I can't wait.* □ *Billy couldn't wait for his birthday.* **2.** to have to go to the toilet urgently. (Informal.) □ *Mum, I can't wait.* □ *Driver, stop the bus! My little boy can't wait.*

**not born yesterday** experienced; knowledgeable in the ways of the world. (Informal.) □ *I know what's going on. I wasn't born yesterday.* □ *Sally knows the score. She wasn't born yesterday.*

**not breathe a word (about someone or something)** to keep a secret about someone or something. □ *Don't worry. I won't breathe a word about it.* □ *Please don't breathe a word about Bob and his problems.*

**not breathe a word (of something)** not to tell something (to anyone). □ *Don't worry. I won't breathe a word of it.* □ *Tom won't breathe a word.*

**not by a long shot** not by a great amount; not at all. □ *Did I win the race? Not by a long shot.* □ *Not by a long shot did she complete the task.*

**not for anything in the world** See not for the world.

**not for love nor money** See not for the world.

**not for the world** AND **not for anything in the world; not for love nor money** not for anything (no matter what its value). □ *I won't do it for love nor money.* □ *He said he wouldn't do it—not for the world.* □ *She said no, not for anything in the world.*

**not give someone the time of day** to ignore someone (usually out of dislike). (Informal.) □ *Mary won't speak to Sally. She won't give her the time of day.* □ *I couldn't get an appointment with Mr. Smith. He wouldn't even give me the time of day.*

**not half bad** okay; pretty good. (Informal.) □ *Say, this roast beef isn't half bad.* □ *Well, Sally! You're not half bad!*

**not have a care in the world** free and casual; unworried and care-free. □ *I really feel good today—as if I didn't have a care in the world.* □ *Ann always acts as though she doesn't have a care in the world.*

**nothing but skin and bones** AND **all skin and bones** very thin or emaciated. (Informal.) □ *Bill has lost so much weight. He's nothing but skin and bones.*

*ing but skin and bones.* □ *That old horse is all skin and bones. I won't ride it.*

**nothing of the kind** no; absolutely not. □ *I didn't insult him—nothing of the kind!* □ *Were we rude? Nothing of the kind!*

**nothing short of something** more or less the same as something bad; as bad as something. □ *His behaviour was nothing short of criminal.* □ *Climbing those mountains alone is nothing short of suicide.*

**nothing to it** it is easy; no difficulty involved. □ *Driving a car is easy. There's nothing to it.* □ *Geometry is fun to learn. There's nothing to it.*

**nothing to write home about** nothing exciting or interesting. (Informal.) □ *I've been busy, but nothing to write home about.* □ *I had a dull week—nothing to write home about.*

**not hold water** to make no sense; to be illogical. (Said of ideas or arguments. Like a vessel or container that leaks, the idea has flaws or “holes” in it.) □ *Your argument doesn't hold water.* □ *This scheme won't work because it won't hold water.*

**not in the same league as someone or something** not nearly as good as someone or something. □ *John isn't in the same league as Bob and his friends. He is not nearly as talented.* □ *This house isn't in the same league as our old one.*

**not know someone from Adam** not to know someone at all. □ *I wouldn't recognize John if I saw him. I don't know him from Adam.* □ *What does she look like? I don't know her from Adam.*

**not lift a finger (to help someone)** to do nothing to help someone. □ *They wouldn't lift a finger to help us.* □ *Can you imagine that they wouldn't lift a finger?*

**not long for this world** about to die. □ *Our dog is nearly twelve years old and not long for this world.* □ *I'm so tired. I think I'm not long for this world.*

**not move a muscle** to remain perfectly motionless. □ *Be quiet. Sit there and don't move a muscle.* □ *I was so tired I couldn't move a muscle.*

**not open one's mouth** AND **not utter a word** not to say anything at all; not to tell something (to anyone). □ *Don't worry, I'll*

*keep your secret. I won't even open my mouth. □ Have no fear. I won't utter a word. □ I don't know how they found out. I didn't even open my mouth.*

**no trespassing** do not enter. (Usually seen on a sign. Not usually spoken.) □ *The sign on the tree said "No Trespassing." So we didn't go in. □ The angry farmer chased us out of the field, shouting, "Get out! Don't you see the No Trespassing sign?"*

**not see further than the end of one's nose** not to care about what is not actually present or obvious; not to care about the future or about what is happening elsewhere or to other people. □ *Mary can't see further than the end of her nose. She doesn't care about what will happen to the environment in the future, as long as she's comfortable now. □ Jack's been accused of not seeing further than the end of his nose. He refuses to expand the firm and look for new markets.*

**not set foot somewhere** not to go somewhere. □ *I wouldn't set foot in John's room. I'm very angry with him. □ He never set foot here.*

**not show one's face** not to appear (somewhere). □ *After what she said, she had better not show her face around here again. □ If I don't say I'm sorry, I'll never be able to show my face again.*

**not sleep a wink** not to sleep at all. (Informal.) □ *I couldn't sleep a wink last night. □ Ann hasn't been able to sleep a wink for a week.*

**not someone's cup of tea** not something one likes or prefers. (Informal.) □ *Playing cards isn't her cup of tea. □ Sorry, that's not my cup of tea.*

**not take no for an answer** not to accept someone's refusal. (A polite way of being insistent.) □ *Now, you must drop over and see us tomorrow. We won't take no for an answer. □ I had to go. They just wouldn't take no for an answer.*

**not to darken someone's door** AND **never darken my door again** to go away and not come back. □ *The heroine of the drama told the villain not to darken her door again. □ She touched the back of her hand to her forehead and said, "Get out and never darken my door again!"*

**not up to scratch** not adequate. (Informal.) □ *Sorry, your essay isn't up to scratch. Please do it over again. □ The performance was not up to scratch.*

**not utter a word** See not open one's mouth.

**not worth a candle** See not worth a penny.

**not worth a penny** AND **not worth a candle** worthless. (Informal.) □ *This land is all swampy. It's not worth a penny.* □ *This vase is not worth a candle.*

**no two ways about it** no choice about it; no other interpretation of it. (Informal.) □ *You have to go to the doctor whether you like it or not. There's no two ways about it.* □ *This letter means you're in trouble with the Inland Revenue. There's no two ways about it.*

**null and void** cancelled; worthless. □ *I tore the contract up, and the entire agreement became null and void.* □ *The judge declared the whole business null and void.*

**nuts and bolts (of something)** the basic facts about something; the practical details of something. □ *Tom knows all about the nuts and bolts of the chemical process.* □ *Ann is familiar with the nuts and bolts of public relations.*

# O

**odd man out** an unusual or atypical person or thing. □ *I'm odd man out because I'm not wearing a tie.* □ *You had better learn to work a computer unless you want to be odd man out.*

**odour of sanctity** AND **air of sanctity** an atmosphere of excessive holiness or piety. (Derogatory.) □ *I hate their house. There's such an odour of sanctity, with Bibles and holy pictures everywhere.* □ *People are nervous of Jane's air of sanctity. She's always praying for people or doing good works and never has any fun.*

**off-centre** not exactly in the centre or middle. □ *The arrow hit the target a little off-centre.* □ *The picture hanging over the chair is a little off-centre.*

**off colour** not very well; slightly ill. □ *Mary is a bit off colour after the long journey.* □ *Fred went to the doctor when he was feeling off colour.*

**off the beaten track** in an unfamiliar place; on a route which is not often travelled. □ *Their home is in a quiet neighbourhood, off the beaten track.* □ *We like to stop there and admire the scenery. It's off the beaten track, but it's worth the trip.*

**of the first water** of the finest quality. □ *This is a very fine pearl—a pearl of the first water.* □ *Tom is a musician of the first water.*

**of the old school** holding attitudes and ideas that were popular and important in the past, but are no longer considered relevant or in line with modern trends. □ *Grammar was not taught much in my son's school, but fortunately he had a teacher of the old school.* □ *Aunt Jane is of the old school. She never goes out without wearing a hat and gloves.*

**old enough to be someone's father** See old enough to be someone's mother.

**old enough to be someone's mother** AND **old enough to be someone's father** as old as someone's parents. (Usually a way of saying that one person is much older than the other, especially when the difference in age is considered inappropriate.) □ *You can't go out with Bill. He's old enough to be your father!* □ *He married a woman who is old enough to be his mother.*

**old hand at doing something** someone who is experienced at doing something. (Informal.) □ *I'm an old hand at fixing clocks.* □ *With four children, he's an old hand at changing nappies.*

**on active duty** in battle or ready to go into battle. (Military.) □ *The soldier was on active duty for ten months.* □ *That was a long time to be on active duty.*

**on a first-name basis (with someone)** AND **on first-name terms (with someone)** knowing someone very well; good friends with someone. (Refers to using a person's given name rather than a surname or title.) □ *I'm on a first-name basis with John.* □ *John and I are on first-name terms.*

**on a fool's errand** involved in a useless journey or task. □ *Bill went for an interview, but he was on a fool's errand. The job had already been filled.* □ *I was sent on a fool's errand to buy some flowers. I knew the shop would be shut by then.*

**on all fours** on one's hands and knees. □ *I dropped a contact lens and spent an hour on all fours looking for it.* □ *The baby can walk, but is on all fours most of the time.*

**on a par with someone or something** equal to someone or something. □ *Your effort is simply not on a par with what's expected from you.* □ *John's work is not on a par with Bob's.*

**on average** generally; usually. □ *On average, you can expect about a 10 percent failure.* □ *On average, we see about ten people a day.*

**on behalf of someone** AND **on someone's behalf** [doing something] as someone's agent; [doing something] in place of someone; for the benefit of someone. □ *I'm writing on behalf of Mr. Smith, who has applied for a position with your company.* □ *I'm calling on behalf of my client, who wishes to complain about your actions.* □ *I'm acting on your behalf.*

**once and for all** finally and irreversibly. □ *I want to get this problem settled once and for all.* □ *I told him once and for all that he has to start studying.*

**once in a blue moon** very rarely. □ *I seldom go to the cinema—maybe once in a blue moon.* □ *I don't go into the city except once in a blue moon.*

**once-in-a-lifetime chance** a chance that will never occur again in one's lifetime. □ *This is a once-in-a-lifetime chance. Don't miss it.* □ *She offered me a once-in-a-lifetime chance, but I turned it down.*

**once in a while** occasionally. □ *I go to see a film once in a while.* □ *Once in a while we have lamb, but not very often.*

**once upon a time** once in the past. (A formula used to begin a fairy-tale.) □ *Once upon a time, there were three bears.* □ *Once upon a time, I had a puppy of my own.*

**on cloud nine** very happy. (Informal.) □ *When I got my promotion, I was on cloud nine.* □ *When the cheque came, I was on cloud nine for days.*

**one for the record (books)** a record-breaking act. □ *What a dive! That's one for the record books.* □ *I've never heard such a funny joke. That's really one for the record.*

**one in a hundred** See one in a thousand.

**one in a million** See one in a thousand.

**one in a thousand** AND **one in a hundred; one in a million** unique; one of a very few. □ *He's a great friend. He's one in a million.* □ *Mary's one in a hundred—such a hard worker.*

**one's days are numbered** [for someone] to face death, dismissal, or ruin. (Informal.) □ *If I don't get this contract, my days are numbered at this firm.* □ *His days as a member of the club are numbered.* □ *Uncle Tom has a terminal disease. His days are numbered.*

**one's eyes are bigger than one's stomach** [for one] to take more food than one can eat. (Informal.) □ *I can't eat all this. I'm afraid that my eyes were bigger than my stomach when I ordered.* □ *Try to take less food. Your eyes are bigger than your stomach at every meal.*  
ALSO: **have eyes bigger than one's stomach** to have a desire for



more food than one could possibly eat. □ *I know I have eyes bigger than my stomach, so I won't take a lot of food.*

**one's old stamping-ground** the place where one was raised or where one has spent a lot of time. (Informal.) □ *Ann should know about that place. It's near her old stamping-ground.* □ *I can't wait to get back to my old stamping-ground and see old friends.*

**one's way of life** one's life-style; one's pattern of living. □ *That kind of thing just doesn't fit into my way of life.* □ *Children change one's way of life.*

**one's words stick in one's throat** one finds it difficult to speak because of emotion. □ *My words stick in my throat whenever I try to say something kind or tender.* □ *I wanted to apologize, but the words stuck in my throat.*

**one-up (on someone)** ahead of someone; with an advantage over someone. (Informal.) □ *Tom is one-up on Sally because he got a job and she didn't.* □ *Yes, it sounds like Tom is one-up.*

**on first-name terms (with someone)** See on a first-name basis (with someone).

**on holiday** away, having a holiday; on holiday. □ *Where are you going on holiday this year?* □ *I'll be away on holiday for three weeks.*

**only have eyes for someone** to be loyal to only one person, in the context of romance; to be interested in only one person. □ *Oh, Jane! I only have eyes for you!* □ *Don't waste any time on Tom. He only has eyes for Ann.*

**on one's feet** **1.** standing up. □ *Get on your feet. They are playing the national anthem.* □ *I've been on my feet all day, and they hurt.* **2.** in improving health, especially after an illness. □ *I hope to be back on my feet next week.* □ *I can help out as soon as I'm back on my feet.*

**on one's guard** cautious; watchful. □ *Be on your guard. There are pickpockets around here.* □ *You had better be on your guard.*

**on one's honour** on one's solemn oath; promised sincerely. □ *On my honour, I'll be there on time.* □ *He promised on his honour that he'd pay me back next week.*

**on one's mind** occupying one's thoughts; currently being thought about. □ *You've been on my mind all day.* □ *Do you have something on your mind? You look so serious.*

**on one's (own) head be it** one must take the responsibility for one's actions. □ *On your head be it if you set fire to the house.* □ *James insisted on going to the party uninvited. On his head be it if the host is annoyed.*

**on one's toes** alert. (Informal.) □ *You have to be on your toes if you want to be in this business.* □ *My job keeps me on my toes.*

**on order** ordered with delivery expected. □ *Your car is on order. It'll be here in a few weeks.* □ *I don't have the part in stock, but it's on order.*

**on record** recorded for future reference. □ *We had the coldest winter on record last year.* □ *This is the fastest race on record.*

**on sale** AND **for sale** offered for sale; able to be bought. □ *There are antiques on sale at the market.* □ *There is a wide range of fruit for sale.*

**on second thoughts** having given something more thought; having reconsidered something. □ *On second thoughts, maybe you should sell your house and move into a flat.* □ *On second thoughts, let's not go to a film.*

**on someone's behalf** See on behalf of someone.

**on the air** broadcasting (a radio or television programme). □ *The radio station came back on the air shortly after the storm.* □ *We were on the air for two hours.*

**on the alert (for someone or something)** watchful and attentive for someone or something. □ *Be on the alert for pickpockets.* □ *You should be on the alert when you cross the street in heavy traffic.*

**on the cards** in the future. (Informal.) □ *Well, what do you think is on the cards for tomorrow?* □ *I asked the managing director if there was a rise on the cards for me.*

**on the dot** exactly right; in exactly the right place; at exactly the right time. (Informal.) □ *That's it! You're right on the dot.* □ *He got here at one o'clock on the dot.*

**on the eve of something** just before something, possibly the evening before something. □ *John decided to leave college on the eve of his graduation.* □ *The team held a party on the eve of the tournament.*

**on the face of it** superficially; from the way it looks. □ *This looks like a serious problem on the face of it. It probably is minor, however.* □ *On the face of it, it seems worthless.*

**on the horns of a dilemma** having to decide between two things, people, etc. □ *Mary found herself on the horns of a dilemma. She didn't know which dress to choose.* □ *I make up my mind easily. I'm not on the horns of a dilemma very often.*

**on the loose** running around free. (Informal.) □ *Look out! There is a bear on the loose from the zoo.* □ *Most young people enjoy being on the loose when they go to college.*

**on the mend** getting well; healing. (Informal.) □ *My cold was terrible, but I'm on the mend now.* □ *What you need is some hot chicken soup. Then you'll really be on the mend.*

**on the off-chance** because of a slight possibility that something may happen, might be the case, etc.; just in case. □ *I went to the theatre on the off-chance that there were tickets for the show left.* □ *We didn't think we would get into the football ground, but we went on the off-chance.*

**on the sly** slyly or sneakily. (Informal.) □ *He was seeing Mrs. Smith on the sly.* □ *She was supposed to be losing weight, but she was eating chocolate on the sly.*

**on the spot** (Informal.) **1.** at exactly the right place; in the place where one is needed. □ *Fortunately the ambulance men were on the spot when the accident happened at the football match.* □ *I expect the police to be on the spot when and where trouble arises.* **2.** at once; then and there. □ *She liked the house so much that she bought it on the spot.* □ *He was fined on the spot for parking illegally.*

**on the spur of the moment** suddenly; spontaneously. □ *We decided to go on the spur of the moment.* □ *I went on holiday on the spur of the moment.*

**on the strength of something** because of the support of something, such as a promise or evidence; owing to something. □ *On*

*the strength of your comment, I decided to give John another chance.*

□ *On the strength of my neighbour's testimony, my case was dismissed.*

**on the tip of one's tongue** about to be said; almost remembered.

□ *I have his name right on the tip of my tongue. I'll think of it in a second.*

□ *John had the answer on the tip of his tongue, but Ann said it first.*

**on thin ice** See skating on thin ice.

**on tiptoe** standing or walking on the front part of the feet (the balls of the feet) with no weight put on the heels. (This is done to gain height or to walk quietly.)

□ *I had to stand on tiptoe to see over the fence.*

□ *I came in late and walked on tiptoe so I wouldn't wake anybody up.*

**on top of the world** See sitting on top of the world.

**open a can of worms** to uncover a set of problems or complications; to create unnecessary complications. (Informal.)

□ *If you start asking questions about the firm's accounts, you'll open a can of worms.*

□ *How about clearing up this mess before you open up a new can of worms?*

**open-and-shut case** something, usually a law-case or problem, that is simple and straightforward without complications.

□ *The murder trial was an open-and-shut case. The defendant was caught with the murder weapon.*

□ *Jack's death was an open-and-shut case of suicide. He left a suicide note.*

**open book** someone or something that is easy to understand.

□ *Jane's an open book. I always know what she is going to do next.*

□ *The council's intentions are an open book. They want to save money.*

**open fire (on someone)** to start (doing something, such as asking questions or criticizing). (Informal. Also used literally.)

□ *The reporters opened fire on the mayor.*

□ *When the reporters opened fire, the film-star was smiling, but not for long.*

□ *The soldiers opened fire on the villagers.*

**open one's heart (to someone)** to reveal one's most private thoughts to someone.

□ *I always open my heart to my wife when I have a problem.*

□ *It's a good idea to open your heart every now and then.*

**open Pandora's box** to uncover a lot of unsuspected problems.  *When I asked Jane about her problems, I didn't know I had opened Pandora's box.*  *You should be cautious with people who are upset. You don't want to open Pandora's box.*

**open season for something** unrestricted hunting of a particular game animal.  *It's always open season for rabbits around here.*  *Is it ever open season for deer?*

**open secret** something which is supposed to be secret, but which is known to a great many people.  *Their engagement is an open secret. Only their friends are supposed to know, but in fact, the whole town knows.*  *It's an open secret that Fred's looking for a new job.*

**open the door to something** to permit or allow something to become a possibility. (Also used literally.)  *Your policy opens the door to cheating.*  *Your statement opens the door to John's candidacy.*

**order of the day** something necessary or usual at a certain time.  *Warm clothes are the order of the day when camping in the winter.*  *Going to bed early was the order of the day when we were young.*

**other way round** the reverse; the opposite.  *No, it won't fit that way. Try it the other way round.*  *It doesn't make any sense like that. It belongs the other way round.*

**out of kilter** out of working order; malfunctioning. (Informal.)  *My furnace is out of kilter. I have to call someone to fix it.*  *This computer is out of kilter. It doesn't work.*

**out of line 1.** improper; inappropriate.  *I'm afraid that your behaviour was quite out of line. I do not wish to speak further about this matter.*  *Bill, that remark was out of line. Please be more respectful.* **2.** See the following entry.

**out of line (with something) 1.** not properly lined up in a line of things.  *One of those books on the shelf is out of line with the others. Please fix it.*  *The files are out of line also.* **2.** unreasonable when compared with something else; not fitting with what is usual.  *The cost of this meal is out of line with what other restaurants charge.*  *Your request is out of line with company policy.*

**out of luck** without good luck; having bad fortune. (Informal.)  *If you wanted some icecream, you're out of luck.*  *I was out of luck. I got there too late to get a seat.*

**out of necessity** because of necessity; because it was necessary.  
 *I bought this hat out of necessity. I needed one, and this was all there was.*  *We sold our car out of necessity.*

**out of one's mind** silly and senseless; crazy; irrational.  *Why did you do that? You must be out of your mind!*  *Good grief, Tom! You're out of your mind!*

**out of order 1.** not in the correct order.  *This book is out of order. Please put it in the right place on the shelf.*  *You're out of order, John. Please get in the queue after Jane.* **2.** not following correct procedure.  *My question was declared out of order by the president.*  *Ann inquired, "Isn't a motion to table the question out of order at this time?"*

**out of place 1.** not in the usual or proper place.  *The salt was out of place in the cupboard, so I couldn't find it.*  *Billy, you're out of place. Please sit next to Tom.* **2.** improper and impertinent.  *That kind of behaviour is out of place in church.*  *Your rude remark is quite out of place.*

**out-of-pocket expenses** the actual amount of money spent. (Refers to the money one person pays while doing something on someone else's behalf. One is usually paid back this money.)  *My out-of-pocket expenses for the party were nearly £175.*  *My employer usually pays all out-of-pocket expenses for a business trip.*

**out of practice** performing poorly because of a lack of practice.  *I used to be able to play the piano extremely well, but now I'm out of practice.*  *The players lost the game because they were out of practice.*

**out of print** no longer available for sale. (Said of a book or periodical.)  *The book you want is out of print, but perhaps I can find a used copy for you.*  *It was published nearly ten years ago, so it's probably out of print.*

**out of season 1.** not now available for sale.  *Sorry, oysters are out of season. We don't have any.*  *Watermelon is out of season in the winter.* **2.** not now legally able to be hunted or caught.  *Are salmon out of season?*  *I caught a trout out of season and had to pay a fine.*

**out of service** not now operating.  *Both lifts are out of service, so I had to use the stairs.*  *The toilet is temporarily out of service.*

**out of sorts** not feeling well; cross and irritable. □ *I've been out of sorts for a day or two. I think I'm coming down with flu.* □ *The baby is out of sorts. Maybe she's cutting a tooth.*

**out of stock** not immediately available in a shop; [for goods] to be temporarily unavailable. □ *Those items are out of stock, but a new supply will be delivered on Thursday.* □ *I'm sorry, but the red ones are out of stock. Would a blue one do?*

**out of the blue** suddenly; without warning. □ *Then, out of the blue, he told me he was leaving.* □ *Mary appeared on my doorstep out of the blue.*

**out of the corner of one's eye** [seeing something] at a glance; glimpsing (something). □ *I saw someone do it out of the corner of my eye. It might have been Jane who did it.* □ *I only saw the accident out of the corner of my eye. I don't know who is at fault.*

**out of the frying-pan into the fire** from a bad situation to a worse situation. □ *When I tried to argue about my fine for a traffic violation, the judge charged me with contempt of court. I really went out of the frying-pan into the fire.* □ *I got deeply in debt. Then I really got out of the frying-pan into the fire when I lost my job.*

**out of the question** not possible; not permitted. □ *I'm sorry, but leaving early is out of the question.* □ *You can't go to France this spring. We can't afford it. It's out of the question.*

**out of the running** no longer being considered; eliminated from a contest. □ *After the first part of the diving competition, three of our team were out of the running.* □ *After the scandal was made public, I was no longer in the running. I pulled out of the election.*

**out of the swim of things** not in the middle of activity; not involved in things. (Informal.) □ *While I had my cold, I was out of the swim of things.* □ *I've been out of the swim of things for a few weeks. Please bring me up to date.*

**out of the woods** past a critical phase; no longer at risk. (Informal.) □ *When the patient got out of the woods, everyone relaxed.* □ *I can give you a better prediction for your future health when you are out of the woods.*

**out of thin air** out of nowhere; out of nothing. (Informal.) □ *Suddenly—out of thin air—the messenger appeared.* □ *You just made that up out of thin air.*

**out of this world** wonderful; extraordinary. □ *This pie is just out of this world.* □ *Look at you! How lovely you look—simply out of this world.*

**out of turn** not at the proper time; not in the proper order. □ *We were permitted to be served out of turn, because we had to leave early.* □ *Bill tried to register out of turn and was sent away.*

**out of work** unemployed, temporarily or permanently. □ *How long have you been out of work?* □ *My brother has been out of work for nearly a year.*

**out on a limb** [in or into a situation of] doing something differently from the way others do it, and thus taking a chance or a risk. (Often with go.) □ *She really went out on a limb when she gave him permission to leave early.* □ *As the only one who supported the plan, Bill was out on a limb.*

**out on parole** out of jail but still under police supervision. □ *Bob got out on parole after serving only a few years of his sentence.* □ *He was out on parole because of good behaviour.*

**over and done with** finished. □ *I'm glad that's over and done with.* □ *Now that I have college over and done with, I can find a job.*

**over my dead body** not if I can stop you; you'll have to kill me first (so that I won't stop you). □ *You'll sell this house over my dead body!* □ *You want to leave college? Over my dead body!*

**over the hill** over age; too old to do something. (Informal.) □ *Now that Mary's forty, she thinks she's over the hill.* □ *My grandfather was over eighty before he felt he was over the hill.*

**over the hump** over the difficult part. (Informal.) □ *This is a difficult project, but we're over the hump now.* □ *I'm half-way through—over the hump—and it looks as though I may finish after all.*

**over the odds** more than one would expect to pay. (From betting in horse-racing.) □ *We had to pay over the odds for a house in the area where we wanted to live.* □ *It's a nice car, but the owner's asking well over the odds for it.*



**over the top** exaggerated; excessive. (Informal.) □ *Her reaction to my statement was a bit over the top. She hugged me.* □ *Everyone thought her behaviour was over the top.* ALSO: **go over the top** to do something in an exaggerated or excessive way; to overreact. □ *Jane really went over the top with the dinner she prepared for us. It took her hours to prepare.* □ *Uncle Jack went completely over the top when he bought my baby's present. It must have been incredibly expensive.*

# P

**packed out** very crowded; containing as many people as possible. (Informal.) □ *The theatre was packed out.* □ *The cinema was packed out twenty minutes before we arrived.*

**pack someone off (to somewhere)** to send someone away to somewhere, often with the suggestion that one is glad to do so. □ *His parents packed him off to boarding-school as soon as possible.* □ *John finally has left for France. We packed him off last week.*

**pack them in** to draw a lot of people. (Informal.) □ *It was a good night at the theatre. The play really packed them in.* □ *The circus manager knew he could pack them in if he advertised the lion tamer.*

**paddle one's own canoe** to do (something) by oneself; to be alone. □ *I've been left to paddle my own canoe since I was a child.* □ *Sally didn't stay with the group. She wanted to paddle her own canoe.*

**pain in the neck** a bother; an annoyance. (Informal.) □ *This assignment is a pain in the neck.* □ *Your little brother is a pain in the neck.*

**pale around the gills** AND **green around the gills; green about the gills** looking sick. (Informal.) □ *John is looking a little pale around the gills. What's wrong?* □ *Oh, I feel a little green about the gills.*

**paper over the cracks (in something)** to try to hide faults or difficulties, often in a hasty or not very successful way. □ *The politician tried to paper over the cracks in his party's economic policy.* □ *Tom tried to paper over the cracks in his relationship with the boss, but it was not possible.*

**par for the course** typical; about what one could expect. (This refers to a golf-course.) □ *So he went off and left you? Well, that's about par for the course. He's no friend.* □ *I worked for days on this project, but it was rejected. That's par for the course around here.*

**parrot-fashion** without understanding the meaning of what one has learnt, is saying, etc. □ *The child learnt the poem by heart and repeated it parrot-fashion.* □ *Jean never thinks for herself. She just repeats what her father says, parrot-fashion.*

**part and parcel of something** an essential part of something; something that is unavoidably included as part of something else. □ *This point is part and parcel of my whole argument.* □ *Bill refused to accept pain and illness as part and parcel of growing older.*

**parting of the ways** a point at which people separate and go their own ways. (Often with *come to a*, *arrive at a*, *reach a*, etc.) □ *Jane and Bob finally came to a parting of the ways and divorced.* □ *Bill and his parents reached a parting of the ways and he left home.*

**party line** the official ideas and attitudes which are adopted by the leaders of a particular group, usually political, and which the other members are expected to accept. □ *Tom has left the club. He refused to follow the party line.* □ *Many politicians agree with the party line without thinking.*

**pass as someone or something** to succeed in being accepted as someone or something. □ *The spy was able to pass as a normal citizen.* □ *The thief was arrested when he tried to pass as a priest.*

**pass muster** to measure up to the required standards. □ *I tried my best, but my efforts didn't pass muster.* □ *If you don't wear a suit, you won't pass muster at that expensive restaurant. They won't let you in.*

**pass the buck** to pass the blame (to someone else); to give the responsibility (to someone else). (Informal.) □ *Don't try to pass the buck! It's your fault, and everybody knows it.* □ *Some people try to pass the buck whenever they can. They won't accept responsibility.*

**pass the hat round** to attempt to collect money for some (charitable) project. □ *Bob is passing the hat round to collect money to buy flowers for Ann.* □ *He's always passing the hat round for something.*

**pass the time of day (with someone)** to chat or talk informally with someone. (Informal.) □ *I saw Mr. Brown in town yesterday. I stopped and passed the time of day with him.* □ *No, we didn't have a serious talk; we just passed the time of day.*

**past it** See past someone's or something's best.

**past someone's or something's best** AND **past someone's or something's sell-by date; past it** less good or efficient now than someone or something was before. (Past it and past someone's or something's sell-by date are informal.) □ *Joan was a wonderful singer, but she's past her best now.* □ *This old car's past it. I'll need to get a new one.* □ *Mary feels she's past her sell-by date when she sees so many young women joining the company.* □ *This cooker's past its sell-by date. We'll have to get a new one.*

**past someone's or something's sell-by date** See past someone's or something's best.

**pay an arm and a leg (for something)** AND **pay through the nose (for something)** to pay too much money for something. (Informal.) □ *I hate to have to pay an arm and a leg for a tank of petrol.* □ *If you shop around, you won't have to pay an arm and a leg.* □ *Why should you pay through the nose?* ALSO: **cost an arm and a leg** to cost too much. □ *It cost an arm and a leg, so I didn't buy it.*

**pay lip-service (to something)** to express loyalty, respect, or support for something insincerely. □ *You don't really care about politics. You're just paying lip-service to the candidate.* □ *The students pay lip-service to the new rules, but they plan to ignore them in practice.*

**pay one's debt to society** to serve a sentence for a crime, usually in prison. □ *The judge said that Mr. Simpson had to pay his debt to society.* □ *Mr. Brown paid his debt to society in prison.*

**pay one's dues** to pay the fees required to belong to an organization. □ *If you haven't paid your dues, you can't come to the club picnic.* □ *How many people have paid their dues?*

**pay someone a back-handed compliment** to give someone an apparent compliment that is really an insult. □ *John said that he had never seen me looking better. I think he was paying me a back-handed compliment.* □ *I'd prefer that someone insulted me directly. I hate it when someone pays me a back-handed compliment—unless it's a joke.*

**pay someone a compliment** to compliment someone. □ *Sally thanked me for paying her a compliment.* □ *When Tom did his job well, I paid him a compliment.*

**pay the earth** to pay a great deal of money for something. (Informal. Compare with *cost the earth*.) □ *Bob paid the earth for that ugly old sideboard.* □ *You have to pay the earth for property in that area.*

**pay the piper** to provide the money for something and so have some control over how the money is spent. (From the expression “He who pays the piper calls the tune.”) □ *The parents at a fee-paying school pay the piper and so should have a say in how the school is run.* □ *Hotel guests pay the piper and should be treated politely.*

**pay through the nose (for something)** See *pay an arm and a leg (for something)*.

**pick and choose** to choose very carefully from a number of possibilities; to be selective. □ *You must take what you are given. You cannot pick and choose.* □ *Meg is so beautiful. She can pick and choose from a whole range of suitors.*

**pick a quarrel (with someone)** to start an argument with someone. □ *Are you trying to pick a quarrel with me?* □ *No, I’m not trying to pick a quarrel.*

**pick holes in something** to criticize something severely; to find all the flaws or fallacies in an argument. (Informal.) □ *The solicitor picked holes in the witness’s story.* □ *They will pick holes in your argument.*

**pick on someone** to criticize someone or something constantly; to abuse someone or something. (Informal.) □ *Stop picking on me!* □ *Why are you always picking on the office junior?*

**piece of cake** something very easy. (Informal.) □ *No, it won’t be any trouble. It’s a piece of cake.* □ *Climbing this is easy! Look here—a piece of cake.*

**pie in the sky** a supposed future reward which one is not likely to get. (From “You’ll get pie in the sky when you die,” a line from a song by U.S. radical labour organizer Joe Hill.) □ *The firm have promised him a large reward, but I think it’s just pie in the sky.* □ *Don’t hold out for a big reward, you know—pie in the sky.*

**pig(gy)-in-the-middle** a person who is in a position between two opposing groups. □ *Jack and Tom share a secretary who is always pig-in-the-middle because they are always disagreeing with each other.* □

*Fred's mother is piggy-in-the-middle when Fred and his father start to argue. She tries to please both of them.*

**pigs might fly** a saying indicating that something is extremely unlikely to happen. □ *Pam might marry Tom, but there again, pigs might fly.* □ *Do you really believe that Jack will lend us his car? Yes, and pigs might fly.*

**pile in(to something)** to climb in or get in roughly. (Informal.) □ *Okay, children, pile in!* □ *The children piled into the car and slammed the door.*

**pinch and scrape** to live on very little money, sometimes to save money. □ *Bob has to pinch and scrape all the time because of his low wages.* □ *Students have to pinch and scrape to buy books.*

**pin one's faith on someone or something** to put one's hope, trust, or faith in someone or something. □ *I'm pinning my faith on your efforts.* □ *Don't pin your faith on Tom. He's not dependable.*

**pins and needles** a tingling feeling in some part of one's body. □ *I've got pins and needles in my legs.* □ *Mary gets pins and needles if she crosses her arms for long.*

**pipe down** to be quiet; to get quiet. (Informal.) □ *Okay, you lot, pipe down!* □ *I've heard enough from you. Pipe down!*

**pipe-dream** a wish or an idea which is impossible to achieve or carry out. (From the dreams or visions induced by the smoking of an opium pipe.) □ *Going to the West Indies is a pipe-dream. We'll never have enough money.* □ *Your hopes of winning a lot of money are just a silly pipe-dream.*

**pipped at the post** beaten in the final stages of a race or competition; defeated in some activity at the last minute. (Informal. From horse-racing.) □ *Tom led the race for most of the time, but he was pipped at the post by his rival.* □ *Jane nearly bought that house, but she was pipped at the post by the present owner.*

**pitch in (and help)** to get busy and help (with something). (Informal.) □ *Pick up a paintbrush and pitch in and help.* □ *Why don't some of you pitch in? We need all the help we can get.*

**pit someone or something against someone or something** to set someone or something in opposition to someone or something. □ *The rules of the tournament pit their team against ours.* □ *John*

*pitted Mary against Sally in the tennis match. □ In the illegal dog fight, large dogs were pitted against small ones.*

**plain sailing** progress made without any difficulty; an easy situation. □ *Once you've passed that exam, it will be plain sailing. □ Working there was not all plain sailing. The boss had a very hot temper.*

**play both ends (against the middle)** [for one] to scheme in a way that pits two sides against each other (for one's own gain). (Informal.) □ *I told my brother that Mary doesn't like him. Then I told Mary that my brother doesn't like her. They broke up, so now I can have the car this week-end. I succeeded in playing both ends against the middle. □ If you try to play both ends against the middle, you're likely to get in trouble with both sides.*

**play cat and mouse (with someone)** to capture and release someone over and over; to treat a person in one's control in such a way that the person does not know what is going to happen next. □ *The police played cat and mouse with the suspect until they had sufficient evidence to make an arrest. □ Tom has been playing cat and mouse with Ann. Finally she got tired of it and broke up with him.*

**play devil's advocate** to put forward arguments against or objections to a proposition—which one may actually agree with—purely to test the validity of the proposition. (The devil's advocate was given the role of opposing the canonization of a saint in the mediaeval Church to prove that the grounds for canonization were sound.) □ *I agree with your plan. I'm just playing devil's advocate so you'll know what the opposition will say. □ Mary offered to play devil's advocate and argue against our case so that we would find out any flaws in it.*

**played out** no longer of interest or influence. (Informal.) □ *Jane's political ideas are all played out. □ That particular religious sect is played out now.*

**play fair** to do something by the rules or in a fair and just manner. □ *John won't do business with Bill any more because Bill doesn't play fair. □ You moved the golf ball with your foot! That's not playing fair!*

**play fast and loose (with someone or something)** to act carelessly, thoughtlessly, and irresponsibly. (Informal.) □ *I'm tired of your playing fast and loose with me. Leave me alone. □ Bob played fast and loose with Sally's affections.*

**play gooseberry** to be with two lovers who wish to be alone. (Informal.) □ *I'm not going to the cinema with Tom and Jean. I hate playing gooseberry.* □ *Come on! Let's go home! Bob and Mary don't want us playing gooseberry.*

**play hard to get** to be coy and excessively shy; to make it difficult for someone to talk to one or be friendly. □ *Why can't we go out? Why do you play hard to get?* □ *Sally annoys all the boys because she plays hard to get.*

**play havoc with someone or something** to cause a lot of damage to something; to ruin something; to create disorder in something. □ *The road-works played havoc with the traffic.* □ *A new baby can play havoc with one's household routine.*

**play into someone's hands** to do exactly what an opponent wants one to do, without one realizing it; to assist someone in a scheme without realizing it. □ *John is doing exactly what I hoped he would. He's playing into my hands.* □ *John played into my hands by taking the coins he found in my desk. I caught him and had him arrested.*

**play one's cards close to one's chest** AND **keep one's cards close to one's chest** to work or negotiate in a careful and private manner. □ *It's hard to figure out what John is up to because he plays his cards close to his chest.* □ *Don't let them know what you're up to. Keep your cards close to your chest.*

**play one's cards right** to work or negotiate correctly and skilfully. (Informal.) □ *If you play your cards right, you can get whatever you want.* □ *She didn't play her cards right, so she didn't get promotion.*

**play one's trump card** to use one's most powerful or effective strategy or device. □ *I won't play my trump card until I have tried everything else.* □ *I thought that the whole situation was hopeless until Mary played her trump card and told us her uncle would lend us the money.*

**play on something** to make use of something for one's own ends; to exploit something; to manage something for a desired effect. (The *on* can be replaced by *upon*.) □ *The shop assistant played on my sense of responsibility in trying to get me to buy the book.* □ *See if you can get her to confess by playing upon her sense of guilt.*

**play politics** to allow political concerns to dominate in matters where principles should prevail. □ *Look, I came here to discuss this*



*trial, not play politics.* □ *They're not making reasonable decisions. They're playing politics.*

**play possum** to pretend to be inactive, unobserved, asleep, or dead. (Informal. The *possum* is an *opossum*.) □ *I knew that Bob wasn't asleep. He was just playing possum.* □ *I can't tell if this animal is dead or just playing possum.*

**play safe** not to take risks; to act in a safe manner. □ *You should play safe and take your umbrella.* □ *If you have a cold or the flu, play safe and go to bed.*

**play second fiddle (to someone)** to be in a subordinate position to someone. □ *I'm tired of playing second fiddle to John.* □ *I'm better trained than he is, and I have more experience. I shouldn't play second fiddle.*

**play the field** to date many different people rather than going steady with just one. (Informal.) □ *Tom wanted to play the field, so he said goodbye to Ann.* □ *He said he wanted to play the field rather than get married while he was still young.*

**play the fool** to act in a silly manner play safe to amuse other people. □ *The teacher told Tom to stop playing the fool and sit down.* □ *Fred likes playing the fool, but we didn't find him funny last night.*

**play the game** to behave or act in a fair and honest way. □ *You shouldn't try to disturb your opponent's concentration. That's not playing the game.* □ *Listening to other people's phone calls is certainly not playing the game.*

**play the market** to invest in the shares market. (As if it were a game or as if it were gambling.) □ *Would you rather put your money in the bank or play the market?* □ *I've learned my lesson playing the market. I lost a fortune.*

**play to the gallery** to perform in a manner that will get the strong approval of the audience; to perform in a manner that will get the approval of the less sophisticated members of the audience. □ *John is a competent actor, but he has a tendency to play to the gallery.* □ *When he made the rude remark, he was just playing to the gallery. He wanted others to find him amusing.*

**play tricks (on someone)** to trick or confuse someone. □ *I thought I saw a camel over there. I think that my eyes are playing tricks on me.* □ *Please don't play tricks on your little brother. It makes him cry.*

**play up** to cause trouble; to be a nuisance. (Informal.) □ *My leg is playing up. It really aches.* □ *Her arthritis always plays up in this cold, damp weather.* ALSO: **play someone up** to annoy someone. □ *That child played me up. He was naughty all day.* □ *The pupils played the substitute teacher up the entire day.*

**play up to someone** to try to gain someone's favour; to curry someone's favour; to flatter someone or to pretend to admire someone to gain favour. □ *Bill is always playing up to the teacher.* □ *Ann played up to Bill as if she wanted him to marry her.*

**play with fire** to do something very risky or dangerous. □ *The teacher was playing with fire by threatening a pupil.* □ *I wouldn't talk to Bob that way if I were you—unless you like playing with fire.*

**pluck up (one's) courage** to increase one's courage a bit; to become brave enough to do something. □ *Come on, Ann, make the dive. Pluck up your courage and do it.* □ *Fred plucked up courage and asked Jean for a date.*

**poetic justice** the appropriate but chance receiving of rewards or punishments by those deserving them. □ *It was poetic justice that Jane won the race after Mary tried to get her banned.* □ *The car robbers stole a car with no petrol. That's poetic justice.*

**point the finger at someone** to blame someone; to identify someone as the guilty person. □ *Don't point the finger at me! I didn't take the money.* □ *The manager refused to point the finger at anyone in particular and said the whole staff were sometimes guilty of being late.*

**poke fun (at someone or something)** to make fun of someone; to ridicule someone. (Informal.) □ *Stop poking fun at me! It's not nice.* □ *Bob is always poking fun.*

**pot calling the kettle black** [the instance of] someone with a fault accusing someone else of having the same fault. □ *Ann is always late, but she was rude enough to tell everyone when I was late. Now that's the pot calling the kettle black!* □ *You're calling me thoughtless? That's really a case of the pot calling the kettle black.*

**pound for pound** considering the amount of money involved; considering the cost. (Often seen in advertising.) □ *Pound for pound, you cannot buy a better car.* □ *Pound for pound, this detergent washes cleaner and brighter than any other product on the market.*

**pound the streets** to walk through the streets looking for a job. (Informal.) □ *I spent two months pounding the streets after the factory I worked for closed.* □ *Look, Bob. You'd better get on with your work unless you want to be out pounding the streets.*

**pour cold water on something** AND **throw cold water on something** to discourage doing something; to reduce enthusiasm for something. □ *When my father said I couldn't have the car, he poured cold water on my plans.* □ *John threw cold water on the whole project and refused to participate.*

**pour money down the drain** to waste money; to throw money away. □ *What a waste! You're just pouring money down the drain.* □ *Don't buy any more of that low-quality material. That's just pouring money down the drain.*

**pour oil on troubled waters** to calm things down. (If oil is poured on to rough seas during a storm, the water will become more calm.) □ *That was a good thing to say to John. It helped to pour oil on troubled waters. Now he looks happy.* □ *Bob is the kind of person who always pours oil on troubled waters.*

**power behind the throne** the person who controls the one who is apparently in charge. □ *Mr. Smith appears to run the shop, but his brother is the power behind the throne.* □ *They say that the mayor's husband is the power behind the throne.*

**powers that be** the people who are in authority. □ *The powers that be have decided to send back the immigrants.* □ *I have applied for a licence, and the powers that be are considering my application.*

**practise what you preach** to do what you advise other people to do. □ *If you'd practise what you preach, you'd be better off.* □ *You give good advice. Why not practise what you preach?*

**praise someone or something to the skies** to give someone much praise. □ *He wasn't very good, but his friends praised him to the skies.* □ *They liked your pie. Everyone praised it to the skies.*

**preach to the converted** to praise or recommend something to someone who is already in favour of it. □ *Mary was preaching to the converted when she tried to persuade Jean to become a feminist. She's been one for years.* □ *Bob found himself preaching to the converted when he was telling Jane the advantages of living in the country. She hates city life.*

**presence of mind** calmness and the ability to act sensibly in an emergency or difficult situation. □ *Jane had the presence of mind to phone the police when the child disappeared.* □ *The child had the presence of mind to take a note of the car's number-plate.*

**press-gang someone into doing something** to force someone into doing something. (From the noun *press-gang*, a group of sailors employed to seize men and force them to join the navy.) □ *Aunt Jane press-ganged me into helping with the church fête.* □ *The boss press-ganged us all into working late.*

**pretty kettle of fish** See fine kettle of fish.

**prick up one's ears** to listen more closely. □ *At the sound of my voice, my dog pricked up her ears.* □ *I pricked up my ears when I heard my name mentioned.*

**pride of place** the best or most important place or space. □ *Jack's parents gave pride of place in their living-room to his sports trophy.* □ *The art gallery promised to give pride of place to Mary's painting of the harbour.*

**pride oneself on something** to take special pride in something. □ *Ann prides herself on her apple pies.* □ *John prides himself on his ability to make people feel at ease.*

**prime mover** the force that sets something going; someone or something that starts something off. □ *The assistant manager was the prime mover in getting the manager sacked.* □ *Discontent with his job was the prime mover in John's deciding to emigrate.*

**pull a face** AND **make a face** to twist one's face into a strange expression, typically to show one's dislike, to express ridicule, or to make someone laugh. (Also plural: *pull faces, make faces.*) □ *The comedian pulled faces to amuse the children.* □ *Jane made a face when she was asked to work late.*

**pull a fast one** to succeed in an act of deception. (Informal.) □ *She was pulling a fast one when she said she had a headache and had to go home.* □ *Don't try to pull a fast one with me! I know what you're doing.*

**pull oneself together** to become calm or steady; to become emotionally stabilized; to regain one's composure. □ *Now, calm down. Pull yourself together.* □ *I'll be all right as soon as I can pull myself together. I just can't stop weeping.*

**pull oneself up by one's bootstraps** to achieve (something) through one's own efforts. (Informal.) □ *He's wealthy now, but he pulled himself up by his bootstraps.* □ *The orphan pulled himself up by his bootstraps to become a doctor.*

**pull one's punches 1.** [for a boxer] to strike with light blows to enable the other boxer to win. □ *Bill has been barred from the boxing ring for pulling his punches.* □ *"I never pulled my punches in my life!" cried Tom.* **2.** to hold back in one's criticism or attack. (Usually in the negative. The *one's* can be replaced with *any*.) □ *I didn't pull any punches. I told her just what I thought of her.* □ *The teacher doesn't pull any punches when it comes to discipline.*

**pull one's socks up** to make an effort to improve one's behaviour or performance. □ *If you don't want to be expelled from school, you'll have to pull your socks up.* □ *The firm will have to pull its socks up in order to stay in business.*

**pull out all the stops** to use all one's energy and effort in order to achieve something. (From the stops of a pipe-organ. The more that are pulled out, the louder it gets.) □ *You'll have to pull out all the stops if you're going to pass the exam.* □ *The doctors will pull out all the stops to save the child's life.*

**pull someone's leg** to kid, fool, or trick someone. (Informal.) □ *You don't mean that. You're just pulling my leg.* □ *Don't believe him. He's just pulling your leg.*

**pull something out of a hat** AND **pull something out of thin air** to produce something as if by magic. □ *This is a serious problem, and we just can't pull a solution out of a hat.* □ *I'm sorry, but I don't have a pen. What do you want me to do, pull one out of thin air?*

**pull something out of thin air** See pull something out of a hat.

**pull strings** to use influence (with someone to get something done or gain an advantage). □ *I can borrow the hall easily by pulling strings.*  
□ *Is it possible to get anything done around here without pulling strings?*

**pull the rug out from under someone(s feet)** to do something suddenly which leaves someone in a weak position; to make someone ineffective. □ *The news that his wife had left him pulled the rug out from under him.* □ *The boss certainly pulled the rug out from under Bob's feet when he lowered his salary.*

**pull the wool over someone's eyes** to deceive someone. □ *You can't pull the wool over my eyes. I know what's going on.* □ *Don't try to pull the wool over her eyes. She's too smart.*

**push one's luck** to expect continued good fortune; to expect to continue to escape bad luck. (Informal.) □ *You're okay so far, but don't push your luck.* □ *Bob pushed his luck once too often when he tried to flirt with the new secretary. She slapped him.*

**put a brave face on it** to try to appear happy or satisfied when faced with misfortune or danger. □ *We've lost all our money, but we must put a brave face on it for the sake of the children.* □ *Jim's lost his job and is worried, but he's putting a brave face on it.*

**put all one's eggs in one basket** to risk everything at once; to depend entirely on one plan, venture, etc. (Often negative.) □ *Don't put all your eggs in one basket. You shouldn't invest all your money in one business.* □ *John only applied to the one college he wanted to go to. He put all his eggs in one basket.*

**put ideas into someone's head** to suggest something—usually something that is bad or unfortunate for someone—to someone (who would not have thought of it otherwise). □ *Jack can't afford a holiday abroad. Please don't put ideas into his head.* □ *Bob would get along all right if his chums didn't put ideas into his head.*

**put in a good word for someone** to say something to someone in support of someone. □ *I hope you get the job. I'll put in a good word for you.* □ *You might get the part in the film if Mike puts in a good word for you.*

**put it on** to pretend; to act as if something were true. (Informal.) □ *Ann wasn't really angry. She was just putting it on.* □ *I can't believe she was just putting it on. She really looked mad.*

**put on airs** to act superior. (Informal.) □ *Stop putting on airs. You're just human like the rest of us.* □ *Ann is always putting on airs. You'd think she was a queen.*

**put one across someone** to deceive or trick someone. (Informal.) □ *He tried to put one across the old lady by pretending to be her long-lost nephew.* □ *Meg thought she'd put one across her parents by claiming to spend the night at her friend's house.*

**put one in one's place** to rebuke someone; to remind one of one's (lower) rank or station. □ *My employer put me in my place for criticizing her.* □ *Lady Jane put the butler in his place when he grew too familiar.*

**put one's best foot forward** to prepare to do one's best; to make the best attempt possible to make a good impression. □ *When you apply for a position, you should always put your best foot forward.* □ *Since you failed last time, you must put your best foot forward now.*

**put one's foot down (about something)** to be adamant about something. □ *Ann put her foot down about what kind of car she wanted.* □ *She doesn't put her foot down very often, but when she does, she really means it.*

**put one's foot in it** to say something which one regrets; to say something tactless, insulting, or hurtful. (Informal.) □ *When I told Ann that her hair was more beautiful than I had ever seen it, I really put my foot in it. It was a wig.* □ *I put my foot in it by mistaking John's girlfriend for his wife.*

**put one's hand to the plough** to begin to do a big and important task; to undertake a major effort. □ *If John would only put his hand to the plough, he could do an excellent job of work.* □ *You'll never accomplish anything if you don't put your hand to the plough.*

**put one's house in order** to put one's business or personal affairs into good order. □ *There was some trouble at work and the manager was told to put his house in order.* □ *Every now and then, I have to put my house in order. Then life becomes more manageable.*

**put one's oar in** AND **shove one's oar in; stick one's oar in** to interfere by giving unasked-for advice. (Informal.) □ *You don't need to put your oar in. I don't need your advice.* □ *I'm sorry. I shouldn't have stuck my oar in when you were arguing with your wife.*

**put one's shoulder to the wheel** to take up a task; to get busy.

□ *You won't accomplish anything unless you put your shoulder to the wheel.* □ *I put my shoulder to the wheel and finished the task quickly.*

**put one through one's paces** to make one demonstrate what one can do; to test someone's abilities or capacity.

□ *The teacher put the children through their paces before the exam.* □ *I auditioned for a part in the play, and the director really put me through my paces.*

**put on one's thinking-cap** to start thinking in a serious manner.

□ *Let's put on our thinking-caps and decide where to go on holiday.*  
□ *It's time to put on our thinking-caps, children, and choose a name for the dog.*

**put on weight** to gain weight; to grow fatter.

□ *I have to go on a diet because I've been putting on a little weight lately.* □ *The doctor says I need to put on some weight.*

**put out (some) feelers** to attempt to find out something without being too obvious.

□ *I wanted to get a new position, so I put out some feelers.* □ *We'd like to move house and so we've put out feelers to see what's on the market.*

**put paid to something** to put an end to something; to prevent someone from doing something; to prevent something from happening.

(From the practice of book-keepers of writing "paid" in the account book when a bill has been settled.) □ *Jean's father's objections put paid to John's thoughts of marrying her.* □ *Lack of money put paid to our holiday plans.*

**put someone in mind of someone or something** to remind someone of someone or something.

□ *Mary puts me in mind of her mother when she was that age.* □ *This place puts me in mind of the village where I was brought up.*

**put someone in the picture** to give someone all the necessary facts about something. (Informal.)

□ *They put the police in the picture about how the accident happened.* □ *Would someone put me in the picture about what went on in my absence?*

**put someone on a pedestal** to respect or admire someone too much; to worship someone.

□ *He has put her on a pedestal and thinks she can do no wrong.* □ *Don't put me on a pedestal. I'm only human.*



**put someone on the spot** to ask someone embarrassing questions; to put someone in an uncomfortable or difficult position. □ *Don't put me on the spot. I can't give you an answer.* □ *We put Bob on the spot and demanded that he do everything he had promised.*

**put someone or something out to pasture** to retire someone or something. (Informal. Originally said of a horse which was too old to work.) □ *Please don't put me out to pasture. I have lots of good years left.* □ *This car is very old and keeps breaking down. It's time to put it out to pasture.*

**put someone's nose out of joint** to cause someone to feel slighted or insulted. (Informal.) □ *I'm afraid I put his nose out of joint by not inviting him to the picnic.* □ *Jane's nose was put out of joint when her baby brother was born.*

**put someone through the wringer** to give someone a difficult or exhausting time. (Informal.) □ *They are really putting me through the wringer at school.* □ *We all put Bob through the wringer over this contract.*

**put someone to shame** to show someone up; to embarrass someone; to make someone ashamed. □ *Your excellent efforts put us all to shame.* □ *I put him to shame by telling everyone about his bad behaviour.*

**put someone to the test** to test someone; to see what someone can achieve. □ *I think I can jump that far, but no one has ever put me to the test.* □ *I'm going to put you to the test now!*

**put someone up to something** to cause someone to do something; to bribe someone to do something; to give someone the idea of doing something. □ *Who put you up to it?* □ *Nobody put me up to it. I thought it up myself.*

**put someone wise to someone or something** to inform someone about someone or something. (Informal.) □ *I put her wise to the way we do things around here.* □ *I didn't know she was taking money. Mary put me wise to her.*

**put something on ice** AND **put something on the back burner** to delay or postpone something; to put something on hold. (Informal.) □ *I'm afraid that we'll have to put your project on ice for a while.* □ *Just put your idea on the back burner and keep it there until we get some money.*

**put something on paper** to write something down. □ *You have a great idea for a novel. Now put it on paper.* □ *I'm sorry, I can't discuss your offer until I see something in writing. Put it on paper, and then we'll talk.*

**put something on the back burner** See put something on ice.

**put something over** to accomplish something; to put something across. □ *This is a very hard thing to explain to a large audience. I hope I can put it over.* □ *This is a big request for money. I go before the board of directors this afternoon, and I hope I can put it over.*

**put something plainly** to state something firmly and explicitly. □ *To put it plainly, I want you out of this house immediately.* □ *Thank you. I think you've put your feelings quite plainly.*

**put something right** AND **set something right** to correct something; to alter a situation to make it more fair. □ *This is a very unfortunate situation. I'll ask the people responsible to set this matter right.* □ *I'm sorry that we overcharged you. We'll try to put it right.*

**Put that in your pipe and smoke it!** See how you like that!; It is final, and you have to live with it! (Informal.) □ *Well, I'm not going to do it, so put that in your pipe and smoke it!* □ *I'm sick of you, and I'm leaving. Put that in your pipe and smoke it!*

**put the cart before the horse** to have things in the wrong order; to have things confused and mixed up. □ *You're eating your dessert! You've put the cart before the horse.* □ *Slow down and get organized. Don't put the cart before the horse!* □ *John puts the cart before the horse in most of his projects.*

**put the cat among the pigeons** AND **set the cat among the pigeons** to cause trouble or a disturbance, especially by doing or saying something suddenly or unexpectedly. □ *Meg put the cat among the pigeons by announcing that she was leaving home.* □ *When Frank told of Bob's problems with the police, he really set the cat among the pigeons.*

**put two and two together** to find the answer to something from the information available; to reach an understanding of something. □ *Well, I put two and two together and came up with an idea of who did it.* □ *Don't worry. John won't figure it out. He can't put two and two together.*

**putty in someone's hands** [someone who is] easily influenced by someone else; [someone who is] excessively willing to do what someone else wishes. □ *Bob's wife is putty in his hands. She never thinks for herself.* □ *Jane is putty in her mother's hands. She always does exactly what her mother says.*

**put up a (brave) front** to appear to be brave (even if one is not). □ *Mary is frightened, but she's putting up a brave front.* □ *If she weren't putting up a front, I'd be more frightened than I am.*

**put upon someone** to make use of someone to an unreasonable degree; to take advantage of someone for one's own benefit. (Typically passive.) □ *My mother was always put upon by her neighbours. She was too nice to refuse their requests for help.* □ *Jane feels put upon by her husband's parents. They're always coming to stay with her.*

**put words into someone's mouth** to speak for another person without permission. □ *Stop putting words into my mouth. I can speak for myself.* □ *The solicitor was scolded for putting words into the witness's mouth.*

**Put your money where your mouth is!** a command to stop talking or boasting and make a bet, or to stop talking and provide money for something which one claims to support. □ *I'm tired of your bragging about your skill at betting. Put your money where your mouth is!* □ *You talk about betting, but you don't bet. Put your money where your mouth is!*

# Q

**quake in one's shoes** See shake in one's shoes.

**queue up** to get into a queue; to form a queue.  *Will you all please queue up?*  *It's time to go from here to the theatre. Please queue up.*

**quick on the draw** (Informal.) **1.** quick to draw a gun and shoot.  *Some of the old cowboys were known to be quick on the draw.*  *Wyatt Earp was particularly quick on the draw.* **2.** quick to respond to anything; quick to act.  *John gets the right answer before anyone else. He's really quick on the draw.*  *Sally will probably win the quiz game. She's really quick on the draw.*

**quick on the uptake** quick to understand (something).  *Just because I'm not quick on the uptake, it doesn't mean I'm stupid.*  *Mary understands jokes before anyone else because she's so quick on the uptake.*

**quids in with someone** in an advantageous or favourable position with someone. (Informal.)  *You'll be quids in with Jean if you can charm her mother.*  *Fred's quids in with the boss after his successful export deal.*

# R

**race against time** **1.** to hurry to beat a deadline; to hurry to achieve something by a certain time. □ *We had to race against time to finish the work before the deadline.* □ *You don't need to race against time. Take all the time you want.* **2.** a task which must be finished within a certain time; a situation in which one must hurry to complete something on time. □ *It was a race against time to finish before the deadline.* □ *The examination was a race against time, and Tom could not finish it.*

**rack one's brains** to try very hard to think of something. □ *I racked my brains all afternoon, but couldn't remember where I put the book.* □ *Don't waste any more time racking your brains. Go and borrow the book from the library.*

**rain cats and dogs** to rain very hard. (Informal.) □ *It's raining cats and dogs. Look at it pour!* □ *I'm not going out in that storm. It's raining cats and dogs.*

**rained off** cancelled or postponed because of rain. □ *Oh, the weather looks awful. I hope the picnic isn't rained off.* □ *It's starting to drizzle now. Do you think the game will be rained off?*

**rain or shine** See come rain or shine.

**raise a few eyebrows** to shock or surprise people mildly by doing or saying something. □ *What you just said may raise a few eyebrows, but it shouldn't make anyone really angry.* □ *John's sudden marriage to Ann raised a few eyebrows.*

**raise one's sights** to set higher goals for oneself. □ *When you're young, you tend to raise your sights too high.* □ *On the other hand, some people need to raise their sights higher.*

**rally round someone or something** to come together to support someone or something. □ *The family rallied round Jack when he lost*

his job. □ *The former pupils rallied round their old school when it was in danger of being closed.*

**rant and rave** to shout angrily and wildly. □ *Bob rants and raves when anything displeases him.* □ *Father rants and raves if we arrive home late.*

**rap someone's knuckles** to rebuke or punish someone. □ *She rapped his knuckles for whispering too much.* □ *Don't rap my knuckles. I didn't do it.* ALSO: **get one's knuckles rapped; have one's knuckles rapped** to receive punishment. □ *I got my knuckles rapped for whispering too much.* □ *You should have your knuckles rapped for doing that!*

**rarin' to go** extremely keen to act or do something. (Informal.) □ *Jane can't wait to start her job. She's rarin' to go.* □ *Mary is rarin' to go and can't wait for her university term to start.*

**rat race** a fierce struggle for success, especially in one's career or business. □ *Bob's got tired of the rat race. He's retired and gone to live in the country.* □ *The money market is a rat race, and many people who work in it die of the stress.*

**read between the lines** to infer something (from something). (Usually figurative. Does not necessarily refer to written or printed information.) □ *After listening to what she said, if you read between the lines, you can begin to see what she really means.* □ *Don't believe everything you hear. Learn to read between the lines.*

**read someone like a book** to understand someone very well. □ *I've got John figured out. I can read him like a book.* □ *Of course I understand you. I read you like a book.*

**read someone's mind** to guess what someone is thinking. □ *You'll have to tell me what you want. I can't read your mind, you know.* □ *If I could read your mind, I'd know what you expect of me.*

**read someone the Riot Act** to give someone a severe scolding. (Under the Riot Act of 1715, an assembly of people could be dispersed by magistrates reading the act to them.) □ *The manager read me the Riot Act for coming in late.* □ *The teacher read the pupils the Riot Act for their failure to do their homework.*

**read something into something** to attach or attribute a new or different meaning to something; to find a meaning that is not

intended in something. □ *This statement means exactly what it says. Don't try to read anything else into it.* □ *Am I reading too much into your comments?*

**rear its ugly head** [for something unpleasant] to appear or become obvious after lying hidden. □ *Jealousy reared its ugly head and destroyed their marriage.* □ *The question of money always rears its ugly head in matters of business.*

**receive someone with open arms** AND **welcome someone with open arms** to welcome someone eagerly. (Used literally or figuratively.) □ *I'm certain they wanted us to stay for dinner. They received us with open arms.* □ *When I came home from school, the whole family welcomed me with open arms.*

**redbrick university** one of the universities built in England in the late nineteenth century, contrasted with Oxford and Cambridge Universities. (Derogatory.) □ *John's tutor ridicules the redbrick universities.* □ *Alice is a snob. She refuses to go to a redbrick university.*

**red herring** a piece of information or suggestion introduced to draw attention away from the truth or real facts of a situation. (A red herring is a type of strong-smelling smoked fish that was once drawn across the trail of scent to mislead hunting dogs and put them off the scent. See also **draw a red herring**.) □ *The detectives were following a red herring, but they're on the right track now.* □ *Jack and Mary were hoping to confuse their parents with a series of red herrings so that the parents wouldn't realize that they had eloped.*

**red tape** over-strict attention to the wording and details of rules and regulations, especially by government or public departments. (From the colour of the tape used by government departments to tie up bundles of documents.) □ *Because of red tape, it took weeks for Frank to get a visa.* □ *Red tape prevented Jack's wife from joining him abroad.*

**regain one's composure** to become calm and composed. □ *I found it difficult to regain my composure after the argument.* □ *Here, sit down and relax so that you can regain your composure.*

**rest on one's laurels** to enjoy one's success and not try to achieve more. □ *Don't rest on your laurels. Try to continue to do great things!* □ *I think I'll rest on my laurels for a time before attempting anything new.*

**return ticket** a ticket (for a plane, train, bus, etc.) which allows one to go to a destination and return. □ *A return ticket will usually save you some money.* □ *How much is a return ticket to Harrogate?*

**ride roughshod over someone or something** to treat someone or something with disdain or scorn. □ *Tom seems to ride roughshod over his friends.* □ *You shouldn't have come into our country to ride roughshod over our laws and our traditions.*

**riding for a fall** risking failure or an accident, usually owing to overconfidence. □ *Tom drives too fast, and he seems too sure of himself. He's riding for a fall.* □ *Bill needs to stop borrowing money. He's riding for a fall.*

**right up someone's street** ideally suited to one's interests or abilities. (Informal.) □ *Skiing is right up my street. I love it.* □ *This kind of thing is right up John's street.*

**ring a bell** [for something] to cause someone to remember something or to seem familiar. (Informal.) □ *I've never met John Franklin, but his name rings a bell.* □ *The face in the photograph rang a bell. It was my cousin.*

**ring down the curtain (on something)** AND **bring down the curtain (on something)** to bring something to an end; to declare something to be at an end. □ *It's time to ring down the curtain on our relationship. We have nothing in common any more.* □ *We've tried our best to make this company a success, but it's time to ring down the curtain.* □ *After many years the old man brought down the curtain and closed the restaurant.*

**ring in the New Year** to celebrate the beginning of the New Year at midnight on December 31. □ *We are planning a big affair to ring in the New Year.* □ *How did you ring in the New Year?*

**ring off** to end a telephone call. □ *I must ring off now and get back to work.* □ *James rang off rather suddenly and rudely when Alice contradicted him.*

**ring someone or something up** AND **ring up someone or something 1.** [with *something*] to record the cost of an item on a cash register. □ *The cashier rang up each item and told me how much money I owed.* □ *Please ring this chewing-gum up first, and I'll put it in my handbag.* **2.** [with *someone*] to call someone on the telephone.



□ *Please ring up Ann and ask her if she wants to come over.* □ *Just ring me up any time.*

**ring the changes** to do or arrange things in different ways to achieve variety. (From bell-ringing.) □ *Jane doesn't have many clothes, but she rings the changes by adding different-coloured scarves to her basic outfits.* □ *Aunt Mary rings the changes in her small flat by rearranging the furniture.*

**ring true** to sound or seem true or likely. (From testing the quality of metal or glass by striking it and listening to the noise made.) □ *The pupil's excuse for being late doesn't ring true.* □ *Do you think that Mary's explanation for her absence rang true?*

**ring up someone or something** See ring someone or something up.

**ripe old age** a very old age. □ *Mr. Smith died last night, but he was a ripe old age—ninety-nine.* □ *All the Smiths seem to live to a ripe old age.*

**rise and shine** to get out of bed and be lively and energetic. (Informal. Often a command.) □ *Come on, children! Rise and shine! We're going to the seaside.* □ *Father always calls out "Rise and shine!" in the morning when we want to go on sleeping.*

**rise to the occasion** to meet the challenge of an event; to try extra hard to do a task. □ *John was able to rise to the occasion and make the conference a success.* □ *It was a big challenge, but he rose to the occasion.*

**risk one's neck (to do something)** to risk physical harm play safe to accomplish something. (Informal.) □ *Look at that traffic! I refuse to risk my neck just to cross the street to buy a paper.* □ *I refuse to risk my neck at all.*

**road-hog** someone who drives carelessly and selfishly. (Informal.) □ *Look at that road-hog driving in the middle of the road and stopping other drivers getting past him.* □ *That road-hog nearly knocked the children over. He was driving too fast.*

**rob Peter to pay Paul** to take from one person in order to give to another. □ *Why borrow money to pay your bills? That's just robbing Peter to pay Paul.* □ *There's no point in robbing Peter to pay Paul. You will still be in debt.*

**rock the boat** to cause trouble; to disturb a situation which is otherwise stable and satisfactory. (Often negative.) □ *Look, Tom, everything is going fine here. Don't rock the boat!* □ *You can depend on Tom to mess things up by rocking the boat.*

**roll on something** [for something, such as a time or a day] to approach rapidly. (Said by someone who wants the time or the day to arrive sooner than is possible. Usually a command.) □ *Roll on Saturday! I get the day off.* □ *Roll on spring! We hate the snow.*

**romp home** to win a race or competition easily. (Informal.) □ *Our team romped home in the relay race.* □ *Jack romped home in the election for president of the club.*

**rooted to the spot** unable to move because of fear or surprise. □ *Joan stood rooted to the spot when she saw the ghostly figure.* □ *Mary was rooted to the spot when the thief snatched her bag.*

**rough it** to live in discomfort; to live in uncomfortable conditions without the usual amenities. (Informal.) □ *The students are roughing it in a shack with no running water.* □ *Bob and Jack had nowhere to live, so they had to rough it in a tent until they found somewhere.*

**round on someone** to attack someone verbally. □ *Jane suddenly rounded on Tom for arriving late.* □ *Peter rounded on Meg, asking what she'd done with the money.*

**rub along with someone** to get along fairly well with someone. (Informal.) □ *Jack and Fred manage to rub along with each other, although they're not best friends.* □ *Jim just about rubs along with his in-laws.*

**rub salt in the wound** deliberately to make someone's unhappiness, shame, or misfortune worse. □ *Don't rub salt in the wound by telling me how enjoyable the party was.* □ *Jim is feeling miserable about losing his job, and Fred is rubbing salt in the wound by saying how good his replacement is.*

**rub shoulders (with someone)** to associate with someone; to work closely with someone. □ *I don't care to rub shoulders with someone who acts like that!* □ *I rub shoulders with John every day at work. We are good friends.*

**rub someone's nose in it** to remind one of something one has done wrong; to remind one of something bad or unfortunate that

has happened. (From a method of house-training animals.)  *When Bob failed his exam, his brother rubbed his nose in it.*  *Mary knows she shouldn't have broken off her engagement. Don't rub her nose in it.*

**rub someone up the wrong way** to irritate someone. (Informal.)

*I'm sorry I rubbed you up the wrong way. I didn't mean to upset you.*

*Don't rub her up the wrong way!*

**ruffle someone's feathers** to upset or annoy someone. (A bird's feathers become ruffled if it is angry or afraid.)  *You certainly ruffled Mrs. Smith's feathers by criticizing her garden.*  *Try to be tactful and not ruffle people's feathers.*

**rule the roost** to be the boss or manager, especially at home. (Informal.)  *Who rules the roost at your house?*  *Our new office manager really rules the roost.*

**run a fever** AND **run a temperature** to have a body temperature higher than normal; to have a fever.  *I ran a fever when I had the flu.*  *The baby is running a temperature and is irritable.*

**run against the clock** to be in a race with time; to be in a great hurry to get something done before a particular time.  *This morning, Bill set a new track record running against the clock. He lost the actual race this afternoon, however.*  *The front runner was running against the clock. The others were a lap behind.*

**run a temperature** See run a fever.

**run a tight ship** to run a ship or an organization in an orderly, efficient, and disciplined manner.  *The new office manager really runs a tight ship.*  *The headmaster runs a tight ship.*

**run for it** to try and escape by running. (Informal.)  *The guard's not looking. Let's run for it!*  *The convict tried to run for it, but the warder caught him.*

**run for one's life** to run away to save one's life.  *The dam has burst! Run for your life!*  *The zoo-keeper told us all to run for our lives.*

**run high** [for feelings] to be in a state of excitement or anger.  *Feelings were running high as the general election approached.*  *The mood of the crowd was running high when they saw the man beat the child.*

**run in the family** for a characteristic to appear in all (or most) members of a family. □ *My grandparents lived well into their nineties, and longevity runs in the family.* □ *My brothers and I have red hair. It runs in the family.*

**run of the mill** common or average; typical. □ *The restaurant we went to was nothing special—just run of the mill.* □ *The service was good, but the food was run of the mill or worse.*

**run riot** AND **run wild** to get out of control. □ *The dandelions have run riot on our lawn.* □ *The children ran wild at the birthday party and had to be taken home.*

**run someone or something to earth** to find something after a search. (From a fox-hunt chasing a fox into its hole.) □ *Jean finally ran her long-lost cousin to earth in Paris.* □ *After months of searching, I ran a copy of Jim's book to earth.*

**run someone ragged** to keep someone very busy. (Informal.) □ *This busy season is running us all ragged at the shop.* □ *What a busy day. I ran myself ragged.*

**run to seed** AND **go to seed** to become worn-out and uncared for. □ *The estate has gone to seed since the old man's death.* □ *Pick things up around here. This place is going to seed. What a mess!*

**run wild** See run riot.

**rush one's fences** to act hurriedly without enough care or thought. (From horse-riding.) □ *Jack's always rushing his fences. He should think things out first.* □ *Think carefully before you buy that expensive house. Don't rush your fences.*

# S

**sacred cow** something that is regarded by some people with such respect and veneration that they don't like it being criticized by anyone in any way. (From the fact that the cow is regarded as sacred in India.) □ *University education is a sacred cow in the Smith family. Fred is regarded as a failure because he left school at sixteen.* □ *Don't talk about eating meat to Pam. Vegetarianism is one of her sacred cows.*

**safe and sound** safe and whole or healthy. □ *It was a rough trip, but we got there safe and sound.* □ *I'm glad to see you here safe and sound.*

**sail through something** to finish something quickly and easily. (Informal.) □ *The test was not difficult. I sailed through it.* □ *Bob sailed through his homework in a short amount of time.*

**sail under false colours** to pretend to be something that one is not. (Originally nautical, referring to a pirate ship disguised as a merchant ship.) □ *John has been sailing under false colours. He's really a spy.* □ *I thought you were wearing that uniform because you worked here. You are sailing under false colours.*

**salt of the earth** the most worthy of people; a very good or worthy person. (A biblical reference.) □ *Mrs. Jones is the salt of the earth. She is the first to help anyone in trouble.* □ *Frank's mother is the salt of the earth. She has five children of her own and yet fosters three others.*

**same old story** something that occurs or has occurred in the same way often. □ *Jim's got no money. It's the same old story. He's spent it all on clothing.* □ *The firm are getting rid of staff. It's the same old story—a shortage of orders.*

**saved by the bell** rescued from a difficult or dangerous situation just in time by something which brings the situation to a sudden end. (From the sounding of a bell marking the end of a round in a

boxing match.) □ *James didn't know the answer to the question, but he was saved by the bell when the teacher was called away from the room.* □ *I couldn't think of anything to say to the woman at the bus-stop, but I was saved by the bell by my bus arriving.*

**save one's breath** to refrain from talking, explaining, or arguing. (Informal.) □ *There is no sense in trying to convince her. Save your breath.* □ *Tell her to save her breath. He won't listen to her.*

**save someone's skin** to save someone from injury, embarrassment, or punishment. (Informal.) □ *I saved my skin by getting the job done on time.* □ *Thanks for saving my skin. If you hadn't given me an alibi, the police would have arrested me.*

**save something for a rainy day** to reserve something—usually money—for some future need. (*Save something* can be replaced with *put something aside, hold something back, keep something, etc.*) □ *I've saved a little money for a rainy day.* □ *Keep some sweets for a rainy day.*

**say something under one's breath** to say something so softly that hardly anyone can hear it. □ *John was saying something under his breath, and I don't think it was very pleasant.* □ *I'm glad he said it under his breath. If he had said it out loud, it would have caused an argument.*

**say the word** to give a signal to begin; to say *yes* or *okay* as a signal to begin. (Informal.) □ *I'm ready to start anytime you say the word.* □ *We'll all shout "Happy birthday!" when I say the word.*

**scare someone stiff** to scare someone severely; to make someone very frightened. □ *That loud noise scared me stiff.* □ *The robber jumped out and scared us stiff.*

**scrape the bottom of the barrel** to select from among the worst; to choose from what is left over. □ *You've bought a dreadful old car. You really scraped the bottom of the barrel to get that one.* □ *The worker you sent over was the worst I've ever seen. Send me another—and don't scrape the bottom of the barrel.*

**scratch someone's back** to do a favour for someone in return for a favour done for you. (Informal.) □ *You scratch my back, and I'll scratch yours.* □ *We believe that the manager has been scratching the treasurer's back.*

**scratch the surface** just to begin to find out about something; to examine only the superficial aspects of something. □ *The investigation of the firm's books showed some inaccuracies. It is thought that the investigators have just scratched the surface.* □ *We don't know how bad the problem is. We've only scratched the surface.*

**screw up one's courage** to get one's courage together; to force oneself to be brave. □ *I suppose I have to screw up my courage and go to the dentist.* □ *I spent all morning screwing up my courage to take my driver's test.*

**scrimp and save** to be very thrifty; to live on very little money, often to save up for something. □ *We had to scrimp and save to send the children to college.* □ *The Smiths scrimp and save all year to go on a foreign holiday.*

**search something with a fine-tooth comb** See go over something with a fine-tooth comb.

**second nature to someone** easy and natural for someone. □ *Being polite is second nature to Jane.* □ *Driving is no problem for Bob. It's second nature to him.*

**second to none** better than anyone or anything else. □ *This is an excellent car—second to none.* □ *Mary is an excellent teacher—second to none.*

**see double** to see two of everything instead of one. □ *When I was driving, I saw two people on the road instead of one. I'm seeing double. There's something wrong with my eyes.* □ *Mike thought he was seeing double when he saw Mary with her sister. He didn't know she had a twin.*

**see eye to eye (about something)** AND **see eye to eye (on something)** to view something in the same way (as someone else). (Usually negative.) □ *John and Ann never see eye to eye about anything. They always disagree.* □ *James and Jean rarely see eye to eye either.*

**see eye to eye (on something)** See see eye to eye (about something).

**seeing is believing** one must believe something that one sees. □ *I never would have thought that a cow could swim, but seeing is*

*believing.* □ *I can hardly believe we are in Paris, but there's the Eiffel Tower, and seeing is believing.*

**see red** to be angry. (Informal.) □ *Whenever I think of the needless destruction of trees, I see red.* □ *Bill really saw red when the tax bill arrived.*

**see someone home** to accompany someone home. □ *Bill agreed to see his aunt home after the film.* □ *You don't need to see me home. It's perfectly safe, and I can get there on my own.*

**see something with half an eye** to see or understand very easily. □ *You could see with half an eye that the children were very tired.* □ *Anyone could see with half an eye that the work was badly done.*

**see stars** to see flashing lights after receiving a blow to the head. □ *I saw stars when I bumped my head on the attic ceiling.* □ *The little boy saw stars when he fell head first on to the concrete.*

**see the light** to understand something clearly at last. □ *After a lot of studying and asking many questions, I finally saw the light.* □ *I know that geometry is difficult. Keep working at it. You'll see the light pretty soon.*

**see the light at the end of the tunnel** to foresee an end to one's problems after a long period of time. □ *I had been horribly ill for two months before I began to see the light at the end of the tunnel.* □ *We were in debt for years, but then we saw the light at the end of the tunnel.*

**see the light of day** [for something] to be finished or produced. (Often negative.) □ *The product will never see the light of day.* □ *His inventions will never see the light of day. They are too impractical.*

**see the writing on the wall** to know that something unpleasant or disastrous is certain to happen. (From a biblical reference.) □ *If you don't improve your performance, they'll sack you. Can't you see the writing on the wall?* □ *Jack saw the writing on the wall when the firm reduced his salary.*

**sell someone a pup** to cheat someone by selling the person something that is inferior or worthless. (Informal.) □ *Jack sold me a pup when I bought a bike from him. It broke down in two days.* □ *The salesman sold Jane a pup when he persuaded her to buy the second-hand washing-machine. Water pours out of it.*



**sell someone or something short** to underestimate someone or something; to fail to see the good qualities of someone or something. □ *This is a very good restaurant. Don't sell it short.* □ *When you say that John isn't interested in music, you're selling him short. Did you know he plays the violin quite well?*

**send someone or something up** to ridicule or make fun of someone or something; to satirize someone or something. (Informal.) □ *John is always sending Jane up by mocking the way she walks.* □ *The drama group sent their lecturers up.*

**send someone packing** to send someone away; to dismiss someone, possibly rudely. (Informal.) □ *I couldn't stand him any more, so I sent him packing.* □ *The maid proved to be so incompetent that I had to send her packing.*

**send someone to Coventry** to refuse to speak to or associate with someone or a group of people as a punishment. □ *The other children sent Tom to Coventry for telling tales to the teacher.* □ *Fred was sent to Coventry by his fellow workers for breaking the strike.*

**separate the men from the boys** AND **sort the men from the boys** to separate the competent ones from those who are less competent; to separate the brave or strong ones from those who are less brave or strong. □ *This is the kind of task that sorts the men from the boys.* □ *This project is very complex. It'll separate the men from the boys.*

**separate the sheep from the goats** to divide people into two groups in order to distinguish the good from the bad, etc. □ *Working in a place like this really separates the sheep from the goats.* □ *We can't go on with the game until we separate the sheep from the goats.*

**separate the wheat from the chaff** to separate what is of value from what is useless. □ *Could you have a look at this furniture and separate the wheat from the chaff?* □ *The difficult exam will separate the wheat from the chaff among the pupils.*

**serve as a guinea pig** [for someone or something] to be experimented on. □ *Try it on someone else! I don't want to serve as a guinea pig!* □ *Jane agreed to serve as a guinea pig. She'll be the one to try out the new flavour of icecream.*

**serve notice** to announce something. □ *John served notice that he was leaving the company.* □ *I'm serving notice that I'll resign as secretary next month.*

**set foot somewhere** to go or enter somewhere. (Often in the negative.) □ *If I were you, I wouldn't set foot in that town.* □ *I wouldn't set foot in her house! Not after the way she spoke to me.*

**set great store by someone or something** to have positive expectations for someone or something; to have high hopes for someone or something. □ *I set great store by my computer and its ability to help me in my work.* □ *We set great store by John because of his quick mind.*

**set one back on one's heels** to surprise, shock, or overwhelm someone. □ *Her sudden announcement set us all back on our heels.* □ *The manager scolded me, and that really set me back on my heels.*

**set someone's teeth on edge 1.** [for a sour or bitter taste] to irritate one's mouth. □ *Have you ever eaten a lemon? It'll set your teeth on edge.* □ *Vinegar sets my teeth on edge.* **2.** [for a person or a noise] to be irritating or get on one's nerves. □ *Please don't scrape your finger-nails on the blackboard! It sets my teeth on edge!* □ *Here comes Bob. He's so annoying. He really sets my teeth on edge.*

**set someone straight** to explain something to someone. □ *I don't think you understand about taxation. Let me set you straight.* □ *Ann was confused, so I set her straight.*

**set something right** See put something right.

**set the ball rolling** See start the ball rolling.

**set the cat among the pigeons** See put the cat among the pigeons.

**set the record straight** to put right a mistake or misunderstanding; to make sure that an account, etc., is correct. □ *The manager thought Jean was to blame, but she soon set the record straight.* □ *Jane's mother heard that Tom is a married man, but he set the record straight. He's divorced.*

**set the table** AND **lay the table** to place plates, glasses, napkins, etc., on the table before a meal. □ *Jane, would you please lay the table?* □ *I'm tired of setting the table. Ask someone else to do it.*

**set the world on fire** to do exciting things that bring fame and glory. (Frequently negative.) □ *I'm not very ambitious. I don't want*

to set the world on fire. □ *You don't have to set the world on fire. Just do a good job.*

**set upon someone or something** to attack someone or something violently. □ *The dogs set upon the bear and chased it up a tree.* □ *Bill set upon Tom and struck him hard in the face.*

**set up shop somewhere** to establish one's place of work somewhere. (Informal.) □ *Mary set up shop in a small office building in Oak Street.* □ *The police officer said, "You can't set up shop right here on the pavement!"*

**shades of someone or something** reminders of someone or something; reminiscent of someone or something. □ *When I met Jim's mother, I thought "shades of Aunt Mary."* □ *"Shades of school," said Jack as the university lecturer rebuked him for being late.*

**shaggy-dog story** a kind of funny story which relies for its humour on its length and its sudden ridiculous ending. □ *Don't let John tell a shaggy-dog story. It'll go on for hours.* □ *Mary didn't get the point of Fred's shaggy-dog story.*

**shake in one's shoes** AND **quake in one's shoes** to be afraid; to shake from fear. □ *I was shaking in my shoes because I had to go and see the manager.* □ *Stop quaking in your shoes, Bob. I'm not going to sack you.*

**share and share alike** with equal shares. □ *I kept five and gave the other five to Mary—share and share alike.* □ *The two room-mates agreed that they would divide expenses—share and share alike.*

**sharp practice** dishonest or illegal methods or behaviour. □ *I'm sure that Jim's firm was guilty of sharp practice in getting that export order.* □ *The Smith brothers accused their competitors of sharp practice, but they couldn't prove it.*

**shift one's ground** to change one's opinions or arguments, often without being challenged or opposed. □ *At first Jack and I were on opposite sides, but he suddenly shifted his ground and started agreeing with me.* □ *Jim has very fixed views. You won't find him shifting his ground.*

**shipshape (and Bristol fashion)** in good order; neat and tidy. (A nautical term. Bristol was a major British port.) □ *You had better get*

*this room shipshape before your mother gets home. □ Mr. Jones always keeps his garden shipshape and Bristol fashion.*

**ships that pass in the night** people who meet each other briefly by chance and are unlikely to meet again. □ *Mary would have liked to see Jim again, but to him, they were ships that passed in the night. □ When you travel a lot on business, your encounters are just so many ships that pass in the night.*

**shirk one's duty** to neglect one's job or task. □ *The guard was sacked for shirking his duty. □ You cannot expect to continue shirking your duty without someone noticing.*

**short and sweet** brief (and pleasant because of briefness). □ *That was a good sermon—short and sweet. □ I don't care what you say, as long as you keep it short and sweet.*

**shot across the bows** something acting as a warning. (A naval term.) □ *The student was sent a letter warning him to attend lectures, but he ignored the shot across the bows. □ Fred's solicitor sent Bob a letter as a shot across the bows to get him to pay the money he owed Fred.*

**shot-gun wedding** a forced wedding. (Informal. From the bride's father having threatened the bridegroom with a shot-gun to force him to marry.) □ *Mary was six months pregnant when she married Bill. It was a real shot-gun wedding. □ Bob would never have married Jane if she hadn't been pregnant. Jane's father saw to it that there was a shot-gun wedding.*

**shot in the arm** a boost; something that gives someone energy. (Informal.) □ *Thank you for cheering me up. Your visit was a real shot in the arm. □ Your friendly greeting card was just what I needed—a real shot in the arm.*

**shot in the dark** a random or wild guess or try. (Informal.) □ *I don't know how I guessed the right answer. It was just a shot in the dark. □ I was lucky to take on such a good worker as Sally. When I employed her, it was just a shot in the dark.*

**shove one's oar in** See put one's oar in.

**show of hands** a vote expressed by people raising their hands. □ *We were asked to vote for the candidates for captain by a show of hands.*

□ *Jack wanted us to vote on paper, not by a show of hands, so that we could have a secret ballot.*

**show oneself in one's true colours** to show what one is really like or what one is really thinking. □ *Jane always pretends to be sweet and gentle, but she showed herself in her true colours when she lost the match.* □ *Mary's drunken husband didn't show himself in his true colours until after they were married.*

**show one's hand** to reveal one's intentions to someone. (From card-games.) □ *I don't know whether Jim's intending to marry Jane or not. He's not one to show his hand.* □ *If you want to get a rise, don't show the boss your hand too soon.*

**show one's paces** to show what one can do; to demonstrate one's abilities. (From horses demonstrating their skill and speed.) □ *The runners had to show their paces for a place in the relay team.* □ *All the singers had to show their paces to be selected for the choir.*

**show one's teeth** to act in an angry or threatening manner. □ *We thought Bob was meek and mild, but he really showed his teeth when Jack insulted his girlfriend.* □ *The enemy forces didn't expect the country they invaded to show its teeth.*

**show the flag** to be present at a gathering just so that the organization to which one belongs will be represented, or just to show others that one has attended. (From a ship flying its country's flag.) □ *The firm wants all the salesmen to attend the international conference in order to show the flag.* □ *As many as possible of the family should attend the wedding. We must show the flag.*

**show the white feather** to reveal fear or cowardice. (From the fact that a white tail-feather was a sign of inferior breeding in a fighting cock.) □ *Jim showed the white feather by refusing to fight with Jack.* □ *The enemy army showed the white feather by running away.*

**shut up shop** to stop working or operating, for the day or forever. (Informal.) □ *It's five o'clock. Time to shut up shop.* □ *I can't make any money in this town. The time has come to shut up shop and move to another town.*

**signed, sealed, and delivered** formally and officially signed; [for a formal document to be] executed. (Informal.) □ *Here is the deed to the property—signed, sealed, and delivered.* □ *I can't begin work on this project until I have the contract signed, sealed, and delivered.*

**sign one's own death-warrant** to do something that will lead to one's ruin, downfall, or death. (As if one were signing a paper which called for one's own death.) □ *I wouldn't ever gamble a large sum of money. That would be signing my own death-warrant.* □ *The killer signed his own death-warrant when he walked into the police station and gave himself up.*

**silly season** the time of year, usually in the summer, when there is a lack of important news, and newspapers contain articles about unimportant or trivial things instead. □ *It must be the silly season. There's a story here about peculiarly shaped potatoes.* □ *There's a piece on the front page about people with big feet. Talk about the silly season.*

**since the year dot** See from the year dot.

**sing someone's praises** to praise someone highly and enthusiastically. □ *The boss is singing the praises of his new secretary.* □ *The theatre critics are singing the praises of the young actor.*

**sink or swim** fail or succeed. □ *After I've studied and learned all I can, I have to take the test and sink or swim.* □ *It's too late to help John now. It's sink or swim for him.*

**sink our differences** to forget or to agree to set aside disagreements of opinion, attitude, etc. (Also with *their* or *your*, as in the examples.) □ *We decided to sink our differences and try to be friends for Mary's sake.* □ *Individual members of the team must sink their differences and work for the success of the team.* □ *You two must sink your differences, or your marriage will fail.*

**sit at someone's feet** to admire someone greatly; to be influenced by someone's teaching; to be taught by someone. □ *Jack sat at the feet of Picasso when he was studying in Europe.* □ *Tom would love to sit at the feet of the musician Yehudi Menuhin.*

**sit (idly) by** to remain inactive when other people are doing something; to ignore a situation which calls for help. □ *Bob sat idly by even though everyone else was hard at work.* □ *I can't sit by while all those people need food.*

**sit on one's hands** to do nothing; to fail to help. □ *When we needed help from Mary, she just sat on her hands.* □ *We need the co-operation of everyone. You can't sit on your hands!*

**sitting on a powder keg** in a risky or explosive situation; in a situation where something serious or dangerous may happen at any

time. □ *Things are very tense at work. The whole office is sitting on a powder keg.* □ *The fire at the oilfield seems to be under control for now, but all the workers there are sitting on a powder keg.*

**(sitting) on top of the world** feeling wonderful; glorious; ecstatic. □ *Wow, I feel on top of the world.* □ *Since he got a new job, he's on top of the world.* □ *I've been sitting on top of the world all week because I passed my exams.*

**sitting pretty** living in comfort or luxury; in a good situation. (Informal.) □ *My uncle died and left enough money for me to be sitting pretty for the rest of my life.* □ *Now that I have a good job, I'm sitting pretty.*

**six of one and half a dozen of the other** about the same one way or another. □ *It doesn't matter to me which way you do it. It's six of one and half a dozen of the other.* □ *What difference does it make? They're both the same—six of one and half a dozen of the other.*

**sixth sense** a supposed power to know or feel things that are not perceptible by the five senses of sight, hearing, smell, taste, and touch. □ *My sixth sense told me to avoid going home by my usual route. Later I discovered there had been a fatal accident on it.* □ *Meg's sixth sense told her not to trust Tom, even though he seemed honest enough.*

**skate over something** to pass lightly over something, trying to avoid drawing attention or avoid taking something into consideration. □ *Sally prefers to skate over her reasons for leaving her job.* □ *Meg skated over the reason for her quarrel with Dick.*

**(skating) on thin ice** in a risky situation. □ *If you try that you'll really be on thin ice. That's too risky.* □ *You're skating on thin ice if you criticize the lecturer. He has a hot temper.*

**skeleton in the cupboard** a hidden and shocking secret. (Often in the plural.) □ *You can ask anyone about how reliable I am. I don't mind. I don't have any skeletons in the cupboard.* □ *My uncle was in jail for a day once. That's our family's only skeleton in the cupboard.*

**slate something** to criticize something severely. □ *The critics slated the place.* □ *The teacher slated the pupil's performance.*

**slice of the cake** a share of something. □ *There's not much work around and so everyone must get a slice of the cake.* □ *The firm makes huge profits, and the workers want a slice of the cake.*

**slip of the tongue** an error in speaking where a word is pronounced incorrectly, or where something is said which the speaker did not mean to say. □ *I didn't mean to tell her that. It was a slip of the tongue.* □ *I failed to understand the instructions because the speaker made a slip of the tongue at an important point.*

**small hours** the hours immediately after midnight. □ *The dance went on to the small hours.* □ *Jim goes to bed in the small hours and gets up at lunch-time.*

**smell of the lamp** [for a book] to show signs of being revised and researched carefully and to lack spontaneity. □ *I preferred her earlier spontaneous novels. The later ones smell of the lamp.* □ *The student has done a lot of research, but has few original ideas. His essay smells of the lamp.*

**snake in the grass** a low and deceitful person. □ *Sally said that Bob couldn't be trusted because he was a snake in the grass.* □ *"You snake in the grass!" cried Sally. "You cheated me."*

**something sticks in one's craw** something bothers one. □ *Her criticism stuck in my craw.* □ *I knew that everything I said would stick in his craw and upset him.*

**sort the men from the boys** See separate the men from the boys.

**speak of the devil** said when someone whose name has just been mentioned appears or is heard from. □ *Well, speak of the devil! Hello, Tom. We were just talking about you.* □ *I had just mentioned Sally when—speak of the devil—she walked in the door.*

**speak one's mind** to say frankly what one thinks (about something). □ *Please let me speak my mind, and then you can do whatever you wish.* □ *You can always depend on John to speak his mind. He'll let you know what he really thinks.*

**speak out of turn** to say something unwise or imprudent; to say something at the wrong time. □ *Excuse me if I'm speaking out of turn, but what you are proposing is quite wrong.* □ *What Bob said about the boss was true, even though he was speaking out of turn.*

**speak the same language** [for people] to have similar ideas, tastes, etc. □ *Jane and Jack get along very well. They really speak the same language about almost everything.* □ *Bob and his father don't speak the same language when it comes to politics.*



**spend a penny** to urinate. (Informal. From the former cost of admission to the cubicles in public lavatories.) □ *Stop the car. The little girl needs to spend a penny.* □ *The station toilets are closed and I have to spend a penny.*

**spick and span** very clean. (Informal.) □ *I have to clean up the house and get it spick and span for the party on Friday night.* □ *I love to have everything around me spick and span.*

**spike someone's guns** to spoil someone's plans; to make it impossible for someone to carry out a course of action. (From driving a metal spike into the touch-hole of an enemy gun to render it useless.) □ *The boss was going to sack Sally publicly, but she spiked his guns by resigning.* □ *Jack intended borrowing his father's car when he was away, but his father spiked his guns by locking it in the garage.*

**spill the beans** See let the cat out of the bag.

**splash out on something** to spend a lot of money on something in an extravagant way. (Informal.) □ *Jack splashed out on a new car that he couldn't afford.* □ *Let's splash out on a really good meal out.*

**split hairs** to quibble; to try to make petty distinctions. □ *They don't have any serious differences. They are just splitting hairs.* □ *Don't waste time splitting hairs. Accept it the way it is.*

**split the difference** to divide the difference (with someone else). □ *You want to sell for £120, and I want to buy for £100. Let's split the difference and close the deal at £110.* □ *I don't want to split the difference. I want £120.*

**spoil the ship for a ha'porth of tar** to risk ruining something valuable by not buying something relatively inexpensive but essential for it. (*Ha'porth* is a halfpenny's worth. From the use of tar to make boats watertight.) □ *Meg spent a lot of money on a new dress but refused to buy shoes. She certainly spoils the ship for a ha'porth of tar.* □ *Bob bought a new car but doesn't get it serviced because it's too expensive. He'll spoil the ship for a ha'porth of tar.*

**spoon-feed** to treat someone with too much care or help; to teach someone with methods that are too easy and do not stimulate the learner to independent thinking. □ *The teacher spoon-feeds the pupils by dictation notes on the novel instead of getting the children to read the books themselves.* □ *You mustn't spoon-feed the new recruits by telling them what to do all the time. They must use their initiative.*

**sporting chance** a reasonably good chance. □ *If you hurry, you have a sporting chance of catching the bus.* □ *The firm has only a sporting chance of getting the export order.*

**spot on** exactly right or accurate. (Informal.) □ *Jack's assessment of the state of the firm was spot on.* □ *Mary's description of the stolen car was spot on.*

**spread oneself too thin** to do too many things, so that one can do none of them well. □ *It's a good idea to get involved in a lot of activities, but don't spread yourself too thin.* □ *I'm too busy these days. I'm afraid I've spread myself too thin.*

**square deal** a fair and honest transaction; fair treatment. (Informal.) □ *All the workers want is a square deal, but their boss underpays them.* □ *You always get a square deal with that travel firm.*

**square meal** a nourishing, filling meal. (Informal.) □ *All you've eaten today is junk food. You should sit down to a square meal.* □ *The tramp hadn't had a square meal in weeks.*

**square peg in a round hole** a misfit; one who is poorly adapted to one's surroundings. □ *John just can't seem to get along with the people he works with. He's just a square peg in a round hole.* □ *I'm not a square peg in a round hole. It's just that no one understands me.*

**stack the cards (against someone or something)** to arrange things against someone or something; to make it difficult for someone to succeed. (Informal. Originally from card-playing. Usually in the passive.) □ *I can't make any progress at my office. The cards are stacked against me.* □ *The cards seem to be stacked against me. I am having very bad luck.*

**stand a chance** to have a chance. □ *Do you think I stand a chance of winning first place?* □ *Everyone stands a chance of catching the disease.*

**stand corrected** to admit that one has been wrong. □ *I realize that I accused him wrongly. I stand corrected.* □ *We appreciate now that our conclusions were wrong. We stand corrected.*

**stand down** to withdraw from a competition or a position. □ *John has stood down from the election for president of the club.* □ *It is time our chairman stood down and made room for a younger person.*

**standing joke** a subject that regularly and over a period of time causes amusement whenever it is mentioned. □ *Uncle Jim's driving was a standing joke. He used to drive incredibly slowly.* □ *Their mother's inability to make a decision was a standing joke in the Smith family all their lives.*

**stand on ceremony** to hold rigidly to formal manners. (Often in the negative.) □ *Please help yourself to more. Don't stand on ceremony.* □ *We are very informal around here. Hardly anyone stands on ceremony.*

**stand someone in good stead** to be useful or beneficial to someone. □ *This is a fine overcoat. I'm sure it'll stand you in good stead for many years.* □ *I did the managing director a favour which I'm sure will stand me in good stead.*

**stand to reason** to seem reasonable; [for a fact or conclusion] to survive careful or logical evaluation. □ *It stands to reason that it'll be colder in January than it is in June.* □ *It stands to reason that Bill left in a hurry, because he didn't pack his clothes.*

**start (off) with a clean slate** to start out again afresh; to ignore the past and start over again. □ *James started off with a clean slate when he went to a new school.* □ *When Bob got out of jail, he started off with a clean slate.*

**start the ball rolling** AND **get the ball rolling; set the ball rolling** to start something; to get some process going; to get a discussion started. □ *If I could just get the ball rolling, then other people would help.* □ *Jack started the ball rolling by asking for volunteers.* ALSO: **keep the ball rolling** □ *Tom started the project, and we kept the ball rolling.*

**stay the distance** See go the distance.

**steal a march on someone** to get some sort of an advantage over someone without being noticed. □ *I got the contract because I was able to steal a march on my competitor.* □ *You have to be clever and fast to steal a march on anyone.*

**steal someone's thunder** to prevent someone from receiving the public recognition expected upon the announcement of an achievement, by making the announcement in public before the intended receiver of the recognition can do so. □ *I stole Mary's thunder by telling her friends about Mary's engagement to Tom before she could do*

*so herself.* □ *Someone stole my thunder by leaking my announcement to the press.*

**steal the show** to give the best or most popular performance in a show, play, or some other event; to get attention for oneself. □ *The lead in the play was very good, but the butler stole the show.* □ *Ann always tries to steal the show when she and I make a presentation.*

**step into dead men's shoes** AND **fill dead men's shoes** to take over the job or position of someone who has died; to gain an advantage by someone's death. □ *The only hope of promotion in that firm is to step into dead men's shoes.* □ *Jack and Ben are both going out with rich widows. They hope to fill dead men's shoes.*

**step in(to the breach)** to move into a space or vacancy; to fulfill a needed role or function that has been left vacant. □ *When Ann resigned as president, I stepped into the breach.* □ *A number of people asked me to step into the breach and take her place.*

**step on someone's toes** AND **tread on someone's toes** to interfere with or offend someone. (Also used literally. Note example with *anyone*.) □ *When you're in public office, you have to avoid stepping on anyone's toes.* □ *Ann trod on someone's toes during the last campaign and lost the election.*

**stew in one's own juice** to be left alone to suffer one's anger or disappointment. (Informal.) □ *John has such a terrible temper. When he got angry with us, we just let him go away and stew in his own juice.* □ *After John stewed in his own juice for a while, he decided to come back and apologize to us.*

**stick it out** to put up with or endure a situation, however difficult. (Informal.) □ *This job's boring, but we're sticking it out until we find something more interesting.* □ *I know the children are being annoying, but can you stick it out until their mother returns?*

**stick one's neck out** to take a risk. (Informal.) □ *Why should I stick my neck out to do something for her? What's she ever done for me?* □ *He made a risky investment. He stuck his neck out because he thought he could make some money.*

**stick one's oar in** See put one's oar in.

**stick out like a sore thumb** to be very prominent or unsightly; to be very obvious. (Informal.) □ *Bob is so tall that he sticks out like*

*a sore thumb in a crowd.* □ *The house next door needs painting. It sticks out like a sore thumb.*

**stick to one's guns** to remain firm in one's opinions and convictions; to stand up for one's rights. (Informal.) □ *I'll stick to my guns on this matter. I'm sure I'm right.* □ *Bob can be persuaded to do it our way. He probably won't stick to his guns on this point.*

**stir up a hornets' nest** to create trouble or difficulties. □ *By finding pupils copying from each other, you've really stirred up a hornets' nest.* □ *Bill stirred up a hornets' nest when he discovered the theft.*

**storm in a teacup** an uproar about something trivial or unimportant. □ *This isn't a serious problem—just a storm in a teacup.* □ *Even a storm in a teacup can take a lot of time to get settled.*

**straight away** right away; immediately, without thinking or considering. □ *We'll have to go straight away.* □ *Straight away I knew something was wrong.*

**straight from the shoulder** sincerely; frankly; holding nothing back. □ *Sally always speaks straight from the shoulder. You never have to guess what she really means.* □ *Bill told the staff the financial facts—straight from the shoulder and brief.*

**straw in the wind** an indication or sign of what might happen in the future. □ *The student's argument with the lecturer was a straw in the wind in terms of student-teacher relations. The students are planning a strike.* □ *Two or three people getting the sack represents just a straw in the wind. I think the whole work-force will have to go.*

**stretch one's legs** to walk around after sitting down or lying down for a time. (Informal.) □ *We wanted to stretch our legs during the theatre interval.* □ *After sitting in the car all day, the travellers decided to stretch their legs.*

**strike a bargain** to reach an agreement on a price (for something). □ *They argued for a while and finally struck a bargain.* □ *They were unable to strike a bargain, so they left.*

**strike a chord** to cause someone to remember [someone or something]; to remind someone of [someone or something]; to be familiar. □ *The woman in the portrait struck a chord, and I realized that she was my grandmother.* □ *His name strikes a chord, but I don't know why.*

**strike a happy medium** to find a compromise position; to arrive at a position half-way between two unacceptable extremes. □ *Ann likes very spicy food, but Bob doesn't care for spicy food at all. We are trying to find a restaurant which strikes a happy medium.* □ *Tom is either very happy or very sad. He can't seem to strike a happy medium.*

**strike the right note** to achieve the desired effect; to do something suitable or pleasing. (A musical reference.) □ *Meg struck the right note when she wore a dark suit to the interview.* □ *The politician's speech failed to strike the right note with the crowd.*

**strike while the iron is hot** to do something at the best possible time; to do something when the time is ripe. □ *He was in a good mood, so I asked for a loan of £200. I thought I'd better strike while the iron was hot.* □ *Please go to the bank and settle this matter now! They are willing to be reasonable. You've got to strike while the iron is hot.*

**stuff and nonsense** nonsense. (Informal.) □ *Come on! Don't give me all that stuff and nonsense!* □ *I don't understand this book. It's all stuff and nonsense as far as I am concerned.*

**stumbling-block** something that prevents or obstructs progress. □ *We'd like to buy that house, but the high price is the stumbling-block.* □ *Jim's age is a stumbling-block to getting another job. He's over sixty.*

**sugar the pill** AND **sweeten the pill** to make something unpleasant more pleasant. (From the sugar coating on some pills to disguise the bitter taste of the medicine.) □ *Mary's parents wouldn't let her go out and tried to sugar the pill by inviting some of her friends around.* □ *Tom hated boarding-school and his parents tried to sweeten the pill by giving him a lot of pocket-money.*

**suit someone down to the ground** See suit someone to a T.

**suit someone to a T** AND **suit someone down to the ground** to be very appropriate for someone. □ *This kind of employment suits me to a T.* □ *This is Sally's kind of house. It suits her down to the ground.*

**survival of the fittest** the idea that the most able or fit will survive (while the less able and less fit will perish). (This is used literally as a part of the theory of evolution.) □ *In college, it's the survival of the fittest. You have to keep working in order to survive and graduate.*

□ *I don't look after my house-plants very well, but the ones I have are really flourishing. It's the survival of the fittest, I suppose.*

**swallow one's pride** to forget one's pride and accept something humiliating. □ *I had to swallow my pride and admit that I was wrong.*  
 □ *When you're a pupil, you find yourself swallowing your pride quite often.*

**swallow something hook, line, and sinker** to believe something completely. (Informal. These terms refer to fishing and fooling a fish into being caught.) □ *I made up a story about why I was so late. They all swallowed it hook, line, and sinker.* □ *I feel like a fool. I swallowed the trick hook, line, and sinker.*

**swan around** to go around in an idle and irresponsible way. (Informal.) □ *Mrs. Smith's swanning around abroad while her husband's in hospital here.* □ *Mary's not looking for a job. She's just swanning around visiting all her friends.*

**swan-song** the last work or performance of a playwright, musician, actor, etc., before death or retirement. □ *His portrayal of Lear was the actor's swan-song.* □ *We didn't know that her performance last night was the singer's swan-song.*

**sweep something under the carpet** AND **brush something under the carpet** to try to hide something unpleasant, shameful, etc., from the attention of others. □ *The boss said he couldn't sweep the theft under the carpet, that he'd have to call in the police.* □ *The headmaster tried to brush the children's truancy under the carpet, but the inspector wanted to investigate it.*

**sweeten the pill** See sugar the pill.

**swim against the tide** to do the opposite of what everyone else does; to go against the trend. □ *Bob tends to do what everybody else does. He isn't likely to swim against the tide.* □ *Mary always swims against the tide. She's a very contrary person.*

# T

**tail wagging the dog** a situation where a small or minor part is controlling the whole thing. □ *John was just employed yesterday, and today he's bossing everyone around. It's a case of the tail wagging the dog.* □ *Why is this minor matter being given so much importance? It's the tail wagging the dog!*

**take a leaf out of someone's book** to behave or to do something in the way that someone else would; to use someone as an example. □ *Take a leaf out of your brother's book and work hard.* □ *Eventually June took a leaf out of her friend's book and started dressing smartly.*

**take a stab at something** to make a try at something, sometimes without much hope of success. (Informal. Also with *have*.) □ *I don't know if I can do it, but I'll take a stab at it.* □ *Come on, Mary. Take a stab at catching a fish. You might end up liking fishing.* □ *Would you like to have a stab at this problem?*

**take leave of one's senses** to become irrational. □ *What are you doing? Have you taken leave of your senses?* □ *What a terrible situation! It's enough to make one take leave of one's senses.*

**take one's medicine** to accept the punishment or the bad fortune which one deserves. □ *I know I did wrong, and I know I have to take my medicine.* □ *Billy knew he was going to be punished, and he didn't want to take his medicine.*

**take someone down a peg (or two)** to reprimand someone who is acting in too arrogant a way. (Informal.) □ *The teacher's scolding took Bob down a peg or two.* □ *He was so rude that someone was bound to take him down a peg.*

**take someone to task** to scold or reprimand someone. □ *The teacher took John to task for his bad behaviour.* □ *I lost a big contract, and the managing director took me to task in front of everyone.*



**take someone under one's wing** to take over and care for a person. □ *John wasn't doing well at school until an older pupil took him under her wing.* □ *I took the new workers under my wing, and they learned the job in no time.*

**take something as read** to assume something or regard something as being understood and accepted without reading it out, stating it, or checking it. □ *Can we take the minutes of the meeting as read, or should I read them?* □ *I think we can take their agreement as read, but I'll check with them if you like.*

**take something in one's stride** to accept something as natural or expected. □ *The argument surprised him, but he took it in his stride.* □ *It was a very rude remark, but Mary took it in her stride.*

**take something lying down** to endure something unpleasant without fighting back. □ *He insulted me publicly. You don't expect me to take that lying down, do you?* □ *I'm not the kind of person who'll take something like that lying down.*

**take something on the chin** to experience and endure a blow stoically. (Informal.) □ *The bad news was a real shock, but John took it on the chin.* □ *The worst luck comes my way, but I always end up taking it on the chin.*

**take something to heart** to take something very seriously. □ *John took the criticism to heart and made an honest effort to improve.* □ *I know Bob said a lot of cruel things to you, but he was angry. You shouldn't take those things to heart.*

**take the rough with the smooth** to accept the bad things along with the good things. □ *We all have disappointments. You have to learn to take the rough with the smooth.* □ *There are good days and bad days, but every day you take the rough with the smooth. That's life.*

**take the wind out of someone's sails** to put an end to someone's boasting or arrogance and make the person feel embarrassed; to take an advantage away from someone. (Informal.) □ *John was bragging about how much money he earned until he learned that most of us make more. That took the wind out of his sails.* □ *Learning that one has been totally wrong about something can really take the wind out of one's sails.*

**take the words (right) out of one's mouth** [for someone else] to say what you were going to say. □ *John said exactly what I was*

*going to say. He took the words out of my mouth. □ I agree with you. You took the words right out of my mouth.*

**take up the cudgels on behalf of someone or something** to support or defend someone or something. □ *We'll have to take up the cudgels on behalf of Jim or he'll lose the debate. □ Meg has taken up the cudgels on behalf of an environmental movement.*

**talking-shop** a place or meeting where things are discussed, but action may or may not be taken. (Informal.) □ *Many people think the City Chambers is just a talking-shop. □ The firm's board meeting is always just a talking-shop. The chairman makes all the decisions himself.*

**talk nineteen to the dozen** to talk a lot, usually quickly. (Informal.) □ *The old friends talk nineteen to the dozen when they meet once a year. □ You won't get Jean to stop chattering. She always talks nineteen to the dozen.*

**talk of the town** the subject of gossip; someone or something that everyone is talking about. □ *Joan's argument with the town council is the talk of the town. □ Fred's father is the talk of the town since the police arrested him.*

**talk through one's hat** to talk nonsense. (Informal.) □ *John doesn't know anything about gardening. He's just talking through his hat. □ Jean said that the Smiths are emigrating, but she's talking through her hat.*

**talk until one is blue in the face** to talk until one is exhausted. (Informal.) □ *I talked until I was blue in the face, but I couldn't change her mind. □ She had to talk until she was blue in the face to convince him.*

**tarred with the same brush** having the same faults or bad points as someone else. □ *Jack and his brother are tarred with the same brush. They're both crooks. □ The Smith children are tarred with the same brush. They're all lazy.*

**teach one's grandmother to suck eggs** to try to tell or show someone more knowledgeable or experienced than oneself how to do something. □ *Don't suggest showing Mary how to knit. It will be teaching your grandmother to suck eggs. She's an expert. □ Don't teach your grandmother to suck eggs. Jack has been playing tennis for years.*

**Tell it to the marines.** AND **Tell that to the marines.** I do not believe you (maybe the marines will). (Informal.)  *That's silly. Tell it to the marines.*  *I don't care how good you think your reason is. Tell that to the marines!*

**tell tales out of school** to tell secrets or spread rumours. (Does not refer only to schoolchildren.)  *I wish that John would keep quiet. He's telling tales out of school again.*  *If you tell tales out of school a lot, people won't know when to believe you.*

**ten a penny** See two a penny.

**thank one's lucky stars** to be thankful for one's luck. (Informal.)  *You can thank your lucky stars that I was there to help you.*  *I thank my lucky stars that I studied the right things for the test.*

**thick and fast** in large numbers or amounts and at a rapid rate.  *The enemy soldiers came thick and fast.*  *New problems seem to come thick and fast.*

**thick-skinned** not easily upset or hurt; insensitive.  *Tom won't worry about your insults. He's completely thick-skinned.*  *Jane's so thick-skinned she didn't realize Fred was being rude to her.*

**thin end of the wedge** a minor or unimportant event or act that is the first stage in something more serious or unfortunate.  *If you let Pam stay for a few days, it will be the thin end of the wedge. She'll stay for ages.*  *The boss thinks that if he gives his secretary a rise, it will be the thin end of the wedge and all the staff will demand the same.*

**thin on the ground** few in number; rare.  *Jobs in that area are thin on the ground.*  *Butterflies are thin on the ground here now.*

**thin-skinned** easily upset or hurt; sensitive.  *You'll have to handle Mary's mother carefully. She's very thin-skinned.*  *Jane weeps easily when people tease her. She's too thin-skinned.*

**through hell and high water** through all sorts of severe difficulties. (Informal.)  *I came through hell and high water to get to this meeting. Why don't you start on time?*  *You'll have to go through hell and high water to accomplish your goal, but it'll be worth it.*

**through thick and thin** through good times and bad times. (Informal.)  *We've been together through thick and thin and we won't desert*

*each other now. □ Over the years, we went through thick and thin and enjoyed every minute of it.*

**throw a fit** to become very angry; to put on a display of anger. □ *Sally threw a fit when I showed up without the things she asked me to buy. □ My dad threw a fit when I got home three hours late.*

**throw a party (for someone)** to give or hold a party for someone. □ *Mary was leaving town, so we threw a party for her. □ Do you know a place where we could throw a party?*

**throw a spanner in the works** to cause problems for someone's plans. (Informal.) □ *I don't want to throw a spanner in the works, but have you checked your plans with a solicitor? □ When John refused to help us, he really threw a spanner in the works.*

**throw caution to the winds** to become very careless. □ *Jane, who is usually quite cautious, threw caution to the winds and went wind-surfing. □ I don't mind taking a little chance now and then, but I'm not the type of person who throws caution to the winds.*

**throw cold water on something** See pour cold water on something.

**throw down the gauntlet** to challenge (someone) to an argument or (figurative) combat. □ *When Bob challenged my conclusions, he threw down the gauntlet. I was ready for an argument. □ Frowning at Bob is the same as throwing down the gauntlet. He loves to get into a fight about anything.*

**throw good money after bad** to waste additional money after wasting money once. □ *I bought a used car and then had to spend £300 on repairs. That was throwing good money after bad. □ The Browns are always throwing good money after bad. They bought a plot of land which turned out to be swamp, and then had to pay to have it filled in.*

**throw in one's hand** to give up or abandon a course of action. (From a player giving up in a card-game.) □ *I got tired of the tennis competition and threw in my hand. □ John spent only one year at university and then threw in his hand.*

**throw the book at someone** to charge someone with, or convict someone of, as many crimes as possible; to reprimand or punish someone severely. □ *I made the police officer angry, so he took me to*

*the station and threw the book at me.* □ *The judge threatened to throw the book at me if I didn't stop insulting the police officer.*

**thumb a lift** AND **hitch a lift** to get a lift from a passing motorist; to make a sign with one's thumb that indicates to passing drivers that one is asking for a lift. □ *My car broke down on the motorway, and I had to thumb a lift to get back to town.* □ *Sometimes it's dangerous to hitch a lift with a stranger.*

**thumb one's nose at someone or something** to make a rude gesture of disgust—touching the end of one's nose with one's thumb—at someone or something. (Both literal and figurative uses.) □ *The tramp thumbed his nose at the lady and walked away.* □ *You can't just thumb your nose at people who give you trouble. You've got to learn to get along with them.*

**tickle someone's fancy** to interest someone; to attract someone. (Informal.) □ *I have an interesting proposal here which I think will tickle your fancy.* □ *The idea of dancing doesn't exactly tickle my fancy.*

**tick over** to move along at a quiet, even pace, without either stopping or going quickly. (Informal. From an engine ticking over.) □ *The firm didn't make large profits, but it's ticking over.* □ *We must try to keep our finances ticking over until the recession ends.*

**tied to one's mother's apron-strings** dominated by one's mother; dependent on one's mother. □ *Tom is still tied to his mother's apron-strings.* □ *Isn't he a little old to be tied to his mother's apron-strings?*

**tie someone in knots** to make someone confused or upset. (Informal.) □ *The speaker tied herself in knots trying to explain her difficult subject in simple language.* □ *I was trying to be tactful, but I just tied myself in knots.*

**tie the knot** to get married. (Informal.) □ *Well, I hear that you and John are going to tie the knot.* □ *My parents tied the knot almost forty years ago.*

**tighten one's belt** to manage to spend less money. (Informal.) □ *Things are beginning to cost more and more. It looks as though we'll all have to tighten our belts.* □ *Times are hard, and prices are high. I can tighten my belt for only so long.*

**till the cows come home** for a very long time. (Cows are returned to the barn at the end of the day. Informal.) □ *We could discuss this*

*until the cows come home and still reach no decisions.* □ *He could drink beer until the cows come home.*

**time out of mind** for a very long time; longer than anyone can remember. □ *There has been a church in the village time out of mind.* □ *The Smith family have lived in that house time out of mind.*

**tip someone the wink** to give someone privileged or useful information in a secret or private manner. (Informal.) □ *John tipped Mary the wink that there was a vacancy in his department.* □ *Jack got his new house at a good price. A friend tipped him the wink that it was going on the market.*

**tip the scales at something** to weigh some amount. □ *Tom tips the scales at nearly 14 stone.* □ *I'll be glad when I tip the scales at a few pounds less.*

**toe the line** to do what one is expected or required to do; to follow the rules. (Informal.) □ *You'll get ahead, Sally. Don't worry. Just toe the line, and everything will be okay.* □ *John finally got the sack. He just couldn't learn to toe the line.*

**tongue-in-cheek** insincere; joking. □ *Ann made a tongue-in-cheek remark to John, and he got angry because he thought she was serious.* □ *The play seemed very serious at first, but then everyone saw that it was tongue-in-cheek, and the audience began laughing.*

**to the bitter end** to the very end. (Originally nautical. This originally had nothing to do with bitterness.) □ *I kept trying to the bitter end.* □ *It took me a long time to get through college, but I worked hard at it all the way to the bitter end.*

**to the letter** exactly as instructed; exactly as written. □ *I didn't make an error. I followed your instructions to the letter.* □ *We didn't prepare the recipe to the letter, but the cake still turned out very well.*

**touch-and-go** very uncertain or critical. □ *Things were touch-and-go at the office until a new manager was employed.* □ *Jane had a serious operation, and everything was touch-and-go for several hours.*

**touch a sore point** See touch a sore spot.

**touch a sore spot** AND **touch a sore point** to refer to a sensitive matter which will upset someone. (Also used literally.) □ *I seem to have touched a sore spot. I'm sorry. I didn't mean to upset you.* □ *When*

*you talk to him, avoid talking about money. It's best not to touch a sore point if possible.*

**touch wood** a phrase said to cancel out imaginary bad luck. □ *My stereo has never given me any trouble—touch wood.* □ *We plan to be in London by tomorrow evening—touch wood.*

**trade on something** to use a fact or a situation to one's advantage. □ *Tom was able to trade on the fact that he had once been in the army.* □ *John traded on his poor eyesight to get a seat closer to the stage.*

**tread on someone's toes** See step on someone's toes.

**true to one's word** keeping one's promise. □ *True to his word, Tom appeared at exactly eight o'clock.* □ *We'll soon know if Jane is true to her word. We'll see if she does what she promised.*

**try it on** to behave in a bold, disobedient, or unlawful manner to discover whether such behaviour will be allowed. (Informal.) □ *Tony knew he wouldn't get away with working only four days a week. He was just trying it on by asking the boss.* □ *The children really try it on when their mother's out.*

**try one's wings** to try to do something one has recently become qualified to do. (Like a young bird uses its wings to try to fly.) □ *John just got his driver's licence and wants to borrow the car to try his wings.* □ *I learned to skin-dive, and I want to go to the seaside to try my wings.*

**try someone's patience** to do something annoying which may cause someone to lose patience; to cause someone to be annoyed. □ *Stop whistling. You're trying my patience. Very soon I'm going to lose my temper.* □ *Some pupils think it's fun to try the teacher's patience.*

**tuck into something** to eat something with hunger and enjoyment. (Informal.) □ *The children really tucked into the icecream.* □ *Jean would like to have tucked into the cream cakes, but she's on a strict diet.*

**tumble to something** suddenly to understand or realize something. (Informal.) □ *I suddenly tumbled to the reason for his behaviour.* □ *When will Meg tumble to the fact that her husband is dishonest?*

**turn a blind eye to someone or something** to ignore something and pretend you do not see it. □ *The usherette turned a blind eye to*

*the little boy who sneaked into the theatre.* □ *How can you turn a blind eye to all those starving children?*

**turn someone's head** to make someone conceited. □ *John's compliments really turned Sally's head.* □ *Victory in the competition is bound to turn Tom's head. He'll think he's too good for us.*

**turn something to good account** to use something in such a way that it is to one's advantage; to make good use of a situation, experience, etc. □ *Pam turned her illness to good account and did a lot of reading.* □ *Many people turn their retirement to good account and take up interesting hobbies.*

**turn something to one's advantage** to make an advantage for oneself out of something (which might otherwise be a disadvantage). □ *Sally found a way to turn the problem to her advantage.* □ *The icecream shop manager was able to turn the hot weather to her advantage.*

**turn the other cheek** to choose not to respond to abuse or to an insult. □ *When Bob got angry with Mary and shouted at her, she just turned the other cheek.* □ *Usually I turn the other cheek when someone is rude to me.*

**turn the tables (on someone)** to cause a reversal in someone's plans; to reverse a situation and put someone in a different position, especially in a less advantageous position. □ *I went to Jane's house to help get ready for a surprise party for Bob. It turned out that the surprise party was for me! Jane really turned the tables on me!* □ *Turning the tables like that requires a lot of planning and a lot of secrecy.*

**turn the tide** to cause a reversal in the direction of events; to cause a reversal in public opinion. □ *It looked as though the team was going to lose, but near the end of the game, our star player turned the tide by scoring a goal.* □ *At first, people were opposed to our plan. After a lot of discussion, we were able to turn the tide and get them to agree with us.*

**turn turtle** to turn upside down. □ *The boat turned turtle, and everyone got soaked.* □ *The car ran off the road and turned turtle in the ditch.*

**turn up trumps** to do the right or required thing, often unexpectedly or at the last minute. (Informal.) □ *I thought our team would let us down, but they turned up trumps in the second half of the match.*



□ *We always thought the boss was mean, but he turned up trumps and made a large contribution to Mary's leaving present.*

**two a penny** AND **ten a penny** very common; easily obtained and therefore cheap. □ *People with qualifications like yours are two a penny. You should take another training course.* □ *Flats to rent here are no longer two a penny.*

**two can play at that game** See under game at which two can play.

# U

**up a blind alley** at a dead end; on a route that leads nowhere. (Informal.) □ *I have been trying to find out something about my ancestors, but I'm up a blind alley. I can't find anything.* □ *The police are up a blind alley in their investigation of the crime.*

**up and doing** active and lively. □ *The children are always up and doing early in the morning.* □ *If Jean wants to be at work early, it's time she was up and doing.*

**up in arms** rising up in anger. □ *The citizens were up in arms, pounding on the gates of the palace, demanding justice.* □ *My father was really up in arms when he got his rates bill this year.*

**up in the air** undecided; uncertain. □ *I don't know what Sally plans to do. Things were sort of up in the air the last time we talked.* □ *Let's leave this question up in the air until next week. Then we will make a decision.*

**upper crust** the higher levels of society; the upper class. (Informal. Refers to the top, as opposed to the bottom, crust of a pie.) □ *Jane speaks like that because she pretends to be from the upper crust, but her father was a miner.* □ *James is from the upper crust, but he is penniless.* ALSO **upper-crust** of the upper class; belonging to or typical of the upper class. (Informal.) □ *Pam has a grating upper-crust voice.* □ *Many people dislike Bob because of his snobbish, upper-crust attitude.*

**upset the applecart** to spoil or ruin something. □ *Tom really upset the applecart by telling Mary the truth about Jane. Now the two women are no longer friends.* □ *We were going abroad, but the children upset the applecart by getting the mumps.*

**up to no good** doing something bad or criminal. (Informal.) □ *I could tell from the look on Tom's face that he was up to no good.* □

*There are three boys in the front garden. I don't know what they are doing, but I think they are up to no good.*

**use every trick in the book** to use every method possible. (Informal.) □ *I used every trick in the book, but I still couldn't manage to get a ticket to the game on Saturday.* □ *Bob used every trick in the book to get Mary to go out with him, but he still failed. She simply refuses to go out with him.*

# V

**vanish into thin air** to disappear without leaving a trace. □ *My money gets spent so fast. It seems to vanish into thin air.* □ *When I came back, my car was gone. I had locked it, and it couldn't have vanished into thin air!*

**vent one's spleen** to get rid of one's feelings of anger caused by someone or something by attacking someone or something else. □ *Because Jack didn't get the job, he was angry, and he vented his spleen by shouting at his wife.* □ *Peter kicked his car to vent his spleen for losing the race.*

**vexed question** a difficult problem about which there is a lot of discussion without a solution being found. □ *The two brothers quarrelled over the vexed question of which of them should take charge of their father's firm.* □ *We've seen a house that we like, but there's the vexed question of where we'll get the money from.*

**villain of the piece** someone or something that is responsible for something bad or wrong. □ *I wondered who told the newspapers about the local scandal. I discovered that Joan was the villain of the piece.* □ *We couldn't think who had stolen the meat. The dog next door turned out to be the villain of the piece.*

# W

**waiting in the wings** ready or prepared to do something, especially to take over someone else's job or position. (From waiting at the side of the stage to go on.) □ *Mr. Smith retires as manager next year, and Mr. Jones is just waiting in the wings.* □ *Jane was waiting in the wings, hoping that a member of the hockey team would drop out and she would get a place on the team.*

**walk a tightrope** to be in a situation where one must be very cautious. □ *I've been walking a tightrope all day trying to please both bosses. I need to relax.* □ *Our business is about to fail. We've been walking a tightrope for three months, trying to control our cash flow.*

**walk on air** to be very happy; to be euphoric. □ *Ann was walking on air when she got the job.* □ *On the last day of school, all the children are walking on air.*

**walk on eggs** to be very cautious. (Informal. Never used literally.) □ *The manager is very hard to deal with. You really have to walk on eggs.* □ *I've been walking on eggs ever since I started working here. There's a very large staff turnover.*

**walls have ears** we may be overheard. □ *Let's not discuss this matter here. Walls have ears, you know.* □ *Shhh. Walls have ears. Someone may be listening.*

**want it both ways** to want to have both of two seemingly incompatible things; to want to have it both ways. □ *John wants it both ways. He can't have it both ways.* □ *You like marriage and you like freedom. You want it both ways.*

**warm the cockles of someone's heart** to make someone feel pleased and happy. □ *It warms the cockles of my heart to hear you say that.* □ *Hearing that old song again warmed the cockles of her heart.*

**warts and all** including all the faults and disadvantages. □ *Jim has many faults, but Jean loves him, warts and all.* □ *The place where we*

*went on holiday had some very run-down parts, but we liked it, warts and all.*

**water under the bridge** [something] past and forgotten. □ *Please don't worry about it any more. It's all water under the bridge.* □ *I can't change the past. It's water under the bridge.*

**wear more than one hat** to have more than one set of responsibilities; to hold more than one office. □ *The mayor is also the police chief. She wears more than one hat.* □ *I have too much to do to wear more than one hat.*

**wear out one's welcome** to stay too long (at an event to which one has been invited); to visit somewhere too often. □ *Tom visited the Smiths so often that he wore out his welcome.* □ *At about midnight, I decided that I had worn out my welcome, so I went home.*

**weep buckets** to weep a great many tears. (Informal.) □ *The girls wept buckets at the sad film.* □ *Mary wept buckets when her dog died.*

**weigh one's words** to consider one's own words carefully when speaking. □ *I always weigh my words when I speak in public.* □ *John was weighing his words carefully because he didn't want to be misunderstood.*

**weigh on someone's mind** [for a worrying matter] to be constantly in a person's thoughts; [for something] to be bothering someone's thinking. □ *This problem has been weighing on my mind for many days now.* □ *I hate to have things weighing on my mind. I can't sleep when I'm worried.*

**welcome someone with open arms** See receive someone with open arms.

**well up in something** having a great deal of knowledge about something. □ *Jane's husband is well up in computers.* □ *Joan's well up in car maintenance. She took lessons at night-school.*

**wheeling and dealing** taking part in clever but sometimes dishonest or immoral business deals. □ *John loves wheeling and dealing in the money markets.* □ *Jack's got tired of all the wheeling and dealing of big business and retired to run a pub in the country.*

**wheels within wheels** circumstances, often secret or personal, which all have an effect on each other and lead to a complicated, confusing situation. □ *This is not a straightforward matter of choos-*

*ing the best person for the job. There are wheels within wheels and one of the applicants is the boss's son-in-law. □ I don't know why Jane was accepted by the college and Mary wasn't. There must have been wheels within wheels, because Mary has better qualifications.*

**when the time is ripe** at exactly the right time. □ *I'll tell her the good news when the time is ripe. □ When the time is ripe, I'll bring up the subject again.*

**whip something into shape** See lick something into shape.

**whistle for something** to expect or look for something with no hope of getting it. (Informal.) □ *I'm afraid you'll have to whistle for it if you want to borrow money. I don't have any. □ Jane's father told her to whistle for it when she asked him to buy her a car.*

**white elephant** something which is useless and which is either a nuisance or expensive to keep up. (From the gift of a white elephant by the Kings of Siam to courtiers who displeased them, knowing the cost of the upkeep would ruin them.) □ *Bob's father-in-law has given him an old Rolls-Royce, but it's a real white elephant. He has no place to park it and can't afford the petrol for it. □ Those antique vases Aunt Mary gave me are white elephants. They're ugly and take ages to clean.*

**whole (bang) shooting match** the whole lot. (Informal.) □ *They didn't even sort through the books. They just threw out the whole shooting match. □ All these tables are damaged. Take the whole bang shooting match away and replace them.*

**win the day** AND **carry the day** to be successful; to win a competition, argument, etc. (Originally meaning to win a battle.) □ *Our team didn't play well at first, but we won the day in the end. □ Hard work carried the day, and James passed his exams.*

**win through** to succeed. □ *After many setbacks, we won through in the end. □ The rescuers had difficulty reaching the injured climber, but they won through.*

**wise after the event** knowledgeable of how a situation should have been dealt with only after it has passed. □ *I know now I should have agreed to help him, but that's being wise after the event. At the time I thought he was just being lazy. □ Jack now realizes that he shouldn't have married Mary when they had nothing in common, but he didn't see it at the time. He's now wise after the event.*

**wish someone joy of something** to express the hope that someone will enjoy having or doing something, usually while being glad that one does not have to have it or do it. □ *I wish you joy of that old car. I had one just like it and spent a fortune on repairs for it.* □ *Mary wished us joy of going to Nepal on holiday. She preferred somewhere more comfortable.*

**with all one's heart and soul** very sincerely. □ *Oh Bill, I love you with all my heart and soul, and I always will!* □ *She thanked us with all her heart and soul for the gift.*

**wither on the vine** [for something] to decline or fade away at an early stage of development. (Also used literally in reference to grapes or other fruit.) □ *You have a great plan, Tom. Let's keep it alive. Don't let it wither on the vine.* □ *The whole project withered on the vine when the contract was cancelled.*

**with every other breath** [saying something] repeatedly or continually. □ *Bob was out in the garden raking leaves and cursing with every other breath.* □ *The child was so grateful that she was thanking me with every other breath.*

**with flying colours** easily and excellently. □ *John passed his geometry test with flying colours.* □ *Sally qualified for the race with flying colours.*

**within an inch of doing something** very close to doing something. □ *I came within an inch of losing my job.* □ *Bob came within an inch of hitting Mike across the face.*

**within an inch of one's life** very close to death. □ *When Mary was seriously ill in the hospital, she came within an inch of her life.* □ *The thug beat up the old man to within an inch of his life.*

**within hailing distance** close enough to hear someone call out. □ *When the boat came within hailing distance, I asked if I could borrow some petrol.* □ *We weren't within hailing distance, so I couldn't hear what you said to me.*

**without batting an eye** without showing surprise or emotion; without blinking an eye. □ *I knew I had insulted her, and she turned to me and asked me to leave without batting an eye.* □ *The child can tell lies without batting an eye.*



**without rhyme or reason** without purpose, order, or reason. (See variations in the examples.) □ *The teacher said my report was disorganized. My paragraphs seemed to be without rhyme or reason.* □ *Everything you do seems to be without rhyme or reason.* □ *This procedure seems to have no rhyme or reason.*

**with the best will in the world** however much one wishes to do something, or however hard one tries to do something. □ *With the best will in the world, Jack won't be able to help Mary get the job.* □ *With the best will in the world, they won't finish the job in time.*

**woe betide someone** someone will regret something very much. □ *Woe betide John if he's late. Mary will be angry.* □ *Woe betide the students if they don't work harder. They will be asked to leave college.*

**won't hold water** to be inadequate, insubstantial, or ill-conceived. (Informal.) □ *Sorry, your ideas won't hold water. Nice try, though.* □ *The solicitor's case wouldn't hold water, so the defendant was released.*

**work one's fingers to the bone** to work very hard. □ *I worked my fingers to the bone so you children could have everything you needed. Now look at the way you treat me!* □ *I spent the day working my fingers to the bone, and now I want to relax.*

**worn to a shadow** exhausted and thin, often from overwork. □ *Working all day and looking after the children in the evening has left Pam worn to a shadow.* □ *Ruth's worn to a shadow worrying about her son, who's very ill.*

**Worse luck!** Unfortunately!; The worst thing has happened! □ *I have an exam tomorrow, worse luck!* □ *We ran out of money on holiday, worse luck!*

**wrongfoot someone** to take someone by surprise, placing the person in a difficult situation. □ *The chairman of the committee wrongfooted his opponents by calling a meeting when most of them were on holiday and had no time to prepare for it.* □ *The teacher wrongfooted the class by giving the test a day early.*

# Z

**zero hour** the time at which something is due to begin; a crucial moment. □ *We'll know whether the new computer system works effectively at zero hour, when we switch over to it.* □ *The runners are getting nervous as zero hour approaches. The starter's gun will soon go off.*

# Phrase-Finder Index

Use this index to find the form of a phrase that you want to look up in the dictionary. First, pick out any major word in the phrase you are seeking. Second, look that word up in this index to find the form of the phrase used in the dictionary. Third, look up the phrase in the dictionary.

Some of the words occurring in the dictionary entries do not occur as entries in this index. Some words are omitted because they occur so frequently that their lists would cover many pages. Some of the grammar or function words, such as the articles *a*, *an*, and *the*, are not indexed. In these instances, you should look up the phrase under some other word.

**ABC** know one's ABC

**abet** aid and abet someone

**able** not able

**able** not able to call one's time  
one's own

**able** not able to see the wood for  
the trees

**able** not able to wait

**about** (all) at sea (about  
something)

**about** beat about the bush

**about** do an about-face

**about** fall about

**about** green about the gills

**about** have one's wits about one

**about** in a stew (about someone  
or something)

**about** in the dark (about  
someone or something)

**about** keep one's mouth shut  
(about someone or something)

**about** keep one's wits about one

**about** knock about (somewhere)

**about** know a thing or two (about  
someone or something)

**about** lay about one

**about** make cracks (about  
someone or something)

**about** make no bones about  
something

**about** much ado about  
nothing

**about** no ifs or buts about it

**about** no two ways about it

**about** not breathe a word (about  
someone or something)

**about** nothing to write home  
about

**about** put one's foot down (about  
something)

**about** see eye to eye (about  
something)

**above** above one's station

**above** above someone's head

**above** get above oneself

**above** head and shoulders above  
someone or something

**above** keep one's head above  
water

**absence** conspicuous by one's  
absence

**accident** chapter of accidents

**according** according to one's  
(own) lights

**according** cut one's coat  
according to one's cloth

**account** give a good account of oneself

**account** turn something to good account

**across** put one across someone

**across** shot across the bows

**act** act the goat

**act** read someone the Riot Act

**active** on active duty

**Adam** not know someone from Adam

**ado** much ado about nothing

**advanced** advanced in years

**advantage** turn something to one's advantage

**advocate** play devil's advocate

**affair** fine state of affairs

**afraid** afraid of one's own shadow

**after** much sought after

**after** throw good money after bad

**after** wise after the event

**again** never darken my door again

**against** dead set against someone or something

**against** go against the grain

**against** have a case (against someone)

**against** hope against hope

**against** pit someone or something against someone or something

**against** play both ends (against the middle)

**against** race against time

**against** run against the clock

**against** stack the cards (against someone or something)

**against** swim against the tide

**age** come of age

**age** donkey's ages

**age** in this day and age

**age** ripe old age

**ahead** full steam ahead

**aid** aid and abet someone

**air** air of sanctity

**air** airs and graces

**air** clear the air

**air** give oneself airs

**air** have one's nose in the air

**air** in the air

**air** keep one's nose in the air

**air** on the air

**air** out of thin air

**air** pull something out of thin air

**air** put on airs

**air** up in the air

**air** vanish into thin air

**air** walk on air

**alert** on the alert (for someone or something)

**alike** share and share alike

**all** (all) at sea (about something)

**all** all ears (and eyes)

**all** (all) Greek to me

**all** all hours (of the day and night)

**all** all over bar the shouting

**all** all skin and bones

**all** all thumbs

**all** all to the good

**all** carry all before one

**all** get away (from it all)

**all** in all one's born days

**all** in all probability

**all** jack-of-all-trades

**all** know all the tricks of the trade

**all** on all fours

**all** once and for all

**all** pull out all the stops

**all** put all one's eggs in one basket

**all** warts and all

**all** with all one's heart and soul

**alley** up a blind alley

**alone** go it alone

**alone** leave well alone

**alone** let well alone

**along** inch along (something)

**along** jolly someone along

**along** rub along with someone

**altogether** in the altogether

**among** put the cat among the pigeons

**among** set the cat among the pigeons

**and** all ears (and eyes)

**and** (as) large as life (and twice as ugly)

- and** cross one's heart (and hope to die)
- and** curl up (and die)
- and** (fresh fields and) pastures new
- and** life (and soul) of the party
- and** pitch in (and help)
- and** shipshape (and Bristol fashion)
- angel** fools rush in (where angels fear to tread)
- another** have another think coming
- another** horse of another colour
- answer** not take no for an answer
- ant** have ants in one's pants
- any** any port in a storm
- anything** not for anything in the world
- apart** be poles apart
- apart** fall apart at the seams
- apart** joking apart
- apple** apple of someone's eye
- applecart** upset the applecart
- apron** tied to one's mother's apron-strings
- are** one's days are numbered
- are** one's eyes are bigger than one's stomach
- arm** armed to the teeth
- arm** babe in arms
- arm** chance one's arm
- arm** give one's right arm (for someone or something)
- arm** pay an arm and a leg (for something)
- arm** receive someone with open arms
- arm** shot in the arm
- arm** up in arms
- arm** welcome someone with open arms
- armour** chink in one's armour
- around** every time one turns around
- around** green around the gills
- around** knock around (somewhere)
- around** millstone around one's neck
- around** pale around the gills
- around** swan around
- arrears** in arrears
- as** as a duck takes to water
- as** as black as one is painted
- as** (as) black as pitch
- as** (as) bold as brass
- as** (as) bright as a button
- as** (as) calm as a millpond
- as** (as) cold as charity
- as** (as) fit as a fiddle
- as** (as) happy as a lark
- as** (as) happy as a sandboy
- as** (as) happy as Larry
- as** (as) happy as the day is long
- as** (as) hungry as a hunter
- as** (as) large as life (and twice as ugly)
- as** (as) near as dammit
- as** (as) plain as a pikestaff
- as** (as) pleased as Punch
- as** (as) quiet as the grave
- as** (as) safe as houses
- as** (as) sound as a bell
- as** (as) thick as thieves
- as** (as) thick as two short planks
- as** (as) thin as a rake
- as** enough is as good as a feast
- as** give as good as one gets
- as** go so far as to say something
- as** look as if butter wouldn't melt in one's mouth
- as** make good as something
- as** not in the same league as someone or something
- as** pass as someone or something
- as** serve as a guinea pig
- as** take something as read
- asleep** asleep at the wheel
- at** (all) at sea (about something)
- at** asleep at the wheel
- at** at a loose end
- at** at a pinch
- at** at a rate of knots
- at** at death's door
- at** at first glance
- at** at full stretch

- at** at half-mast  
**at** at large  
**at** at liberty  
**at** at loggerheads (with someone)  
**at** at one's wits' end  
**at** at sixes and sevens  
**at** at someone's beck and call  
**at** at the bottom of the ladder  
**at** at the drop of a hat  
**at** at the eleventh hour  
**at** at the end of one's tether  
**at** at the expense of someone or something  
**at** at the top of one's voice  
**at** burn the candle at both ends  
**at** champ at the bit  
**at** clutch at straws  
**at** cock a snook at someone  
**at** down at heel  
**at** fall apart at the seams  
**at** foam at the mouth  
**at** game at which two can play  
**at** go off at a tangent  
**at** go off at half cock  
**at** have a go (at something)  
**at** have something at one's fingertips  
**at** ill at ease  
**at** in at the kill  
**at** jump at the chance (to do something)  
**at** jump at the opportunity (to do something)  
**at** leap at the chance (to do something)  
**at** leap at the opportunity (to do something)  
**at** look daggers at someone  
**at** love at first sight  
**at** make eyes at someone  
**at** make oneself at home  
**at** old hand at doing something  
**at** pipped at the post  
**at** point the finger at someone  
**at** poke fun (at someone or something)  
**at** see the light at the end of the tunnel  
**at** sit at someone's feet  
**at** take a stab at something  
**at** throw the book at someone  
**at** thumb one's nose at someone or something  
**at** tip the scales at something  
**at** two can play at that game  
**attendance** dance attendance on someone  
**average** on average  
**avoid** avoid someone or something like the plague  
**away** come away empty-handed  
**away** get away (from it all)  
**away** get carried away  
**away** give the game away  
**away** straight away  
**axe** have an axe to grind  
**babe** babe in arms  
**baby** leave someone holding the baby  
**back** back of beyond  
**back** back to the drawing-board  
**back** drop back  
**back** get back on one's feet  
**back** give someone the shirt off one's back  
**back** go back on one's word  
**back** hark(en) back to something  
**back** have eyes in the back of one's head  
**back** have one's back to the wall  
**back** like water off a duck's back  
**back** pay someone a back-handed compliment  
**back** put something on the back burner  
**back** scratch someone's back  
**back** set one back on one's heels  
**backyard** in one's (own) backyard  
**bacon** bring home the bacon  
**bad** come to a bad end  
**bad** go from bad to worse  
**bad** good riddance (to bad rubbish)  
**bad** in a bad mood  
**bad** in a bad way  
**bad** leave a bad taste in someone's mouth

- bad** not half bad  
**bad** throw good money after bad  
**bag** bag and baggage  
**bag** let the cat out of the bag  
**bag** mixed bag  
**baggage** bag and baggage  
**balance** hang in the balance  
**balance** in the balance  
**ball** get the ball rolling  
**ball** keep one's eye on the ball  
**ball** keep the ball rolling  
**ball** set the ball rolling  
**ball** start the ball rolling  
**balloon** go down like a lead balloon  
**bang** whole (bang) shooting match  
**baptism** baptism of fire  
**bar** all over bar the shouting  
**bar** no holds barred  
**bargain** drive a hard bargain  
**bargain** into the bargain  
**bargain** keep one's side of the bargain  
**bargain** strike a bargain  
**barrel** caught over a barrel  
**barrel** lock, stock, and barrel  
**barrel** scrape the bottom of the barrel  
**basis** on a first-name basis (with someone)  
**basket** put all one's eggs in one basket  
**bat** have bats in one's belfry  
**bat** without batting an eye  
**be** be a thorn in someone's side  
**be** be getting on for something  
**be** be old hat  
**be** be poles apart  
**be** be thankful for small mercies  
**be** old enough to be someone's father  
**be** old enough to be someone's mother  
**be** on one's (own) head be it  
**be** powers that be  
**bean** spill the beans  
**bear** grin and bear it  
**beard** beard the lion in his den  
**beat** beat a (hasty) retreat  
**beat** beat about the bush  
**beat** off the beaten track  
**beaver** eager beaver  
**beck** at someone's beck and call  
**bed** bed of roses  
**bed** get out of the wrong side of the bed  
**bee** have a bee in one's bonnet  
**beeline** make a beeline for someone or something  
**been** have been through the mill  
**before** before you can say Jack Robinson  
**before** carry all before one  
**before** cross a bridge before one comes to it  
**before** put the cart before the horse  
**beg** beg off  
**beg** go begging  
**beggar** beggar description  
**behalf** on behalf of someone  
**behalf** on someone's behalf  
**behalf** take up the cudgels on behalf of someone or something  
**behind** burn one's bridges (behind one)  
**behind** lag behind (someone or something)  
**behind** power behind the throne  
**belfry** have bats in one's belfry  
**believe** believe it or not  
**believe** lead someone to believe something  
**believe** seeing is believing  
**bell** (as) sound as a bell  
**bell** ring a bell  
**bell** saved by the bell  
**below** hit (someone) below the belt  
**belt** get something under one's belt  
**belt** hit (someone) below the belt  
**belt** tighten one's belt  
**bend** bend someone's ear  
**beneath** feel it beneath one (to do something)

**berth** give someone or something a wide berth  
**best** best bib and tucker  
**best** come off second-best  
**best** give something one's best shot  
**best** in the best of health  
**best** past someone's or something's best  
**best** put one's best foot forward  
**best** with the best will in the world  
**betide** woe betide someone  
**better** have seen better days  
**between** draw a line between something and something else  
**between** fall between two stools  
**between** hit someone (right) between the eyes  
**between** no love lost between someone and someone else  
**between** read between the lines  
**beyond** back of beyond  
**beyond** beyond one's ken  
**beyond** beyond the pale  
**beyond** beyond the shadow of a doubt  
**beyond** beyond words  
**beyond** can't see beyond the end of one's nose  
**bib** best bib and tucker  
**bide** bide one's time  
**big** have a big mouth  
**big** one's eyes are bigger than one's stomach  
**bill** fill the bill  
**bill** foot the bill  
**bill** get a clean bill of health  
**bird** early bird  
**bird** eat like a bird  
**birthday** in one's birthday suit  
**bit** champ at the bit  
**bit** do one's bit  
**bit** hair of the dog (that bit one)  
**bit** Not a bit (of it).  
**bite** bite someone's head off  
**bite** bite the hand that feeds one  
**bitter** bitter pill to swallow  
**bitter** to the bitter end

**black** as black as one is painted  
**black** (as) black as pitch  
**black** black sheep (of the family)  
**black** get a black eye  
**black** in black and white  
**black** pot calling the kettle black  
**blanche** carte blanche  
**blank** blank cheque  
**blank** draw a blank  
**blind** turn a blind eye to someone or something  
**blind** up a blind alley  
**block** chip off the old block  
**block** stumbling-block  
**blood** blue blood  
**blood** draw blood  
**blood** flesh and blood  
**blood** in one's blood  
**blood** in the blood  
**blood** make someone's blood boil  
**blood** make someone's blood run cold  
**blow** blow hot and cold  
**blow** blow off steam  
**blow** blow one's own trumpet  
**blow** blow the lid off (something)  
**blow** blow up in someone's face  
**blow** land a blow (somewhere)  
**blue** blue blood  
**blue** like a bolt out of the blue  
**blue** once in a blue moon  
**blue** out of the blue  
**blue** talk until one is blue in the face  
**board** back to the drawing-board  
**board** go by the board  
**boat** burn one's boats  
**boat** in the same boat  
**boat** rock the boat  
**body** keep body and soul together  
**body** over my dead body  
**boil** have a low boiling-point  
**boil** make someone's blood boil  
**bold** (as) bold as brass  
**bolt** like a bolt out of the blue  
**bolt** nuts and bolts (of something)  
**bombshell** drop a bombshell  
**bone** all skin and bones  
**bone** bone of contention



- bone** chilled to the bone  
**bone** feel something in one's bones  
**bone** have a bone to pick (with someone)  
**bone** make no bones about something  
**bone** near the bone  
**bone** nothing but skin and bones  
**bone** work one's fingers to the bone  
**bonnet** have a bee in one's bonnet  
**book** cook the books  
**book** have one's nose in a book  
**book** in one's book  
**book** one for the record (books)  
**book** open book  
**book** read someone like a book  
**book** take a leaf out of someone's book  
**book** throw the book at someone  
**book** use every trick in the book  
**boot** have one's heart in one's boots  
**bootstrap** pull oneself up by one's bootstraps  
**boredom** die of boredom  
**born** born with a silver spoon in one's mouth  
**born** in all one's born days  
**born** not born yesterday  
**borrow** live on borrowed time  
**both** burn the candle at both ends  
**both** cut both ways  
**both** have a foot in both camps  
**both** have it both ways  
**both** land on both feet  
**both** make (both) ends meet  
**both** play both ends (against the middle)  
**both** want it both ways  
**bother** hot and bothered  
**bottle** crack a bottle  
**bottom** at the bottom of the ladder  
**bottom** get to the bottom of something  
**bottom** hit rock bottom  
**bottom** scrape the bottom of the barrel  
**bound** by leaps and bounds  
**bound** in leaps and bounds  
**bow** bow and scrape  
**bow** shot across the bows  
**Box** Box and Cox  
**box** open Pandora's box  
**boy** separate the men from the boys  
**boy** sort the men from the boys  
**brain** have something on the brain  
**brain** rack one's brains  
**branch** hold out the olive branch  
**brass** (as) bold as brass  
**brass** get down to brass tacks  
**brave** put a brave face on it  
**brave** put up a (brave) front  
**breach** step in(to the breach)  
**break** break new ground  
**break** break one's duck  
**break** break one's word  
**break** break someone's fall  
**break** break someone's heart  
**break** break the ice  
**break** break the news (to someone)  
**break** die of a broken heart  
**break** get a lucky break  
**break** make or break someone  
**breast** make a clean breast of something  
**breath** catch one's breath  
**breath** find time to catch one's breath  
**breath** get time to catch one's breath  
**breath** in the same breath  
**breath** save one's breath  
**breath** say something under one's breath  
**breath** with every other breath  
**breathe** breathe down someone's neck  
**breathe** breathe one's last  
**breathe** hardly have time to breathe

**breathe** not breathe a word  
(about someone or something)  
**breathe** not breathe a word (of something)  
**bridge** burn one's bridges (behind one)  
**bridge** cross a bridge before one comes to it  
**bridge** water under the bridge  
**brief** hold no brief for someone or something  
**bright** (as) bright as a button  
**bring** bring down the curtain (on something)  
**bring** bring home the bacon  
**bring** bring something home to someone  
**bring** bring something to a head  
**bring** bring something to light  
**Bristol** shipshape (and Bristol fashion)  
**broad** in broad daylight  
**broke** go broke  
**broken** die of a broken heart  
**brow** by the sweat of one's brow  
**brow** knit one's brow  
**brush** brush something under the carpet  
**brush** get the brush-off  
**brush** have a brush with something  
**brush** tarred with the same brush  
**buck** pass the buck  
**bucket** weep buckets  
**bud** nip something in the bud  
**buff** in the buff  
**bull** bull in a china shop  
**bull** cock-and-bull story  
**bull** hit the bull's-eye  
**burn** burn one's boats  
**burn** burn one's bridges (behind one)  
**burn** burn the candle at both ends  
**burn** burn the midnight oil  
**burn** fiddle while Rome burns  
**burn** get one's fingers burned  
**burn** have money to burn  
**burn** keep the home fires burning

**burner** put something on the back burner  
**bury** bury the hatchet  
**bury** dead and buried  
**bush** beat about the bush  
**bush** bush telegraph  
**bushel** hide one's light under a bushel  
**business** business end of something  
**business** get down to business  
**business** get one's nose out of someone's business  
**business** have no business doing something  
**business** mind one's own business  
**business** monkey business  
**busman** busman's holiday  
**but** everything but the kitchen sink  
**but** last but not least  
**but** no ifs or buts about it  
**but** nothing but skin and bones  
**butter** look as if butter wouldn't melt in one's mouth  
**butterfly** get butterflies in one's stomach  
**button** (as) bright as a button  
**buy** buy a pig in a poke  
**buy** buy something for a song  
**by** by fits and starts  
**by** by leaps and bounds  
**by** by no means  
**by** by return post  
**by** by the same token  
**by** by the seat of one's pants  
**by** by the skin of one's teeth  
**by** by the sweat of one's brow  
**by** by virtue of something  
**by** by word of mouth  
**by** cheek by jowl  
**by** conspicuous by one's absence  
**by** fall by the wayside  
**by** fly-by-night  
**by** get by (on a shoe-string)  
**by** go by the board  
**by** hang by a hair  
**by** hang by a thread

- by** hang on by an eyebrow  
**by** hang on by one's eyebrows  
**by** lead someone by the nose  
**by** learn something by heart  
**by** learn something by rote  
**by** let the chance slip by  
**by** live by one's wits  
**by** not by a long shot  
**by** past someone's or something's sell-by date  
**by** pull oneself up by one's bootstraps  
**by** saved by the bell  
**by** set great store by someone or something  
**by** sit (idly) by  
**cake** piece of cake  
**cake** slice of the cake  
**calf** kill the fatted calf  
**call** at someone's beck and call  
**call** call a spade a spade  
**call** call it a day  
**call** call of nature  
**call** not able to call one's time one's own  
**call** pot calling the kettle black  
**calm** (as) calm as a millpond  
**camp** have a foot in both camps  
**can** before you can say Jack Robinson  
**can** can't hold a candle to someone  
**can** can't make head nor tail of someone or something  
**can** can't see beyond the end of one's nose  
**can** can't see one's hand in front of one's face  
**can** game at which two can play  
**can** open a can of worms  
**can** two can play at that game  
**canary** look like the cat that swallowed the canary  
**candle** burn the candle at both ends  
**candle** can't hold a candle to someone  
**candle** not worth a candle  
**cannot** can't hold a candle to someone  
**cannot** can't make head nor tail of someone or something  
**cannot** can't see beyond the end of one's nose  
**cannot** can't see one's hand in front of one's face  
**canoe** paddle one's own canoe  
**cap** feather in one's cap  
**cap** put on one's thinking-cap  
**card** keep one's cards close to one's chest  
**card** on the cards  
**card** play one's cards close to one's chest  
**card** play one's cards right  
**card** play one's trump card  
**card** stack the cards (against someone or something)  
**care** not have a care in the world  
**carpet** brush something under the carpet  
**carpet** sweep something under the carpet  
**carry** carry a torch for someone  
**carry** carry all before one  
**carry** carry the day  
**carry** carry the weight of the world on one's shoulders  
**carry** get carried away  
**cart** put the cart before the horse  
**carte** carte blanche  
**case** have a case (against someone)  
**case** open-and-shut case  
**cash** hard cash  
**cast** cast in the same mould  
**cat** Cat got your tongue?  
**cat** let the cat out of the bag  
**cat** look like the cat that swallowed the canary  
**cat** look like the cat that swallowed the cream  
**cat** play cat and mouse (with someone)  
**cat** put the cat among the pigeons  
**cat** rain cats and dogs  
**cat** set the cat among the pigeons

- catch** catch one's breath  
**catch** catch someone on the hop  
**catch** catch someone's eye  
**catch** catch the sun  
**catch** find time to catch one's breath  
**catch** get time to catch one's breath  
**caught** caught over a barrel  
**cause** cause tongues to wag  
**caution** throw caution to the winds  
**centre** dead centre  
**centre** left, right, and centre  
**centre** off-centre  
**ceremony** stand on ceremony  
**chaff** separate the wheat from the chaff  
**champ** champ at the bit  
**chance** chance one's arm  
**chance** fancy someone's chances  
**chance** fighting chance  
**chance** have a snowball's chance in hell  
**chance** jump at the chance (to do something)  
**chance** leap at the chance (to do something)  
**chance** let the chance slip by  
**chance** on the off-chance  
**chance** once-in-a-lifetime chance  
**chance** sporting chance  
**chance** stand a chance  
**change** change hands  
**change** change horses in mid-stream  
**change** change someone's tune  
**change** chop and change  
**change** ring the changes  
**channel** go through the proper channels  
**chapter** chapter and verse  
**chapter** chapter of accidents  
**charity** (as) cold as charity  
**chase** lead someone (on) a merry chase  
**cheap** dirt cheap  
**cheek** cheek by jowl  
**cheek** tongue-in-cheek
- cheek** turn the other cheek  
**cheese** cheese-paring  
**cheese** cheesed off  
**cheque** blank cheque  
**chest** get something off one's chest  
**chest** keep one's cards close to one's chest  
**chest** play one's cards close to one's chest  
**chew** chew the cud  
**chicken** no spring chicken  
**child** expecting (a child)  
**childhood** in one's second childhood  
**chill** chilled to the bone  
**chill** chilled to the marrow  
**chin** keep one's chin up  
**chin** take something on the chin  
**china** bull in a china shop  
**chink** chink in one's armour  
**chip** chip off the old block  
**chip** have a chip on one's shoulder  
**choice** Hobson's choice  
**choose** pick and choose  
**chop** chop and change  
**chord** strike a chord  
**circle** come full circle  
**circle** go round in circles  
**civil** keep a civil tongue (in one's head)  
**clap** clap eyes on someone or something  
**clay** have feet of clay  
**clean** get a clean bill of health  
**clean** have clean hands  
**clean** make a clean breast of something  
**clean** make a clean sweep  
**clean** start (off) with a clean slate  
**clear** clear the air  
**climb** climb down  
**clip** clip someone's wings  
**cloak** cloak-and-dagger  
**clock** run against the clock  
**clockwork** go like clockwork  
**close** close one's eyes to something

- close** keep one's cards close to one's chest
- close** play one's cards close to one's chest
- cloth** cut one's coat according to one's cloth
- cloth** cut one's coat to suit one's cloth
- cloud** cloud-cuckoo-land
- cloud** have one's head in the clouds
- cloud** on cloud nine
- clover** in clover
- clutch** clutch at straws
- coal** haul someone over the coals
- coat** cut one's coat according to one's cloth
- coat** cut one's coat to suit one's cloth
- coat** hang on to someone's coat-tails
- cock** cock a snook at someone
- cock** cock-and-bull story
- cock** cock of the walk
- cock** go off at half cock
- cockle** warm the cockles of someone's heart
- coffin** nail in someone's or something's coffin
- cold** (as) cold as charity
- cold** blow hot and cold
- cold** cold comfort
- cold** get cold feet
- cold** knock someone cold
- cold** make someone's blood run cold
- cold** pour cold water on something
- cold** throw cold water on something
- collar** hot under the collar
- colour** horse of a different colour
- colour** horse of another colour
- colour** nail one's colours to the mast
- colour** off colour
- colour** sail under false colours
- colour** show oneself in one's true colours
- colour** with flying colours
- comb** go over something with a fine-tooth comb
- comb** go through something with a fine-tooth comb
- comb** search something with a fine-tooth comb
- come** come a cropper
- come** come away empty-handed
- come** come down in the world
- come** come down to earth
- come** come down with something
- come** come from far and wide
- come** come full circle
- come** come home to roost
- come** come in for something
- come** come into something
- come** come of age
- come** come off second-best
- come** come out in the wash
- come** come out of nowhere
- come** come out of one's shell
- come** (come) rain or shine
- come** come round
- come** come to a bad end
- come** come to a head
- come** come to a pretty pass
- come** come to an untimely end
- come** come to grief
- come** come to light
- come** come to the fore
- come** cross a bridge before one comes to it
- come** dream come true
- come** get one's come-uppance
- come** get what is coming to one
- come** have another think coming
- come** have something coming to one
- come** johnny-come-lately
- come** till the cows come home
- comeback** make a comeback
- come-uppance** get one's come-uppance
- comfort** cold comfort
- comforter** Job's comforter
- command** have a good command of something
- compliment** fish for compliments

- compliment** pay someone a back-handed compliment  
**compliment** pay someone a compliment  
**composure** regain one's composure  
**condition** in mint condition  
**condition** in the peak of condition  
**condition** in the pink (of condition)  
**conspicuous** conspicuous by one's absence  
**contention** bone of contention  
**contradiction** contradiction in terms  
**convert** preach to the converted  
**conviction** have the courage of one's convictions  
**cook** cook someone's goose  
**cook** cook the books  
**cool** cool one's heels  
**corner** cut corners  
**corner** have turned the corner  
**corner** hole-and-corner  
**corner** hole-in-the-corner  
**corner** out of the corner of one's eye  
**correct** stand corrected  
**cost** cost a pretty penny  
**cost** cost the earth  
**counsel** keep one's own counsel  
**count** count heads  
**courage** have the courage of one's convictions  
**courage** pluck up (one's) courage  
**courage** screw up one's courage  
**course** par for the course  
**court** laugh something out of court  
**Coventry** send someone to Coventry  
**cow** sacred cow  
**cow** till the cows come home  
**Cox** Box and Cox  
**crack** crack a bottle  
**crack** fair crack of the whip  
**crack** make cracks (about someone or something)  
**crack** paper over the cracks (in something)  
**cramp** cramp someone's style  
**craw** something sticks in one's craw  
**cream** look like the cat that swallowed the cream  
**credit** get credit (for something)  
**credit** give credit where credit is due  
**cropper** come a cropper  
**cross** cross a bridge before one comes to it  
**cross** cross one's heart (and hope to die)  
**cross** cross swords (with someone)  
**cross** cross the Rubicon  
**crust** upper crust  
**crux** crux of the matter  
**cry** cry one's eyes out  
**cry** cry over spilled milk  
**cry** cry wolf  
**cry** far cry from something  
**cry** hue and cry  
**cuckoo** cloud-cuckoo-land  
**cud** chew the cud  
**cudgel** take up the cudgels on behalf of someone or something  
**culture** culture vulture  
**cup** in one's cups  
**cup** not someone's cup of tea  
**cupboard** cupboard love  
**cupboard** skeleton in the cupboard  
**curl** curl up (and die)  
**curry** curry favour (with someone)  
**curtain** bring down the curtain (on something)  
**curtain** ring down the curtain (on something)  
**cut** cut a fine figure  
**cut** cut a long story short  
**cut** cut and dried  
**cut** cut and thrust  
**cut** cut both ways  
**cut** cut corners  
**cut** cut it (too) fine

- cut** cut no ice  
**cut** cut one's coat according to one's cloth  
**cut** cut one's coat to suit one's cloth  
**cut** cut one's eye-teeth on something  
**cut** cut one's teeth on something  
**cut** cut someone dead  
**cut** cut someone down to size  
**cut** cut someone to the quick  
**cut** cut teeth  
**cut** have one's work cut out (for one)  
**dagger** cloak-and-dagger  
**dagger** look daggers at someone  
**daily** daily dozen  
**daily** daily grind  
**dammit** (as) near as dammit  
**damn** damn someone or something with faint praise  
**damp** damp squib  
**dance** dance attendance on someone  
**dance** lead someone (on) a merry dance  
**Darby** Darby and Joan  
**dark** dark horse  
**dark** in the dark (about someone or something)  
**dark** shot in the dark  
**darken** never darken my door again  
**darken** not to darken someone's door  
**date** past someone's or something's sell-by date  
**Davy** Davy Jones's locker  
**Davy** go to Davy Jones's locker  
**day** all hours (of the day and night)  
**day** (as) happy as the day is long  
**day** call it a day  
**day** carry the day  
**day** for days on end  
**day** have seen better days  
**day** in all one's born days  
**day** in this day and age  
**day** late in the day  
**day** nine days' wonder  
**day** not give someone the time of day  
**day** one's days are numbered  
**day** order of the day  
**day** pass the time of day (with someone)  
**day** save something for a rainy day  
**day** see the light of day  
**day** win the day  
**daylight** daylight robbery  
**daylight** in broad daylight  
**dead** cut someone dead  
**dead** dead and buried  
**dead** dead centre  
**dead** dead on one's or its feet  
**dead** dead set against someone or something  
**dead** dead to the world  
**dead** fill dead men's shoes  
**dead** flog a dead horse  
**dead** in a dead heat  
**dead** knock someone dead  
**dead** over my dead body  
**dead** step into dead men's shoes  
**deal** square deal  
**deal** wheeling and dealing  
**death** at death's door  
**death** death to something  
**death** die a natural death  
**death** kiss of death  
**death** matter of life and death  
**death** sign one's own death-warrant  
**debt** pay one's debt to society  
**decision** eleventh-hour decision  
**deep** go off the deep end  
**deep** in deep water  
**deliver** signed, sealed, and delivered  
**den** beard the lion in his den  
**description** beggar description  
**desert** get one's just deserts  
**devil** full of the devil  
**devil** give the devil her due  
**devil** give the devil his due  
**devil** go to the devil  
**devil** play devil's advocate  
**devil** speak of the devil

**Dick** (every) Tom, Dick, and Harry  
**die** cross one's heart (and hope to die)  
**die** curl up (and die)  
**die** die a natural death  
**die** die laughing  
**die** die of a broken heart  
**die** die of boredom  
**difference** sink our differences  
**difference** split the difference  
**different** horse of a different colour  
**dig** dig one's own grave  
**dilemma** on the horns of a dilemma  
**dine** dine out on something  
**dip** lucky dip  
**dirt** dirt cheap  
**dirty** dirty look  
**distance** go the distance  
**distance** keep one's distance (from someone or something)  
**distance** stay the distance  
**distance** within hailing distance  
**ditch** last-ditch effort  
**do** do a double take  
**do** do an about-face  
**do** do justice to something  
**do** do one's bit  
**do** do someone down  
**do** do someone good  
**do** do someone proud  
**do** do someone's heart good  
**do** do the trick  
**do** fair do's  
**do** feel it beneath one (to do something)  
**do** find it in one's heart to do something  
**do** have a penchant for doing something  
**do** have half a mind to do something  
**do** have no business doing something  
**do** have the wherewithal (to do something)  
**do** in no mood to do something  
**do** in thing (to do)

**do** instrumental in doing something  
**do** jump at the chance (to do something)  
**do** jump at the opportunity (to do something)  
**do** kick oneself (for doing something)  
**do** lead someone to do something  
**do** leap at the chance (to do something)  
**do** leap at the opportunity (to do something)  
**do** make a point of (doing) something  
**do** make do (with someone or something)  
**do** move heaven and earth to do something  
**do** old hand at doing something  
**do** press-gang someone into doing something  
**do** risk one's neck (to do something)  
**do** up and doing  
**do** within an inch of doing something  
**doctor** just what the doctor ordered  
**dog** dog in the manger  
**dog** hair of the dog (that bit one)  
**dog** lead a dog's life  
**dog** rain cats and dogs  
**dog** shaggy-dog story  
**dog** tail wagging the dog  
**doghhouse** in the doghouse  
**doldrums** in the doldrums  
**dollar** feel like a million dollars  
**dollar** look like a million dollars  
**done** done to a turn  
**done** no sooner said than done  
**done** over and done with  
**donkey** donkey's ages  
**donkey** donkey's years  
**donkey** donkey-work  
**door** at death's door  
**door** get one's foot in the door  
**door** keep the wolf from the door  
**door** never darken my door again



- door** not to darken someone's door
- door** open the door to something
- dose** dose of one's own medicine
- dot** from the year dot
- dot** on the dot
- dot** since the year dot
- double** do a double take
- double** double Dutch
- double** see double
- doubt** beyond the shadow of a doubt
- doubt** doubting Thomas
- down** breathe down someone's neck
- down** bring down the curtain (on something)
- down** climb down
- down** come down in the world
- down** come down to earth
- down** come down with something
- down** cut someone down to size
- down** do someone down
- down** down at heel
- down** down in the mouth
- down** down on one's luck
- down** down to earth
- down** dressing down
- down** fall down on the job
- down** get down to brass tacks
- down** get down to business
- down** go down fighting
- down** go down in history
- down** go down like a lead balloon
- down** hand-me-down
- down** have a down on someone
- down** jump down someone's throat
- down** knock someone down with a feather
- down** lay down the law
- down** let down one's hair
- down** let one's hair down
- down** lie down on the job
- down** pipe down
- down** pour money down the drain
- down** put one's foot down (about something)
- down** ring down the curtain (on something)
- down** stand down
- down** suit someone down to the ground
- down** take someone down a peg (or two)
- down** take something lying down
- down** throw down the gauntlet
- downhill** go downhill
- dozen** daily dozen
- dozen** six of one and half a dozen of the other
- dozen** talk nineteen to the dozen
- drab** in dribs and drabs
- drag** drag one's feet
- drain** pour money down the drain
- draw** back to the drawing-board
- draw** draw a blank
- draw** draw a line between something and something else
- draw** draw a red herring
- draw** draw blood
- draw** quick on the draw
- drawing-board** back to the drawing-board
- dream** dream come true
- dream** pipe-dream
- dress** dressed (up) to the nines
- dress** dressing down
- drib** in dribs and drabs
- drive** drive a hard bargain
- drive** drive someone up the wall
- drop** at the drop of a hat
- drop** drop a bombshell
- drop** drop back
- drop** drop in one's tracks
- drop** drop someone
- drown** drown one's sorrows
- dry** cut and dried
- dry** dry run
- dry** home and dry
- duck** as a duck takes to water
- duck** break one's duck
- duck** lame duck
- duck** like a sitting duck
- duck** like sitting ducks
- duck** like water off a duck's back
- duck** lovely weather for ducks

- due** give credit where credit is due  
**due** give the devil her due  
**due** give the devil his due  
**dues** pay one's dues  
**Dutch** double Dutch  
**Dutch** go Dutch  
**duty** in the line of duty  
**duty** on active duty  
**duty** shirk one's duty  
**eager** eager beaver  
**eagle** eagle eye  
**ear** all ears (and eyes)  
**ear** bend someone's ear  
**ear** flea in one's ear  
**ear** go in one ear and out the other  
**ear** have one's ear to the ground  
**ear** in one ear and out the other  
**ear** keep one's ear to the ground  
**ear** prick up one's ears  
**ear** walls have ears  
**early** early bird  
**earth** come down to earth  
**earth** cost the earth  
**earth** down to earth  
**earth** move heaven and earth to do something  
**earth** pay the earth  
**earth** run someone or something to earth  
**earth** salt of the earth  
**ease** ill at ease  
**easy** free and easy  
**eat** eat humble pie  
**eat** eat like a bird  
**eat** eat like a horse  
**eat** eat one's hat  
**eat** eat one's heart out  
**eat** eat one's words  
**eat** eat out of someone's hands  
**eat** eat someone out of house and home  
**edge** set someone's teeth on edge  
**edgeways** get a word in (edgeways)  
**effort** last-ditch effort  
**egg** have egg on one's face  
**egg** put all one's eggs in one basket  
**egg** teach one's grandmother to suck eggs  
**egg** walk on eggs  
**either** either feast or famine  
**elbow** elbow-grease  
**elephant** white elephant  
**eleven** at the eleventh hour  
**eleven** eleventh-hour decision  
**else** draw a line between something and something else  
**else** no love lost between someone and someone else  
**empty** come away empty-handed  
**end** at a loose end  
**end** at one's wits' end  
**end** at the end of one's tether  
**end** burn the candle at both ends  
**end** business end of something  
**end** can't see beyond the end of one's nose  
**end** come to a bad end  
**end** come to an untimely end  
**end** for days on end  
**end** go off the deep end  
**end** make (both) ends meet  
**end** make someone's hair stand on end  
**end** meet one's end  
**end** not see further than the end of one's nose  
**end** play both ends (against the middle)  
**end** see the light at the end of the tunnel  
**end** thin end of the wedge  
**end** to the bitter end  
**English** in plain English  
**enough** enough is as good as a feast  
**enough** good enough for someone or something  
**enough** old enough to be someone's father  
**enough** old enough to be someone's mother  
**enter** enter the lists  
**envy** green with envy  
**errand** on a fool's errand  
**escape** escape someone's notice

- eve** on the eve of something  
**event** wise after the event  
**every** every time one turns around  
**every** (every) Tom, Dick, and Harry  
**every** hang on someone's every word  
**every** use every trick in the book  
**every** with every other breath  
**everything** everything but the kitchen sink  
**everything** everything from A to Z  
**example** make an example of someone  
**expect** expecting (a child)  
**expense** at the expense of someone or something  
**expense** expense is no object  
**expense** out-of-pocket expenses  
**extend** extend one's sympathy (to someone)  
**eye** all ears (and eyes)  
**eye** apple of someone's eye  
**eye** catch someone's eye  
**eye** clap eyes on someone or something  
**eye** close one's eyes to something  
**eye** cry one's eyes out  
**eye** cut one's eye-teeth on something  
**eye** eagle eye  
**eye** feast one's eyes (on someone or something)  
**eye** get a black eye  
**eye** have eyes in the back of one's head  
**eye** hit someone (right) between the eyes  
**eye** hit the bull's-eye  
**eye** in one's mind's eye  
**eye** in the public eye  
**eye** keep a weather eye open  
**eye** keep an eye out (for someone or something)  
**eye** keep one's eye on the ball  
**eye** make eyes at someone  
**eye** naked eye  
**eye** one's eyes are bigger than one's stomach  
**eye** only have eyes for someone  
**eye** out of the corner of one's eye  
**eye** pull the wool over someone's eyes  
**eye** see eye to eye (about something)  
**eye** see eye to eye (on something)  
**eye** see something with half an eye  
**eye** turn a blind eye to someone or something  
**eye** without batting an eye  
**eyeball** eyeball to eyeball  
**eyebrow** hang on by an eyebrow  
**eyebrow** hang on by one's eyebrows  
**eyebrow** raise a few eyebrows  
**face** blow up in someone's face  
**face** can't see one's hand in front of one's face  
**face** do an about-face  
**face** face the music  
**face** face value  
**face** fly in the face of someone or something  
**face** have egg on one's face  
**face** hide one's face in shame  
**face** keep a straight face  
**face** lose face  
**face** make a face  
**face** not show one's face  
**face** on the face of it  
**face** pull a face  
**face** put a brave face on it  
**face** talk until one is blue in the face  
**fact** matter-of-fact  
**faint** damn someone or something with faint praise  
**fair** fair crack of the whip  
**fair** fair do's  
**fair** fair game  
**fair** play fair  
**faith** pin one's faith on someone or something  
**fall** break someone's fall  
**fall** fall about

- fall** fall apart at the seams  
**fall** fall between two stools  
**fall** fall by the wayside  
**fall** fall down on the job  
**fall** fall foul of someone or something  
**fall** fall from grace  
**fall** fall into line  
**fall** riding for a fall  
**false** sail under false colours  
**familiar** have a familiar ring  
**family** black sheep (of the family)  
**family** in the family  
**family** in the family way  
**family** like one of the family  
**family** run in the family  
**famine** either feast or famine  
**fancy** fancy someone's chances  
**fancy** flight of fancy  
**fancy** tickle someone's fancy  
**far** come from far and wide  
**far** far cry from something  
**far** go so far as to say something  
**fashion** parrot-fashion  
**fashion** shipshape (and Bristol fashion)  
**fast** get nowhere fast  
**fast** hard-and-fast rule  
**fast** play fast and loose (with someone or something)  
**fast** pull a fast one  
**fast** thick and fast  
**fat** kill the fatted calf  
**fat** live off the fat of the land  
**father** old enough to be someone's father  
**fault** generous to a fault  
**favour** curry favour (with someone)  
**fear** fools rush in (where angels fear to tread)  
**fear** in fear and trembling  
**fear** never fear  
**feast** either feast or famine  
**feast** enough is as good as a feast  
**feast** feast one's eyes (on someone or something)  
**feather** feather in one's cap  
**feather** feather one's (own) nest  
**feather** in fine feather  
**feather** knock someone down with a feather  
**feather** make the feathers fly  
**feather** ruffle someone's feathers  
**feather** show the white feather  
**feed** bite the hand that feeds one  
**feed** spoon-feed  
**feel** feel fit  
**feel** feel it beneath one (to do something)  
**feel** feel like a million dollars  
**feel** feel like a new person  
**feel** feel something in one's bones  
**feeler** put out (some) feelers  
**feelings** no hard feelings  
**feet** dead on one's or its feet  
**feet** drag one's feet  
**feet** find one's feet  
**feet** get back on one's feet  
**feet** get cold feet  
**feet** get to one's feet  
**feet** have feet of clay  
**feet** have one's feet on the ground  
**feet** keep one's feet on the ground  
**feet** land on both feet  
**feet** land on one's feet  
**feet** let the grass grow under one's feet  
**feet** on one's feet  
**feet** pull the rug out from under someone's (feet)  
**feet** sit at someone's feet  
**fellow** hail-fellow-well-met  
**fence** mend (one's) fences  
**fence** rush one's fences  
**fever** run a fever  
**few** raise a few eyebrows  
**fiddle** (as) fit as a fiddle  
**fiddle** fiddle while Rome burns  
**fiddle** play second fiddle (to someone)  
**field** (fresh fields and) pastures new  
**field** play the field  
**fight** fight shy of something  
**fight** fighting chance  
**fight** go down fighting

- figure** cut a fine figure  
**file** have something on file  
**file** (in) single file  
**fill** fill dead men's shoes  
**fill** fill someone's shoes  
**fill** fill the bill  
**fill** get one's fill of someone or something  
**find** find it in one's heart to do something  
**find** find one's feet  
**find** find one's own level  
**find** find one's tongue  
**find** find time to catch one's breath  
**fine** cut a fine figure  
**fine** cut it (too) fine  
**fine** fine kettle of fish  
**fine** fine state of affairs  
**fine** go over something with a fine-tooth comb  
**fine** go through something with a fine-tooth comb  
**fine** in fine feather  
**fine** search something with a fine-tooth comb  
**finger** get one's fingers burned  
**finger** have green fingers  
**finger** have one's finger in the pie  
**finger** not lift a finger (to help someone)  
**finger** point the finger at someone  
**finger** work one's fingers to the bone  
**ingertip** have something at one's fingertips  
**fire** baptism of fire  
**fire** hang fire  
**fire** have too many irons in the fire  
**fire** hold one's fire  
**fire** keep the home fires burning  
**fire** open fire (on someone)  
**fire** out of the frying-pan into the fire  
**fire** play with fire  
**fire** set the world on fire  
**first** at first glance  
**first** love at first sight  
**first** of the first water  
**first** on a first-name basis (with someone)  
**first** on first-name terms (with someone)  
**fish** fine kettle of fish  
**fish** fish for compliments  
**fish** fish in troubled waters  
**fish** have other fish to fry  
**fish** like a fish out of water  
**fish** neither fish nor fowl  
**fish** pretty kettle of fish  
**fist** hand over fist  
**fit** (as) fit as a fiddle  
**fit** by fits and starts  
**fit** feel fit  
**fit** fit for a king  
**fit** fit someone in(to something)  
**fit** survival of the fittest  
**fit** throw a fit  
**five** nine-to-five job  
**fix** fix someone up (with something)  
**fix** in a fix  
**flag** show the flag  
**flash** flash in the pan  
**flash** in a flash  
**flea** flea in one's ear  
**flesh** flesh and blood  
**flesh** in the flesh  
**flight** flight of fancy  
**flog** flog a dead horse  
**fly** fly a kite  
**fly** fly-by-night  
**fly** fly in the face of someone or something  
**fly** fly in the ointment  
**fly** flying visit  
**fly** get off to a flying start  
**fly** high-flyer  
**fly** make the feathers fly  
**fly** make the fur fly  
**fly** pigs might fly  
**fly** with flying colours  
**foam** foam at the mouth  
**follow** follow one's heart  
**follow** follow one's nose  
**follow** follow suit

- food** food for thought  
**fool** fool's paradise  
**fool** fools rush in (where angels fear to tread)  
**fool** More fool you!  
**fool** nobody's fool  
**fool** on a fool's errand  
**fool** play the fool  
**foot** dead on one's or its feet  
**foot** drag one's feet  
**foot** find one's feet  
**foot** foot the bill  
**foot** get back on one's feet  
**foot** get cold feet  
**foot** get one's foot in the door  
**foot** get to one's feet  
**foot** have a foot in both camps  
**foot** have feet of clay  
**foot** have one's feet on the ground  
**foot** keep one's feet on the ground  
**foot** land on both feet  
**foot** land on one's feet  
**foot** let the grass grow under one's feet  
**foot** not set foot somewhere  
**foot** on one's feet  
**foot** pull the rug out from under someone('s feet)  
**foot** put one's best foot forward  
**foot** put one's foot down (about something)  
**foot** put one's foot in it  
**foot** set foot somewhere  
**foot** sit at someone's feet  
**for** be getting on for something  
**for** be thankful for small mercies  
**for** buy something for a song  
**for** carry a torch for someone  
**for** come in for something  
**for** fish for compliments  
**for** fit for a king  
**for** food for thought  
**for** for days on end  
**for** for sale  
**for** for the record  
**for** get a good run for one's money  
**for** get credit (for something)  
**for** give one's right arm (for someone or something)  
**for** give someone pause for thought  
**for** give someone tit for tat  
**for** glutton for punishment  
**for** go for someone or something  
**for** go in for something  
**for** good enough for someone or something  
**for** good-for-nothing  
**for** have a lot going for one  
**for** have a penchant for doing something  
**for** have a soft spot for someone or something  
**for** have one's work cut out (for one)  
**for** have something in store (for someone)  
**for** hell for leather  
**for** hold no brief for someone or something  
**for** in the market (for something)  
**for** jockey for position  
**for** keep an eye out (for someone or something)  
**for** kick oneself (for doing something)  
**for** leave oneself wide open for something  
**for** like looking for a needle in a haystack  
**for** lovely weather for ducks  
**for** make a beeline for someone or something  
**for** make a name for oneself  
**for** make a pitch for someone or something  
**for** make up for lost time  
**for** money for jam  
**for** money for old rope  
**for** none the worse for wear  
**for** not able to see the wood for the trees  
**for** not for anything in the world  
**for** not for love nor money  
**for** not for the world

- for** not long for this world  
**for** not take no for an answer  
**for** on the alert (for someone or something)  
**for** once and for all  
**for** one for the record (books)  
**for** only have eyes for someone  
**for** open season for something  
**for** par for the course  
**for** pay an arm and a leg (for something)  
**for** pay through the nose (for something)  
**for** pound for pound  
**for** put in a good word for someone  
**for** riding for a fall  
**for** run for it  
**for** run for one's life  
**for** save something for a rainy day  
**for** spoil the ship for a ha'porth of tar  
**for** throw a party (for someone)  
**for** whistle for something  
**forbidden** forbidden fruit  
**force** force someone's hand  
**force** in force  
**fore** come to the fore  
**forget** forget oneself  
**forget** forgive and forget  
**forgive** forgive and forget  
**forth** hold forth  
**forward** look forward to something  
**forward** put one's best foot forward  
**foul** fall foul of someone or something  
**foul** foul one's own nest  
**foul** foul play  
**four** on all fours  
**fowl** neither fish nor fowl  
**free** free and easy  
**fresh** (fresh fields and) pastures new  
**from** come from far and wide  
**from** everything from A to Z  
**from** fall from grace  
**from** far cry from something  
**from** from pillar to post  
**from** from rags to riches  
**from** from stem to stern  
**from** from the word go  
**from** from the year dot  
**from** get away (from it all)  
**from** go from bad to worse  
**from** hail from somewhere  
**from** keep one's distance (from someone or something)  
**from** keep the wolf from the door  
**from** live from hand to mouth  
**from** make something from scratch  
**from** not know someone from Adam  
**from** pull the rug out from under someone('s feet)  
**from** separate the men from the boys  
**from** separate the sheep from the goats  
**from** separate the wheat from the chaff  
**from** sort the men from the boys  
**from** straight from the shoulder  
**front** can't see one's hand in front of one's face  
**front** put up a (brave) front  
**fruit** forbidden fruit  
**fry** have other fish to fry  
**fry** out of the frying-pan into the fire  
**full** at full stretch  
**full** come full circle  
**full** full of oneself  
**full** full of the devil  
**full** full steam ahead  
**full** get into full swing  
**full** in full swing  
**fun** fun and games  
**fun** make fun of someone or something  
**fun** poke fun (at someone or something)  
**fur** make the fur fly  
**further** not see further than the end of one's nose  
**fuss** kick up a fuss

- future** in the near future  
**gain** ill-gotten gains  
**gallery** play to the gallery  
**game** fair game  
**game** fun and games  
**game** game at which two can play  
**game** give the game away  
**game** name of the game  
**game** play the game  
**game** two can play at that game  
**gang** press-gang someone into doing something  
**garden** lead someone up the garden path  
**gauntlet** throw down the gauntlet  
**gear** in high gear  
**generous** generous to a fault  
**get** be getting on for something  
**get** get a black eye  
**get** get a clean bill of health  
**get** get a good run for one's money  
**get** get a lucky break  
**get** get a lump in one's throat  
**get** get a slap on the wrist  
**get** get a start  
**get** get a tongue-lashing  
**get** get a word in (edgewise)  
**get** get above oneself  
**get** get away (from it all)  
**get** get back on one's feet  
**get** get butterflies in one's stomach  
**get** get by (on a shoe-string)  
**get** get carried away  
**get** get cold feet  
**get** get credit (for something)  
**get** get down to brass tacks  
**get** get down to business  
**get** get in someone's hair  
**get** get into full swing  
**get** get into the swing of things  
**get** get nowhere fast  
**get** get off lightly  
**get** get off to a flying start  
**get** get on the good side of someone  
**get** get one's come-uppance  
**get** get one's fill of someone or something  
**get** get one's fingers burned  
**get** get one's foot in the door  
**get** get one's just deserts  
**get** get one's money's worth  
**get** get one's nose out of someone's business  
**get** get one's second wind  
**get** get one's teeth into something  
**get** get out of the wrong side of the bed  
**get** get someone off the hook  
**get** get someone's number  
**get** get something off one's chest  
**get** get something out of one's system  
**get** get something under one's belt  
**get** get the ball rolling  
**get** get the brush-off  
**get** get the hang of something  
**get** get the last laugh  
**get** get the runaround  
**get** get the shock of one's life  
**get** get the show on the road  
**get** get time to catch one's breath  
**get** get to one's feet  
**get** get to the bottom of something  
**get** get under someone's skin  
**get** get what is coming to one  
**get** get wind of something  
**get** getting on (in years)  
**get** give as good as one gets  
**get** play hard to get  
**ghost** give up the ghost  
**gild** gild the lily  
**gill** green about the gills  
**gill** green around the gills  
**gill** pale around the gills  
**give** give a good account of oneself  
**give** give as good as one gets  
**give** give credit where credit is due  
**give** give ground  
**give** give it to someone straight  
**give** give of oneself



- give** give one one's marching orders
- give** give one's right arm (for someone or something)
- give** give oneself airs
- give** give someone a piece of one's mind
- give** give someone or something a wide berth
- give** give someone pause for thought
- give** give someone the shirt off one's back
- give** give someone tit for tat
- give** give something a lick and a promise
- give** give something a miss
- give** give something one's best shot
- give** give the devil her due
- give** give the devil his due
- give** give the game away
- give** give up the ghost
- give** give voice to something
- give** not give someone the time of day
- glance** at first glance
- glove** hand in glove (with someone)
- glove** handle someone with kid gloves
- glove** iron hand in a velvet glove
- glut** glut on the market
- glutton** glutton for punishment
- go** from the word go
- go** go against the grain
- go** go back on one's word
- go** go begging
- go** go broke
- go** go by the board
- go** go down fighting
- go** go down in history
- go** go down like a lead balloon
- go** go downhill
- go** go Dutch
- go** go for someone or something
- go** go from bad to worse
- go** go haywire
- go** go in for something
- go** go in one ear and out the other
- go** go it alone
- go** go like clockwork
- go** go off at a tangent
- go** go off at half cock
- go** go off the deep end
- go** go over someone's head
- go** go over something with a fine-tooth comb
- go** go round in circles
- go** go sky-high
- go** go so far as to say something
- go** go the distance
- go** go the whole hog
- go** go through something with a fine-tooth comb
- go** go through the motions
- go** go through the proper channels
- go** go to Davy Jones's locker
- go** go to hell
- go** go to rack and ruin
- go** go to seed
- go** go to someone's head
- go** go to the devil
- go** go to the limit
- go** go to the loo
- go** go to the toilet
- go** go to the wall
- go** go to town
- go** go to waste
- go** goes without saying
- go** going great guns
- go** have a go (at something)
- go** have a lot going for one
- go** heavy going
- go** make a go of it
- go** rarin' to go
- go** touch-and-go
- goat** act the goat
- goat** separate the sheep from the goats
- gold** have a heart of gold
- good** all to the good
- good** do someone good
- good** do someone's heart good
- good** enough is as good as a feast
- good** get a good run for one's money

**good** get on the good side of someone  
**good** give a good account of oneself  
**good** give as good as one gets  
**good** good enough for someone or something  
**good** good-for-nothing  
**good** good riddance (to bad rubbish)  
**good** have a good command of something  
**good** have a good head on one's shoulders  
**good** make good as something  
**good** make good money  
**good** make good time  
**good** make someone look good  
**good** never had it so good  
**good** put in a good word for someone  
**good** stand someone in good stead  
**good** throw good money after bad  
**good** turn something to good account  
**good** up to no good  
**goose** cook someone's goose  
**gooseberry** play gooseberry  
**got** Cat got your tongue?  
**gotten** ill-gotten gains  
**grace** airs and graces  
**grace** fall from grace  
**grade** make the grade  
**grain** go against the grain  
**grandmother** teach one's grandmother to suck eggs  
**grasp** grasp the nettle  
**grass** let the grass grow under one's feet  
**grass** snake in the grass  
**grave** (as) quiet as the grave  
**grave** dig one's own grave  
**grease** elbow-grease  
**great** going great guns  
**great** make a great show of something

**great** set great store by someone or something  
**Greek** (all) Greek to me  
**Greek** Greek to me  
**green** green about the gills  
**green** green around the gills  
**green** green with envy  
**green** have green fingers  
**grief** come to grief  
**grin** grin and bear it  
**grind** daily grind  
**grind** grind to a halt  
**grind** have an axe to grind  
**grindstone** keep one's nose to the grindstone  
**grip** lose one's grip  
**grist** grist to the mill  
**grit** grit one's teeth  
**ground** break new ground  
**ground** give ground  
**ground** have one's ear to the ground  
**ground** have one's feet on the ground  
**ground** keep one's ear to the ground  
**ground** keep one's feet on the ground  
**ground** one's old stamping-ground  
**ground** shift one's ground  
**ground** suit someone down to the ground  
**ground** thin on the ground  
**grow** grow on someone  
**grow** let the grass grow under one's feet  
**guard** on one's guard  
**guinea** serve as a guinea pig  
**gun** going great guns  
**gun** jump the gun  
**gun** shot-gun wedding  
**gun** spike someone's guns  
**gun** stick to one's guns  
**gut** hate someone's guts  
**ha'porth** spoil the ship for a ha'porth of tar  
**had** never had it so good  
**hail** hail-fellow-well-met

- hail** hail from somewhere  
**hail** within hailing distance  
**hair** get in someone's hair  
**hair** hair of the dog (that bit one)  
**hair** hang by a hair  
**hair** let down one's hair  
**hair** let one's hair down  
**hair** make someone's hair stand on end  
**hair** neither hide nor hair  
**hair** split hairs  
**hale** hale and hearty  
**half** at half-mast  
**half** go off at half cock  
**half** have half a mind to do something  
**half** meet someone half-way  
**half** not half bad  
**half** see something with half an eye  
**half** six of one and half a dozen of the other  
**halt** grind to a halt  
**hand** bite the hand that feeds one  
**hand** can't see one's hand in front of one's face  
**hand** change hands  
**hand** come away empty-handed  
**hand** eat out of someone's hands  
**hand** force someone's hand  
**hand** hand in glove (with someone)  
**hand** hand it to someone  
**hand** hand-me-down  
**hand** hand over fist  
**hand** hand over hand  
**hand** have clean hands  
**hand** have one's hand in the till  
**hand** have something in hand  
**hand** have something on one's hands  
**hand** iron hand in a velvet glove  
**hand** keep one's hand in (something)  
**hand** lend (someone) a hand  
**hand** live from hand to mouth  
**hand** old hand at doing something  
**hand** pay someone a back-handed compliment  
**hand** play into someone's hands  
**hand** put one's hand to the plough  
**hand** putty in someone's hands  
**hand** show of hands  
**hand** show one's hand  
**hand** sit on one's hands  
**hand** throw in one's hand  
**handle** handle someone with kid gloves  
**hang** get the hang of something  
**hang** hang by a hair  
**hang** hang by a thread  
**hang** hang fire  
**hang** hang in the balance  
**hang** hang on by an eyebrow  
**hang** hang on by one's eyebrows  
**hang** hang on someone's every word  
**hang** hang on to someone's coat-tails  
**hang** Hang on to your hat!  
**hang** hang one's hat up somewhere  
**hang** have something hanging over one's head  
**happy** (as) happy as a lark  
**happy** (as) happy as a sandboy  
**happy** (as) happy as Larry  
**happy** (as) happy as the day is long  
**happy** strike a happy medium  
**hard** drive a hard bargain  
**hard** hard cash  
**hard** hard on someone's heels  
**hard** hard on the heels of something  
**hard** hard-and-fast rule  
**hard** no hard feelings  
**hard** play hard to get  
**hardly** hardly have time to breathe  
**harken** hark(en) back to something  
**Harry** (every) Tom, Dick, and Harry  
**hasty** beat a (hasty) retreat

- hat** at the drop of a hat  
**hat** be old hat  
**hat** eat one's hat  
**hat** Hang on to your hat!  
**hat** hang one's hat up somewhere  
**hat** Hold on to your hat!  
**hat** keep something under one's hat  
**hat** pass the hat round  
**hat** pull something out of a hat  
**hat** talk through one's hat  
**hat** wear more than one hat  
**hatchet** bury the hatchet  
**hate** hate someone's guts  
**haul** haul someone over the coals  
**have** hardly have time to breathe  
**have** have (high) hopes of something  
**have** have a bee in one's bonnet  
**have** have a big mouth  
**have** have a bone to pick (with someone)  
**have** have a brush with something  
**have** have a case (against someone)  
**have** have a chip on one's shoulder  
**have** have a down on someone  
**have** have a familiar ring  
**have** have a foot in both camps  
**have** have a go (at something)  
**have** have a good command of something  
**have** have a good head on one's shoulders  
**have** have a heart  
**have** have a heart of gold  
**have** have a heart of stone  
**have** have a heart-to-heart (talk)  
**have** have a lot going for one  
**have** have a low boiling-point  
**have** have a near miss  
**have** have a penchant for doing something  
**have** have a price on one's head  
**have** have a say (in something)  
**have** have a snowball's chance in hell  
**have** have a soft spot for someone or something  
**have** have a sweet tooth  
**have** have a thin time (of it)  
**have** have a voice (in something)  
**have** have a word with someone  
**have** have an axe to grind  
**have** have an itching palm  
**have** have an itchy palm  
**have** have an out  
**have** have another think coming  
**have** have ants in one's pants  
**have** have bats in one's belfry  
**have** have been through the mill  
**have** have clean hands  
**have** have egg on one's face  
**have** have eyes in the back of one's head  
**have** have feet of clay  
**have** have green fingers  
**have** have half a mind to do something  
**have** have it both ways  
**have** have money to burn  
**have** have no business doing something  
**have** have no staying-power  
**have** have none of something  
**have** have one's back to the wall  
**have** have one's ear to the ground  
**have** have one's feet on the ground  
**have** have one's finger in the pie  
**have** have one's hand in the till  
**have** have one's head in the clouds  
**have** have one's heart in one's boots  
**have** have one's nose in a book  
**have** have one's nose in the air  
**have** have one's wits about one  
**have** have one's work cut out (for one)  
**have** have other fish to fry  
**have** have seen better days  
**have** have someone in one's pocket  
**have** have someone on a string

- have** have someone or something on
- have** have someone under one's thumb
- have** have someone's hide
- have** have something at one's fingertips
- have** have something coming to one
- have** have something hanging over one's head
- have** have something in hand
- have** have something in mind
- have** have something in stock
- have** have something in store (for someone)
- have** have something on file
- have** have something on one's hands
- have** have something on the brain
- have** have something out (with someone)
- have** have something up one's sleeve
- have** have the courage of one's convictions
- have** have the Midas touch
- have** have the right of way
- have** have the time of one's life
- have** have the wherewithal (to do something)
- have** have to live with something
- have** have too many irons in the fire
- have** have turned the corner
- have** have what it takes
- have** let someone have it
- have** not have a care in the world
- have** only have eyes for someone
- have** walls have ears
- havoc** play havoc with someone or something
- haw** hem and haw
- haw** hum and haw
- haystack** like looking for a needle in a haystack
- haywire** go haywire
- head** above someone's head
- head** bite someone's head off
- head** bring something to a head
- head** can't make head nor tail of someone or something
- head** come to a head
- head** count heads
- head** go over someone's head
- head** go to someone's head
- head** have a good head on one's shoulders
- head** have a price on one's head
- head** have eyes in the back of one's head
- head** have one's head in the clouds
- head** have something hanging over one's head
- head** head and shoulders above someone or something
- head** head over heels in love (with someone)
- head** heads will roll
- head** in over one's head
- head** keep a civil tongue (in one's head)
- head** keep one's head above water
- head** knock people's heads together
- head** make someone's head spin
- head** make someone's head swim
- head** on one's (own) head be it
- head** put ideas into someone's head
- head** rear its ugly head
- head** turn someone's head
- health** get a clean bill of health
- health** in the best of health
- heart** break someone's heart
- heart** cross one's heart (and hope to die)
- heart** die of a broken heart
- heart** do someone's heart good
- heart** eat one's heart out
- heart** find it in one's heart to do something
- heart** follow one's heart
- heart** have a heart
- heart** have a heart of gold
- heart** have a heart of stone

**heart** have a heart-to-heart (talk)

**heart** have one's heart in one's boots

**heart** learn something by heart

**heart** lose heart

**heart** open one's heart (to someone)

**heart** take something to heart

**heart** warm the cockles of someone's heart

**heart** with all one's heart and soul

**heartly** hale and hearty

**heat** in a dead heat

**heaven** in seventh heaven

**heaven** move heaven and earth to do something

**heavy** heavy going

**heel** cool one's heels

**heel** down at heel

**heel** hard on someone's heels

**heel** hard on the heels of something

**heel** head over heels in love (with someone)

**heel** kick one's heels

**heel** kick up one's heels

**heel** set one back on one's heels

**hell** go to hell

**hell** have a snowball's chance in hell

**hell** hell for leather

**hell** through hell and high water

**help** help oneself

**help** not lift a finger (to help someone)

**help** pitch in (and help)

**hem** hem and haw

**her** give the devil her due

**here** here's to someone or something

**herring** draw a red herring

**herring** red herring

**hide** have someone's hide

**hide** hide one's face in shame

**hide** hide one's light under a bushel

**hide** neither hide nor hair

**high** go sky-high

**high** have (high) hopes of something

**high** high and mighty

**high** high-flyer

**high** in high gear

**high** run high

**high** through hell and high water

**hill** over the hill

**his** beard the lion in his den

**his** give the devil his due

**history** go down in history

**hit** hit (someone) below the belt

**hit** hit a snag

**hit** hit it off (with someone)

**hit** hit rock bottom

**hit** hit someone (right) between the eyes

**hit** hit the bull's-eye

**hitch** hitch a lift

**Hobson** Hobson's choice

**hog** go the whole hog

**hog** road-hog

**hold** can't hold a candle to someone

**hold** hold forth

**hold** hold no brief for someone or something

**hold** Hold on to your hat!

**hold** hold one's fire

**hold** hold one's own

**hold** hold one's peace

**hold** hold one's tongue

**hold** hold out the olive branch

**hold** hold true

**hold** hold water

**hold** leave someone holding the baby

**hold** no holds barred

**hold** not hold water

**hold** won't hold water

**hole** hole-and-corner

**hole** hole-in-the-corner

**hole** pick holes in something

**hole** square peg in a round hole

**holiday** busman's holiday

**holiday** on holiday

**holier** holier-than-thou

**home** bring home the bacon

- home** bring something home to someone
- home** come home to roost
- home** eat someone out of house and home
- home** home and dry
- home** keep the home fires burning
- home** make oneself at home
- home** nothing to write home about
- home** romp home
- home** see someone home
- home** till the cows come home
- honour** on one's honour
- hook** get someone off the hook
- hook** let someone off (the hook)
- hook** swallow something hook, line, and sinker
- hop** catch someone on the hop
- hope** cross one's heart (and hope to die)
- hope** have (high) hopes of something
- hope** hope against hope
- horn** lock horns (with someone)
- horn** on the horns of a dilemma
- hornet** stir up a hornets' nest
- horse** change horses in mid-stream
- horse** dark horse
- horse** eat like a horse
- horse** flog a dead horse
- horse** horse of a different colour
- horse** horse of another colour
- horse** horse-play
- horse** horse sense
- horse** put the cart before the horse
- hot** blow hot and cold
- hot** hot and bothered
- hot** hot on something
- hot** hot under the collar
- hot** strike while the iron is hot
- hour** all hours (of the day and night)
- hour** at the eleventh hour
- hour** eleventh-hour decision
- hour** keep late hours
- hour** small hours
- hour** zero hour
- house** (as) safe as houses
- house** eat someone out of house and home
- house** house-proud
- house** keep house
- house** put one's house in order
- hue** hue and cry
- huff** in a huff
- hum** hum and haw
- human** milk of human kindness
- humble** eat humble pie
- hump** over the hump
- hundred** one in a hundred
- hungry** (as) hungry as a hunter
- hunter** (as) hungry as a hunter
- hush** hush-money
- Hyde** Jekyll and Hyde
- ice** break the ice
- ice** cut no ice
- ice** on thin ice
- ice** put something on ice
- ice** (skating) on thin ice
- idea** put ideas into someone's head
- idly** sit (idly) by
- if** look as if butter wouldn't melt in one's mouth
- if** no ifs or buts about it
- ill** ill at ease
- ill** ill-gotten gains
- in** advanced in years
- in** any port in a storm
- in** babe in arms
- in** be a thorn in someone's side
- in** beard the lion in his den
- in** blow up in someone's face
- in** born with a silver spoon in one's mouth
- in** bull in a china shop
- in** buy a pig in a poke
- in** can't see one's hand in front of one's face
- in** cast in the same mould
- in** change horses in mid-stream
- in** chink in one's armour
- in** come down in the world
- in** come in for something

- in** come out in the wash  
**in** contradiction in terms  
**in** dog in the manger  
**in** down in the mouth  
**in** drop in one's tracks  
**in** feather in one's cap  
**in** feel something in one's bones  
**in** find it in one's heart to do something  
**in** fish in troubled waters  
**in** flash in the pan  
**in** flea in one's ear  
**in** fly in the face of someone or something  
**in** fly in the ointment  
**in** fools rush in (where angels fear to tread)  
**in** get a lump in one's throat  
**in** get a word in (edgewise)  
**in** get butterflies in one's stomach  
**in** get in someone's hair  
**in** get one's foot in the door  
**in** getting on (in years)  
**in** go down in history  
**in** go in for something  
**in** go in one ear and out the other  
**in** go round in circles  
**in** hand in glove (with someone)  
**in** hang in the balance  
**in** have a bee in one's bonnet  
**in** have a foot in both camps  
**in** have a say (in something)  
**in** have a snowball's chance in hell  
**in** have a voice (in something)  
**in** have ants in one's pants  
**in** have bats in one's belfry  
**in** have eyes in the back of one's head  
**in** have one's finger in the pie  
**in** have one's hand in the till  
**in** have one's head in the clouds  
**in** have one's heart in one's boots  
**in** have one's nose in a book  
**in** have one's nose in the air  
**in** have someone in one's pocket  
**in** have something in hand  
**in** have something in mind  
**in** have something in stock
- in** have something in store (for someone)  
**in** have too many irons in the fire  
**in** head over heels in love (with someone)  
**in** hide one's face in shame  
**in** hole-in-the-corner  
**in** in (just) a second  
**in** in a (pretty) pickle  
**in** in a (tight) spot  
**in** in a bad mood  
**in** in a bad way  
**in** in a dead heat  
**in** in a fix  
**in** in a flash  
**in** in a huff  
**in** in a jam  
**in** in a jiffy  
**in** in a mad rush  
**in** in a nutshell  
**in** in a quandary  
**in** in a sense  
**in** in a split second  
**in** in a stage whisper  
**in** in a stew (about someone or something)  
**in** in all one's born days  
**in** in all probability  
**in** in arrears  
**in** in at the kill  
**in** in black and white  
**in** in broad daylight  
**in** in clover  
**in** in deep water  
**in** in dribs and drabs  
**in** in fear and trembling  
**in** in fine feather  
**in** in force  
**in** in full swing  
**in** in high gear  
**in** in league (with someone)  
**in** in leaps and bounds  
**in** in less than no time  
**in** in lieu of something  
**in** in luck  
**in** in mint condition  
**in** in name only  
**in** in no mood to do something  
**in** in one ear and out the other



- in** in one's (own) backyard  
**in** in one's birthday suit  
**in** in one's blood  
**in** in one's book  
**in** in one's cups  
**in** in one's mind's eye  
**in** in one's opinion  
**in** in one's own time  
**in** in one's right mind  
**in** in one's second childhood  
**in** in one's spare time  
**in** in other words  
**in** in over one's head  
**in** in part  
**in** in place  
**in** in plain English  
**in** in progress  
**in** in Queer Street  
**in** in rags  
**in** in seventh heaven  
**in** (in) single file  
**in** in stock  
**in** in the air  
**in** in the altogether  
**in** in the balance  
**in** in the best of health  
**in** in the blood  
**in** in the buff  
**in** in the dark (about someone or something)  
**in** in the doghouse  
**in** in the doldrums  
**in** in the family  
**in** in the family way  
**in** in the flesh  
**in** in the lap of luxury  
**in** in the light of something  
**in** in the limelight  
**in** in the line of duty  
**in** in the long run  
**in** in the market (for something)  
**in** in the middle of nowhere  
**in** in the money  
**in** in the near future  
**in** in the nick of time  
**in** in the offing  
**in** in the peak of condition  
**in** in the pink (of condition)  
**in** in the public eye  
**in** in the raw  
**in** in the same boat  
**in** in the same breath  
**in** in the soup  
**in** in the swim (of things)  
**in** in the wind  
**in** in thing (to do)  
**in** in this day and age  
**in** in turn  
**in** in two shakes of a lamb's tail  
**in** in vain  
**in** instrumental in doing something  
**in** iron hand in a velvet glove  
**in** keep a civil tongue (in one's head)  
**in** keep in with someone  
**in** keep one's hand in (something)  
**in** keep one's nose in the air  
**in** keep someone in line  
**in** keep someone in stitches  
**in** late in life  
**in** late in the day  
**in** leave a bad taste in someone's mouth  
**in** leave someone in the lurch  
**in** like looking for a needle in a haystack  
**in** live in an ivory tower  
**in** look as if butter wouldn't melt in one's mouth  
**in** lost in thought  
**in** melt in one's mouth  
**in** method in one's madness  
**in** nail in someone's or something's coffin  
**in** never in one's life  
**in** nip something in the bud  
**in** not for anything in the world  
**in** not have a care in the world  
**in** not in the same league as someone or something  
**in** once in a blue moon  
**in** once-in-a-lifetime chance  
**in** once in a while  
**in** one in a hundred  
**in** one in a million  
**in** one in a thousand  
**in** one's words stick in one's throat

**in** pack them in  
**in** pain in the neck  
**in** paper over the cracks (in something)  
**in** pick holes in something  
**in** pie in the sky  
**in** pig(gy)-in-the-middle  
**in** pitch in (and help)  
**in** put all one's eggs in one basket  
**in** put in a good word for someone  
**in** put one in one's place  
**in** put one's foot in it  
**in** put one's house in order  
**in** put one's oar in  
**in** put someone in mind of someone or something  
**in** put someone in the picture  
**in** Put that in your pipe and smoke it!  
**in** putty in someone's hands  
**in** quake in one's shoes  
**in** quids in with someone  
**in** ring in the New Year  
**in** rub salt in the wound  
**in** rub someone's nose in it  
**in** run in the family  
**in** shake in one's shoes  
**in** ships that pass in the night  
**in** shot in the arm  
**in** shot in the dark  
**in** shove one's oar in  
**in** show oneself in one's true colours  
**in** skeleton in the cupboard  
**in** snake in the grass  
**in** something sticks in one's craw  
**in** square peg in a round hole  
**in** stand someone in good stead  
**in** stew in one's own juice  
**in** stick one's oar in  
**in** storm in a teacup  
**in** straw in the wind  
**in** take something in one's stride  
**in** talk until one is blue in the face  
**in** throw a spanner in the works  
**in** throw in one's hand  
**in** tie someone in knots  
**in** tongue-in-cheek

**in** up in arms  
**in** up in the air  
**in** use every trick in the book  
**in** waiting in the wings  
**in** well up in something  
**in** with the best will in the world  
**inch** inch along (something)  
**inch** within an inch of doing something  
**inch** within an inch of one's life  
**information** mine of information  
**instrumental** instrumental in doing something  
**into** come into something  
**into** fall into line  
**into** fit someone in(to something)  
**into** get into full swing  
**into** get into the swing of things  
**into** get one's teeth into something  
**into** into the bargain  
**into** lick something into shape  
**into** out of the frying-pan into the fire  
**into** pile in(to something)  
**into** play into someone's hands  
**into** press-gang someone into doing something  
**into** put ideas into someone's head  
**into** put words into someone's mouth  
**into** read something into something  
**into** step in(to the breach)  
**into** step into dead men's shoes  
**into** tuck into something  
**into** vanish into thin air  
**into** whip something into shape  
**iron** have too many irons in the fire  
**iron** iron hand in a velvet glove  
**iron** strike while the iron is hot  
**is** as black as one is painted  
**is** (as) happy as the day is long  
**is** enough is as good as a feast  
**is** expense is no object  
**is** get what is coming to one  
**is** give credit where credit is due

- is** money is no object  
**is** Put your money where your mouth is!  
**is** seeing is believing  
**is** strike while the iron is hot  
**is** talk until one is blue in the face  
**is** when the time is ripe  
**it** believe it or not  
**it** call it a day  
**it** cross a bridge before one comes to it  
**it** cut it (too) fine  
**it** dead on one's or its feet  
**it** feel it beneath one (to do something)  
**it** find it in one's heart to do something  
**it** get away (from it all)  
**it** give it to someone straight  
**it** go it alone  
**it** grin and bear it  
**it** hand it to someone  
**it** have a thin time (of it)  
**it** have it both ways  
**it** have what it takes  
**it** hit it off (with someone)  
**it** let someone have it  
**it** lord it over someone  
**it** make a go of it  
**it** make it worth someone's while  
**it** make nothing of it  
**it** never had it so good  
**it** no ifs or buts about it  
**it** no two ways about it  
**it** Not a bit (of it).  
**it** nothing to it  
**it** on one's (own) head be it  
**it** on the face of it  
**it** past it  
**it** put a brave face on it  
**it** put it on  
**it** put one's foot in it  
**it** Put that in your pipe and smoke it!  
**it** rear its ugly head  
**it** rough it  
**it** rub someone's nose in it  
**it** run for it  
**it** stick it out  
**it** Tell it to the marines.  
**it** try it on  
**it** want it both ways  
**itch** have an itching palm  
**itchy** have an itchy palm  
**ivory** live in an ivory tower  
**Jack** before you can say Jack Robinson  
**jack** jack-of-all-trades  
**jam** in a jam  
**jam** jam tomorrow  
**jam** money for jam  
**Jekyll** Jekyll and Hyde  
**jiffy** in a jiffy  
**Joan** Darby and Joan  
**job** fall down on the job  
**job** job lot  
**Job** Job's comforter  
**job** just the job  
**job** lie down on the job  
**job** nine-to-five job  
**jockey** jockey for position  
**johnny** johnny-come-lately  
**joint** put someone's nose out of joint  
**joke** joking apart  
**joke** standing joke  
**jolly** jolly someone along  
**Jones** Davy Jones's locker  
**Jones** go to Davy Jones's locker  
**jowl** cheek by jowl  
**joy** wish someone joy of something  
**juice** stew in one's own juice  
**jump** jump at the chance (to do something)  
**jump** jump at the opportunity (to do something)  
**jump** jump down someone's throat  
**jump** jump on someone  
**jump** jump out of one's skin  
**jump** jump the gun  
**jump** jumping-off point  
**just** get one's just deserts  
**just** in (just) a second  
**just** just the job  
**just** just what the doctor ordered  
**justice** do justice to something

**justice** poetic justice

**keen** keen on someone or something

**keep** keep a civil tongue (in one's head)

**keep** keep a stiff upper lip

**keep** keep a straight face

**keep** keep a weather eye open

**keep** keep an eye out (for someone or something)

**keep** keep body and soul together

**keep** keep house

**keep** keep in with someone

**keep** keep late hours

**keep** keep one's cards close to one's chest

**keep** keep one's chin up

**keep** keep one's distance (from someone or something)

**keep** keep one's ear to the ground

**keep** keep one's eye on the ball

**keep** keep one's feet on the ground

**keep** keep one's hand in (something)

**keep** keep one's head above water

**keep** keep one's mouth shut (about someone or something)

**keep** keep one's nose in the air

**keep** keep one's nose to the grindstone

**keep** keep one's own counsel

**keep** keep one's side of the bargain

**keep** keep one's wits about one

**keep** keep one's word

**keep** keep oneself to oneself

**keep** keep someone in line

**keep** keep someone in stitches

**keep** keep someone on a string

**keep** keep someone on tenterhooks

**keep** keep someone posted

**keep** keep something under one's hat

**keep** keep something under wraps

**keep** keep the ball rolling

**keep** keep the home fires burning

**keep** keep the lid on something

**keep** keep the wolf from the door

**keg** sitting on a powder keg

**ken** beyond one's ken

**kettle** fine kettle of fish

**kettle** pot calling the kettle black

**kettle** pretty kettle of fish

**kick** kick one's heels

**kick** kick oneself (for doing something)

**kick** kick up a fuss

**kick** kick up a row

**kick** kick up one's heels

**kid** handle someone with kid gloves

**kid** kids' stuff

**kill** in at the kill

**kill** kill the fatted calf

**kill** kill time

**killer** lady-killer

**kilter** out of kilter

**kind** nothing of the kind

**kindness** milk of human kindness

**king** fit for a king

**kiss** kiss of death

**kitchen** everything but the kitchen sink

**kite** fly a kite

**knit** knit one's brow

**knock** knock about (somewhere)

**knock** knock around (somewhere)

**knock** knock people's heads together

**knock** knock someone cold

**knock** knock someone dead

**knock** knock someone down with a feather

**knot** at a rate of knots

**knot** tie someone in knots

**knot** tie the knot

**know** know a thing or two (about someone or something)

**know** know all the tricks of the trade

**know** know one's ABC

**know** know one's place

**know** know the ropes

- know** not know someone from Adam
- knuckle** near the knuckle
- knuckle** rap someone's knuckles
- labour** labour of love
- ladder** at the bottom of the ladder
- lady** lady-killer
- lag** lag behind (someone or something)
- lamb** in two shakes of a lamb's tail
- lame** lame duck
- lamp** smell of the lamp
- land** cloud-cuckoo-land
- land** land a blow (somewhere)
- land** land of Nod
- land** land on both feet
- land** land on one's feet
- land** live off the fat of the land
- language** speak the same language
- lap** in the lap of luxury
- large** (as) large as life (and twice as ugly)
- large** at large
- large** loom large
- lark** (as) happy as a lark
- Larry** (as) happy as Larry
- lash** get a tongue-lashing
- last** breathe one's last
- last** get the last laugh
- last** last but not least
- last** last-ditch effort
- late** keep late hours
- late** late in life
- late** late in the day
- lately** johnny-come-lately
- laugh** die laughing
- laugh** get the last laugh
- laugh** laugh something out of court
- laugh** laugh up one's sleeve
- laurel** look to one's laurels
- laurel** rest on one's laurels
- law** law unto oneself
- law** lay down the law
- lay** lay about one
- lay** lay down the law
- lay** lay something on the line
- lay** lay the table
- lead** go down like a lead balloon
- lead** lead a dog's life
- lead** lead someone (on) a merry chase
- lead** lead someone (on) a merry dance
- lead** lead someone by the nose
- lead** lead someone to believe something
- lead** lead someone to do something
- lead** lead someone up the garden path
- leaf** take a leaf out of someone's book
- league** in league (with someone)
- league** not in the same league as someone or something
- leap** by leaps and bounds
- leap** in leaps and bounds
- leap** leap at the chance (to do something)
- leap** leap at the opportunity (to do something)
- learn** learn something by heart
- learn** learn something by rote
- learn** learn the ropes
- lease** new lease of life
- least** last but not least
- leather** hell for leather
- leave** leave a bad taste in someone's mouth
- leave** leave no stone unturned
- leave** leave oneself wide open for something
- leave** leave oneself wide open to something
- leave** leave someone holding the baby
- leave** leave someone in the lurch
- leave** leave well alone
- leave** leave word (with someone)
- leave** take leave of one's senses
- left** left, right, and centre
- leg** pay an arm and a leg (for something)
- leg** pull someone's leg

**leg** stretch one's legs  
**lend** lend (someone) a hand  
**less** in less than no time  
**less** less than pleased  
**let** let down one's hair  
**let** let off steam  
**let** let one's hair down  
**let** let someone have it  
**let** let someone off (the hook)  
**let** let something ride  
**let** let something slide  
**let** let something slip (out)  
**let** let the cat out of the bag  
**let** let the chance slip by  
**let** let the grass grow under one's feet  
**let** let well alone  
**let** live and let live  
**letter** to the letter  
**level** find one's own level  
**liberty** at liberty  
**lick** give something a lick and a promise  
**lick** lick one's lips  
**lick** lick something into shape  
**lid** blow the lid off (something)  
**lid** keep the lid on something  
**lie** lie down on the job  
**lie** lie through one's teeth  
**lie** take something lying down  
**lieu** in lieu of something  
**life** (as) large as life (and twice as ugly)  
**life** get the shock of one's life  
**life** have the time of one's life  
**life** late in life  
**life** lead a dog's life  
**life** life (and soul) of the party  
**life** matter of life and death  
**life** never in one's life  
**life** new lease of life  
**life** one's way of life  
**life** run for one's life  
**life** within an inch of one's life  
**lifetime** once-in-a-lifetime chance  
**lift** hitch a lift  
**lift** not lift a finger (to help someone)  
**lift** thumb a lift

**light** according to one's (own) lights  
**light** bring something to light  
**light** come to light  
**light** hide one's light under a bushel  
**light** in the light of something  
**light** make light of something  
**light** see the light  
**light** see the light at the end of the tunnel  
**light** see the light of day  
**lightly** get off lightly  
**like** avoid someone or something like the plague  
**like** eat like a bird  
**like** eat like a horse  
**like** feel like a million dollars  
**like** feel like a new person  
**like** go down like a lead balloon  
**like** go like clockwork  
**like** like a bolt out of the blue  
**like** like a fish out of water  
**like** like a sitting duck  
**like** like looking for a needle in a haystack  
**like** like one of the family  
**like** like sitting ducks  
**like** like water off a duck's back  
**like** likes of someone  
**like** look like a million dollars  
**like** look like the cat that swallowed the canary  
**like** look like the cat that swallowed the cream  
**like** read someone like a book  
**like** stick out like a sore thumb  
**lily** gild the lily  
**limb** out on a limb  
**limelight** in the limelight  
**limit** go to the limit  
**line** draw a line between something and something else  
**line** fall into line  
**line** in the line of duty  
**line** keep someone in line  
**line** lay something on the line  
**line** out of line  
**line** out of line (with something)

- line** party line  
**line** read between the lines  
**line** swallow something hook, line, and sinker  
**line** toe the line  
**lion** beard the lion in his den  
**lion** lion's share (of something)  
**lip** keep a stiff upper lip  
**lip** lick one's lips  
**lip** pay lip-service (to something)  
**list** enter the lists  
**listen** listen to reason  
**live** have to live with something  
**live** live and let live  
**live** live by one's wits  
**live** live from hand to mouth  
**live** live in an ivory tower  
**live** live off the fat of the land  
**live** live on borrowed time  
**load** load off one's mind  
**lock** lock horns (with someone)  
**lock** lock, stock, and barrel  
**locker** Davy Jones's locker  
**locker** go to Davy Jones's locker  
**loggerhead** at loggerheads (with someone)  
**long** (as) happy as the day is long  
**long** cut a long story short  
**long** in the long run  
**long** not by a long shot  
**long** not long for this world  
**loo** go to the loo  
**look** dirty look  
**look** like looking for a needle in a haystack  
**look** look as if butter wouldn't melt in one's mouth  
**look** look daggers at someone  
**look** look forward to something  
**look** look like a million dollars  
**look** look like the cat that swallowed the canary  
**look** look like the cat that swallowed the cream  
**look** look the other way  
**look** look to one's laurels  
**look** look up to someone  
**look** make someone look good  
**loom** loom large
- loose** at a loose end  
**loose** on the loose  
**loose** play fast and loose (with someone or something)  
**lord** lord it over someone  
**lose** lose face  
**lose** lose heart  
**lose** lose one's grip  
**lose** lose one's reason  
**lose** lose one's temper  
**lose** lose one's train of thought  
**lost** lost in thought  
**lost** lost on someone  
**lost** make up for lost time  
**lost** no love lost between someone and someone else  
**lot** have a lot going for one  
**lot** job lot  
**love** cupboard love  
**love** head over heels in love (with someone)  
**love** labour of love  
**love** love at first sight  
**love** no love lost between someone and someone else  
**love** not for love nor money  
**lovely** lovely weather for ducks  
**low** have a low boiling-point  
**lower** lower one's sights  
**lower** lower one's voice  
**luck** down on one's luck  
**luck** in luck  
**luck** out of luck  
**luck** push one's luck  
**luck** Worse luck!  
**lucky** get a lucky break  
**lucky** lucky dip  
**lucky** thank one's lucky stars  
**lump** get a lump in one's throat  
**lurch** leave someone in the lurch  
**luxury** in the lap of luxury  
**lying** take something lying down  
**mad** in a mad rush  
**madness** method in one's madness  
**maiden** maiden speech  
**maiden** maiden voyage  
**make** can't make head nor tail of someone or something

**make** make (both) ends meet  
**make** make a beeline for someone or something  
**make** make a clean breast of something  
**make** make a clean sweep  
**make** make a comeback  
**make** make a face  
**make** make a go of it  
**make** make a great show of something  
**make** make a mountain out of a molehill  
**make** make a name for oneself  
**make** make a pitch for someone or something  
**make** make a point of (doing) something  
**make** make an example of someone  
**make** make cracks (about someone or something)  
**make** make do (with someone or something)  
**make** make eyes at someone  
**make** make fun of someone or something  
**make** make good as something  
**make** make good money  
**make** make good time  
**make** make it worth someone's while  
**make** make light of something  
**make** make merry  
**make** make mischief  
**make** make no bones about something  
**make** make nothing of it  
**make** make oneself at home  
**make** make or break someone  
**make** make someone look good  
**make** make someone's blood boil  
**make** make someone's blood run cold  
**make** make someone's hair stand on end  
**make** make someone's head spin  
**make** make someone's head swim

**make** make someone's mouth water  
**make** make something from scratch  
**make** make something to order  
**make** make the feathers fly  
**make** make the fur fly  
**make** make the grade  
**make** make up for lost time  
**man** odd man out  
**manger** dog in the manger  
**many** have too many irons in the fire  
**march** give one one's marching orders  
**march** steal a march on someone  
**marine** Tell it to the marines.  
**mark** mark my word(s)  
**market** glut on the market  
**market** in the market (for something)  
**market** play the market  
**marrow** chilled to the marrow  
**mast** at half-mast  
**mast** nail one's colours to the mast  
**match** meet one's match  
**match** whole (bang) shooting match  
**matter** crux of the matter  
**matter** matter-of-fact  
**matter** matter of life and death  
**matter** matter of opinion  
**me** (all) Greek to me  
**me** Greek to me  
**me** hand-me-down  
**meal** square meal  
**mealy** mealy-mouthed  
**mean** by no means  
**medicine** dose of one's own medicine  
**medicine** take one's medicine  
**medium** strike a happy medium  
**meet** hail-fellow-well-met  
**meet** make (both) ends meet  
**meet** meet one's end  
**meet** meet one's match  
**meet** meet one's Waterloo  
**meet** meet someone half-way



- melt** look as if butter wouldn't melt in one's mouth  
**melt** melt in one's mouth  
**men** fill dead men's shoes  
**men** separate the men from the boys  
**men** sort the men from the boys  
**men** step into dead men's shoes  
**mend** mend (one's) fences  
**mend** mend one's ways  
**mend** on the mend  
**mercy** be thankful for small mercies  
**merry** lead someone (on) a merry chase  
**merry** lead someone (on) a merry dance  
**merry** make merry  
**met** hail-fellow-well-met  
**method** method in one's madness  
**mid** change horses in mid-stream  
**Midas** have the Midas touch  
**middle** in the middle of nowhere  
**middle** middle-of-the-road  
**middle** pig(gy)-in-the-middle  
**middle** play both ends (against the middle)  
**midnight** burn the midnight oil  
**might** pigs might fly  
**mighty** high and mighty  
**milk** cry over spilled milk  
**milk** milk of human kindness  
**mill** grist to the mill  
**mill** have been through the mill  
**mill** run of the mill  
**million** feel like a million dollars  
**million** look like a million dollars  
**million** one in a million  
**millpond** (as) calm as a millpond  
**millstone** millstone around one's neck  
**mind** give someone a piece of one's mind  
**mind** have half a mind to do something  
**mind** have something in mind  
**mind** in one's mind's eye  
**mind** in one's right mind  
**mind** load off one's mind  
**mind** mind one's own business  
**mind** mind one's P's and Q's  
**mind** mind you  
**mind** never mind  
**mind** on one's mind  
**mind** out of one's mind  
**mind** presence of mind  
**mind** put someone in mind of someone or something  
**mind** read someone's mind  
**mind** speak one's mind  
**mind** time out of mind  
**mind** weigh on someone's mind  
**mine** mine of information  
**mint** in mint condition  
**mischief** make mischief  
**miss** give something a miss  
**miss** have a near miss  
**miss** miss the point  
**mix** mixed bag  
**molehill** make a mountain out of a molehill  
**moment** moment of truth  
**moment** on the spur of the moment  
**money** get a good run for one's money  
**money** get one's money's worth  
**money** have money to burn  
**money** hush-money  
**money** in the money  
**money** make good money  
**money** money for jam  
**money** money for old rope  
**money** money is no object  
**money** money talks  
**money** not for love nor money  
**money** pour money down the drain  
**money** Put your money where your mouth is!  
**money** throw good money after bad  
**monkey** monkey business  
**mood** in a bad mood  
**mood** in no mood to do something  
**moon** once in a blue moon

**more** More fool you!  
**more** more's the pity  
**more** wear more than one hat  
**mother** old enough to be someone's mother  
**mother** tied to one's mother's apron-strings  
**motion** go through the motions  
**mould** cast in the same mould  
**mountain** make a mountain out of a molehill  
**mouse** play cat and mouse (with someone)  
**mouth** born with a silver spoon in one's mouth  
**mouth** by word of mouth  
**mouth** down in the mouth  
**mouth** foam at the mouth  
**mouth** have a big mouth  
**mouth** keep one's mouth shut (about someone or something)  
**mouth** leave a bad taste in someone's mouth  
**mouth** live from hand to mouth  
**mouth** look as if butter wouldn't melt in one's mouth  
**mouth** make someone's mouth water  
**mouth** mealy-mouthed  
**mouth** melt in one's mouth  
**mouth** not open one's mouth  
**mouth** put words into someone's mouth  
**mouth** Put your money where your mouth is!  
**mouth** take the words (right) out of one's mouth  
**move** move heaven and earth to do something  
**move** not move a muscle  
**move** prime mover  
**much** much ado about nothing  
**much** much of a muchness  
**much** much sought after  
**muchness** much of a muchness  
**mum** mum's the word  
**muscle** not move a muscle  
**music** face the music  
**must** needs must

**muster** pass muster  
**my** mark my word(s)  
**my** never darken my door again  
**my** over my dead body  
**nail** nail in someone's or something's coffin  
**nail** nail one's colours to the mast  
**naked** naked eye  
**name** in name only  
**name** make a name for oneself  
**name** name of the game  
**name** on a first-name basis (with someone)  
**name** on first-name terms (with someone)  
**natural** die a natural death  
**nature** call of nature  
**nature** second nature to someone  
**near** (as) near as dammit  
**near** have a near miss  
**near** in the near future  
**near** near the bone  
**near** near the knuckle  
**necessity** out of necessity  
**neck** breathe down someone's neck  
**neck** millstone around one's neck  
**neck** neck and neck  
**neck** pain in the neck  
**neck** risk one's neck (to do something)  
**neck** stick one's neck out  
**need** needs must  
**needle** like looking for a needle in a haystack  
**needle** pins and needles  
**neither** neither fish nor fowl  
**neither** neither hide nor hair  
**nest** feather one's (own) nest  
**nest** foul one's own nest  
**nest** stir up a hornets' nest  
**nettle** grasp the nettle  
**never** never darken my door again  
**never** never fear  
**never** never had it so good  
**never** never in one's life  
**never** never mind  
**new** break new ground  
**new** feel like a new person

- new** (fresh fields and) pastures  
new
- new** new lease of life
- new** new one on someone
- new** ring in the New Year
- news** break the news (to someone)
- nick** in the nick of time
- night** all hours (of the day and night)
- night** fly-by-night
- night** night on the town
- night** night-owl
- night** ships that pass in the night
- nine** dressed (up) to the nines
- nine** nine days' wonder
- nine** nine-to-five job
- nine** on cloud nine
- nineteen** talk nineteen to the dozen
- nip** nip something in the bud
- no** by no means
- no** cut no ice
- no** expense is no object
- no** have no business doing something
- no** have no staying-power
- no** hold no brief for someone or something
- no** in less than no time
- no** in no mood to do something
- no** leave no stone unturned
- no** make no bones about something
- no** money is no object
- no** no hard feelings
- no** no holds barred
- no** no ifs or buts about it
- no** no love lost between someone and someone else
- no** no skin off someone's nose
- no** no sooner said than done
- no** no spring chicken
- no** no trespassing
- no** no two ways about it
- no** not take no for an answer
- no** up to no good
- nobody** nobody's fool
- Nod** land of Nod
- none** have none of something
- none** none the wiser
- none** none the worse for wear
- none** none too something
- none** second to none
- nonsense** stuff and nonsense
- nor** can't make head nor tail of someone or something
- nor** neither fish nor fowl
- nor** neither hide nor hair
- nor** not for love nor money
- nose** can't see beyond the end of one's nose
- nose** follow one's nose
- nose** get one's nose out of someone's business
- nose** have one's nose in a book
- nose** have one's nose in the air
- nose** keep one's nose in the air
- nose** keep one's nose to the grindstone
- nose** lead someone by the nose
- nose** no skin off someone's nose
- nose** not see further than the end of one's nose
- nose** pay through the nose (for something)
- nose** put someone's nose out of joint
- nose** rub someone's nose in it
- nose** thumb one's nose at someone or something
- not** believe it or not
- not** last but not least
- not** Not a bit (of it).
- not** not able
- not** not able to call one's time one's own
- not** not able to see the wood for the trees
- not** not able to wait
- not** not born yesterday
- not** not breathe a word (about someone or something)
- not** not breathe a word (of something)
- not** not by a long shot
- not** not for anything in the world
- not** not for love nor money

**not** not for the world  
**not** not give someone the time of day  
**not** not half bad  
**not** not have a care in the world  
**not** not hold water  
**not** not in the same league as someone or something  
**not** not know someone from Adam  
**not** not lift a finger (to help someone)  
**not** not long for this world  
**not** not move a muscle  
**not** not open one's mouth  
**not** not see further than the end of one's nose  
**not** not set foot somewhere  
**not** not show one's face  
**not** not sleep a wink  
**not** not someone's cup of tea  
**not** not take no for an answer  
**not** not to darken someone's door  
**not** not up to scratch  
**not** not utter a word  
**not** not worth a candle  
**not** not worth a penny  
**note** strike the right note  
**nothing** good-for-nothing  
**nothing** make nothing of it  
**nothing** much ado about nothing  
**nothing** nothing but skin and bones  
**nothing** nothing of the kind  
**nothing** nothing short of something  
**nothing** nothing to it  
**nothing** nothing to write home about  
**notice** escape someone's notice  
**notice** serve notice  
**nowhere** come out of nowhere  
**nowhere** get nowhere fast  
**nowhere** in the middle of nowhere  
**null** null and void  
**number** get someone's number  
**number** one's days are numbered  
**nut** nuts and bolts (of something)

**nutshell** in a nutshell  
**oar** put one's oar in  
**oar** shove one's oar in  
**oar** stick one's oar in  
**object** expense is no object  
**object** money is no object  
**occasion** rise to the occasion  
**odd** odd man out  
**odd** over the odds  
**odour** odour of sanctity  
**of** afraid of one's own shadow  
**of** air of sanctity  
**of** all hours (of the day and night)  
**of** apple of someone's eye  
**of** at a rate of knots  
**of** at the bottom of the ladder  
**of** at the drop of a hat  
**of** at the end of one's tether  
**of** at the expense of someone or something  
**of** at the top of one's voice  
**of** back of beyond  
**of** baptism of fire  
**of** bed of roses  
**of** beyond the shadow of a doubt  
**of** black sheep (of the family)  
**of** bone of contention  
**of** business end of something  
**of** by the seat of one's pants  
**of** by the skin of one's teeth  
**of** by the sweat of one's brow  
**of** by virtue of something  
**of** by word of mouth  
**of** call of nature  
**of** can't make head nor tail of someone or something  
**of** can't see beyond the end of one's nose  
**of** can't see one's hand in front of one's face  
**of** carry the weight of the world on one's shoulders  
**of** chapter of accidents  
**of** cock of the walk  
**of** come of age  
**of** come out of nowhere  
**of** come out of one's shell  
**of** crux of the matter  
**of** die of a broken heart

- of** die of boredom
- of** dose of one's own medicine
- of** eat out of someone's hands
- of** eat someone out of house and home
- of** fair crack of the whip
- of** fall foul of someone or something
- of** fight shy of something
- of** fine kettle of fish
- of** fine state of affairs
- of** flight of fancy
- of** fly in the face of someone or something
- of** full of oneself
- of** full of the devil
- of** get a clean bill of health
- of** get into the swing of things
- of** get on the good side of someone
- of** get one's fill of someone or something
- of** get one's nose out of someone's business
- of** get out of the wrong side of the bed
- of** get something out of one's system
- of** get the hang of something
- of** get the shock of one's life
- of** get to the bottom of something
- of** get wind of something
- of** give a good account of oneself
- of** give of oneself
- of** give someone a piece of one's mind
- of** hair of the dog (that bit one)
- of** hard on the heels of something
- of** have (high) hopes of something
- of** have a good command of something
- of** have a heart of gold
- of** have a heart of stone
- of** have a thin time (of it)
- of** have eyes in the back of one's head
- of** have feet of clay
- of** have none of something
- of** have the courage of one's convictions
- of** have the right of way
- of** have the time of one's life
- of** horse of a different colour
- of** horse of another colour
- of** in lieu of something
- of** in the best of health
- of** in the lap of luxury
- of** in the light of something
- of** in the line of duty
- of** in the middle of nowhere
- of** in the nick of time
- of** in the peak of condition
- of** in the pink (of condition)
- of** in the swim (of things)
- of** in two shakes of a lamb's tail
- of** jack-of-all-trades
- of** jump out of one's skin
- of** keep one's side of the bargain
- of** kiss of death
- of** know all the tricks of the trade
- of** labour of love
- of** land of Nod
- of** laugh something out of court
- of** let the cat out of the bag
- of** life (and soul) of the party
- of** like a bolt out of the blue
- of** like a fish out of water
- of** like one of the family
- of** likes of someone
- of** lion's share (of something)
- of** live off the fat of the land
- of** lose one's train of thought
- of** make a clean breast of something
- of** make a go of it
- of** make a great show of something
- of** make a mountain out of a molehill
- of** make a point of (doing) something
- of** make an example of someone
- of** make fun of someone or something
- of** make light of something
- of** make nothing of it
- of** matter-of-fact

- of** matter of life and death
- of** matter of opinion
- of** middle-of-the-road
- of** milk of human kindness
- of** mine of information
- of** moment of truth
- of** much of a muchness
- of** name of the game
- of** new lease of life
- of** Not a bit (of it).
- of** not breathe a word (of something)
- of** not give someone the time of day
- of** not see further than the end of one's nose
- of** not someone's cup of tea
- of** nothing of the kind
- of** nothing short of something
- of** nuts and bolts (of something)
- of** odour of sanctity
- of** of the first water
- of** of the old school
- of** on behalf of someone
- of** on the eve of something
- of** on the face of it
- of** on the horns of a dilemma
- of** on the spur of the moment
- of** on the strength of something
- of** on the tip of one's tongue
- of** on top of the world
- of** one's way of life
- of** open a can of worms
- of** order of the day
- of** out of kilter
- of** out of line
- of** out of line (with something)
- of** out of luck
- of** out of necessity
- of** out of one's mind
- of** out of order
- of** out of place
- of** out-of-pocket expenses
- of** out of practice
- of** out of print
- of** out of season
- of** out of service
- of** out of sorts
- of** out of stock
- of** out of the blue
- of** out of the corner of one's eye
- of** out of the frying-pan into the fire
- of** out of the question
- of** out of the running
- of** out of the swim of things
- of** out of the woods
- of** out of thin air
- of** out of this world
- of** out of turn
- of** out of work
- of** part and parcel of something
- of** parting of the ways
- of** pass the time of day (with someone)
- of** piece of cake
- of** presence of mind
- of** pretty kettle of fish
- of** pride of place
- of** pull something out of a hat
- of** pull something out of thin air
- of** put someone in mind of someone or something
- of** put someone's nose out of joint
- of** run of the mill
- of** salt of the earth
- of** scrape the bottom of the barrel
- of** see the light at the end of the tunnel
- of** see the light of day
- of** shades of someone or something
- of** show of hands
- of** (sitting) on top of the world
- of** six of one and half a dozen of the other
- of** slice of the cake
- of** slip of the tongue
- of** smell of the lamp
- of** speak of the devil
- of** speak out of turn
- of** spoil the ship for a ha'porth of tar
- of** survival of the fittest
- of** take a leaf out of someone's book
- of** take leave of one's senses

- of** take the wind out of someone's sails
- of** take the words (right) out of one's mouth
- of** take up the cudgels on behalf of someone or something
- of** talk of the town
- of** tell tales out of school
- of** thin end of the wedge
- of** time out of mind
- of** villain of the piece
- of** warm the cockles of someone's heart
- of** wish someone joy of something
- of** within an inch of doing something
- of** within an inch of one's life
- off** beg off
- off** bite someone's head off
- off** blow off steam
- off** blow the lid off (something)
- off** cheesed off
- off** chip off the old block
- off** come off second-best
- off** get off lightly
- off** get off to a flying start
- off** get someone off the hook
- off** get something off one's chest
- off** get the brush-off
- off** give someone the shirt off one's back
- off** go off at a tangent
- off** go off at half cock
- off** go off the deep end
- off** hit it off (with someone)
- off** jumping-off point
- off** let off steam
- off** let someone off (the hook)
- off** like water off a duck's back
- off** live off the fat of the land
- off** load off one's mind
- off** no skin off someone's nose
- off** off-centre
- off** off colour
- off** off the beaten track
- off** on the off-chance
- off** pack someone off (to somewhere)
- off** rained off
- off** ring off
- off** start (off) with a clean slate
- offing** in the offing
- oil** burn the midnight oil
- oil** pour oil on troubled waters
- ointment** fly in the ointment
- old** be old hat
- old** chip off the old block
- old** money for old rope
- old** of the old school
- old** old enough to be someone's father
- old** old enough to be someone's mother
- old** old hand at doing something
- old** one's old stamping-ground
- old** ripe old age
- old** same old story
- olive** hold out the olive branch
- on** be getting on for something
- on** bring down the curtain (on something)
- on** carry the weight of the world on one's shoulders
- on** catch someone on the hop
- on** clap eyes on someone or something
- on** cut one's eye-teeth on something
- on** cut one's teeth on something
- on** dance attendance on someone
- on** dead on one's or its feet
- on** dine out on something
- on** down on one's luck
- on** fall down on the job
- on** feast one's eyes (on someone or something)
- on** for days on end
- on** get a slap on the wrist
- on** get back on one's feet
- on** get by (on a shoe-string)
- on** get on the good side of someone
- on** get the show on the road
- on** getting on (in years)
- on** glut on the market
- on** go back on one's word
- on** grow on someone
- on** hang on by an eyebrow

- on** hang on by one's eyebrows
- on** hang on someone's every word
- on** hang on to someone's coat-tails
- on** Hang on to your hat!
- on** hard on someone's heels
- on** hard on the heels of something
- on** have a chip on one's shoulder
- on** have a down on someone
- on** have a good head on one's shoulders
- on** have a price on one's head
- on** have egg on one's face
- on** have one's feet on the ground
- on** have someone on a string
- on** have someone or something on
- on** have something on file
- on** have something on one's hands
- on** have something on the brain
- on** Hold on to your hat!
- on** hot on something
- on** jump on someone
- on** keen on someone or something
- on** keep one's eye on the ball
- on** keep one's feet on the ground
- on** keep someone on a string
- on** keep someone on tenterhooks
- on** keep the lid on something
- on** land on both feet
- on** land on one's feet
- on** lay something on the line
- on** lead someone (on) a merry chase
- on** lead someone (on) a merry dance
- on** lie down on the job
- on** live on borrowed time
- on** lost on someone
- on** make someone's hair stand on end
- on** new one on someone
- on** night on the town
- on** on a first-name basis (with someone)
- on** on a fool's errand
- on** on a par with someone or something
- on** on active duty
- on** on all fours
- on** on average
- on** on behalf of someone
- on** on cloud nine
- on** on first-name terms (with someone)
- on** on holiday
- on** on one's (own) head be it
- on** on one's feet
- on** on one's guard
- on** on one's honour
- on** on one's mind
- on** on one's toes
- on** on order
- on** on record
- on** on sale
- on** on second thoughts
- on** on someone's behalf
- on** on the air
- on** on the alert (for someone or something)
- on** on the cards
- on** on the dot
- on** on the eve of something
- on** on the face of it
- on** on the horns of a dilemma
- on** on the loose
- on** on the mend
- on** on the off-chance
- on** on the sly
- on** on the spot
- on** on the spur of the moment
- on** on the strength of something
- on** on the tip of one's tongue
- on** on thin ice
- on** on tiptoe
- on** on top of the world
- on** one-up (on someone)
- on** open fire (on someone)
- on** out on a limb
- on** out on parole
- on** pick on someone
- on** pin one's faith on someone or something
- on** play on something
- on** play tricks (on someone)
- on** pour cold water on something
- on** pour oil on troubled waters
- on** pride oneself on something
- on** put a brave face on it



- on** put it on  
**on** put on airs  
**on** put on one's thinking-cap  
**on** put on weight  
**on** put someone on a pedestal  
**on** put someone on the spot  
**on** put something on ice  
**on** put something on paper  
**on** put something on the back burner  
**on** quick on the draw  
**on** quick on the uptake  
**on** rest on one's laurels  
**on** ring down the curtain (on something)  
**on** roll on something  
**on** round on someone  
**on** see eye to eye (on something)  
**on** see the writing on the wall  
**on** set one back on one's heels  
**on** set someone's teeth on edge  
**on** set the world on fire  
**on** sit on one's hands  
**on** sitting on a powder keg  
**on** (sitting) on top of the world  
**on** (skating) on thin ice  
**on** splash out on something  
**on** spot on  
**on** stand on ceremony  
**on** steal a march on someone  
**on** step on someone's toes  
**on** take something on the chin  
**on** take up the cudgels on behalf of someone or something  
**on** thin on the ground  
**on** throw cold water on something  
**on** trade on something  
**on** tread on someone's toes  
**on** try it on  
**on** turn the tables (on someone)  
**on** walk on air  
**on** walk on eggs  
**on** weigh on someone's mind  
**on** wither on the vine  
**once** once and for all  
**once** once in a blue moon  
**once** once in a while  
**once** once upon a time  
**once** once-in-a-lifetime chance  
**one** as black as one is painted  
**one** bite the hand that feeds one  
**one** burn one's bridges (behind one)  
**one** carry all before one  
**one** cross a bridge before one comes to it  
**one** every time one turns around  
**one** feel it beneath one (to do something)  
**one** get what is coming to one  
**one** give as good as one gets  
**one** give one one's marching orders  
**one** go in one ear and out the other  
**one** hair of the dog (that bit one)  
**one** have a lot going for one  
**one** have one's wits about one  
**one** have one's work cut out (for one)  
**one** have something coming to one  
**one** in one ear and out the other  
**one** keep one's wits about one  
**one** lay about one  
**one** like one of the family  
**one** new one on someone  
**one** one for the record (books)  
**one** one in a hundred  
**one** one in a million  
**one** one in a thousand  
**one** one-up (on someone)  
**one** pull a fast one  
**one** put all one's eggs in one basket  
**one** put one across someone  
**one** put one in one's place  
**one** put one through one's paces  
**one** set one back on one's heels  
**one** six of one and half a dozen of the other  
**one** talk until one is blue in the face  
**one** wear more than one hat  
**only** in name only  
**only** only have eyes for someone  
**open** keep a weather eye open

**open** leave oneself wide open for something

**open** leave oneself wide open to something

**open** not open one's mouth

**open** open a can of worms

**open** open-and-shut case

**open** open book

**open** open fire (on someone)

**open** open one's heart (to someone)

**open** open Pandora's box

**open** open season for something

**open** open secret

**open** open the door to something

**open** receive someone with open arms

**open** welcome someone with open arms

**opinion** in one's opinion

**opinion** matter of opinion

**opportunity** jump at the opportunity (to do something)

**opportunity** leap at the opportunity (to do something)

**or** believe it or not

**or** (come) rain or shine

**or** either feast or famine

**or** make or break someone

**or** no ifs or buts about it

**or** rain or shine

**or** sink or swim

**or** take someone down a peg (or two)

**or** without rhyme or reason

**order** give one one's marching orders

**order** just what the doctor ordered

**order** make something to order

**order** on order

**order** order of the day

**order** out of order

**order** put one's house in order

**other** go in one ear and out the other

**other** have other fish to fry

**other** in one ear and out the other

**other** in other words

**other** look the other way

**other** other way round

**other** six of one and half a dozen of the other

**other** turn the other cheek

**other** with every other breath

**our** sink our differences

**out** come out in the wash

**out** come out of nowhere

**out** come out of one's shell

**out** cry one's eyes out

**out** dine out on something

**out** eat one's heart out

**out** eat out of someone's hands

**out** eat someone out of house and home

**out** get one's nose out of someone's business

**out** get out of the wrong side of the bed

**out** get something out of one's system

**out** go in one ear and out the other

**out** have an out

**out** have one's work cut out (for one)

**out** have something out (with someone)

**out** hold out the olive branch

**out** in one ear and out the other

**out** jump out of one's skin

**out** keep an eye out (for someone or something)

**out** laugh something out of court

**out** let something slip (out)

**out** let the cat out of the bag

**out** like a bolt out of the blue

**out** like a fish out of water

**out** make a mountain out of a molehill

**out** odd man out

**out** out of kilter

**out** out of line

**out** out of line (with something)

**out** out of luck

**out** out of necessity

**out** out of one's mind

- out** out of order  
**out** out of place  
**out** out-of-pocket expenses  
**out** out of practice  
**out** out of print  
**out** out of season  
**out** out of service  
**out** out of sorts  
**out** out of stock  
**out** out of the blue  
**out** out of the corner of one's eye  
**out** out of the frying-pan into the fire  
**out** out of the question  
**out** out of the running  
**out** out of the swim of things  
**out** out of the woods  
**out** out of thin air  
**out** out of this world  
**out** out of turn  
**out** out of work  
**out** out on a limb  
**out** out on parole  
**out** packed out  
**out** played out  
**out** pull out all the stops  
**out** pull something out of a hat  
**out** pull something out of thin air  
**out** pull the rug out from under someone('s feet)  
**out** put out (some) feelers  
**out** put someone or something out to pasture  
**out** put someone's nose out of joint  
**out** speak out of turn  
**out** splash out on something  
**out** stick it out  
**out** stick one's neck out  
**out** stick out like a sore thumb  
**out** take a leaf out of someone's book  
**out** take the wind out of someone's sails  
**out** take the words (right) out of one's mouth  
**out** tell tales out of school  
**out** time out of mind  
**out** wear out one's welcome
- over** all over bar the shouting  
**over** caught over a barrel  
**over** cry over spilled milk  
**over** go over someone's head  
**over** go over something with a fine-tooth comb  
**over** hand over fist  
**over** hand over hand  
**over** haul someone over the coals  
**over** have something hanging over one's head  
**over** head over heels in love (with someone)  
**over** in over one's head  
**over** lord it over someone  
**over** over and done with  
**over** over my dead body  
**over** over the hill  
**over** over the hump  
**over** over the odds  
**over** over the top  
**over** paper over the cracks (in something)  
**over** pull the wool over someone's eyes  
**over** put something over  
**over** ride roughshod over someone or something  
**over** skate over something  
**over** tick over
- owl** night-owl
- own** according to one's (own) lights  
**own** afraid of one's own shadow  
**own** blow one's own trumpet  
**own** dig one's own grave  
**own** dose of one's own medicine  
**own** feather one's (own) nest  
**own** find one's own level  
**own** foul one's own nest  
**own** hold one's own  
**own** in one's (own) backyard  
**own** in one's own time  
**own** keep one's own counsel  
**own** mind one's own business  
**own** not able to call one's time one's own  
**own** on one's (own) head be it  
**own** paddle one's own canoe

- own** sign one's own death-warrant  
**own** stew in one's own juice  
**P's** mind one's P's and Q's  
**pace** put one through one's paces  
**pace** show one's paces  
**pack** pack someone off (to somewhere)  
**pack** pack them in  
**pack** packed out  
**pack** send someone packing  
**paddle** paddle one's own canoe  
**paid** put paid to something  
**pain** pain in the neck  
**paint** as black as one is painted  
**pale** beyond the pale  
**pale** pale around the gills  
**palm** have an itching palm  
**palm** have an itchy palm  
**pan** flash in the pan  
**pan** out of the frying-pan into the fire  
**Pandora** open Pandora's box  
**pants** by the seat of one's pants  
**pants** have ants in one's pants  
**paper** paper over the cracks (in something)  
**paper** put something on paper  
**par** on a par with someone or something  
**par** par for the course  
**paradise** fool's paradise  
**parcel** part and parcel of something  
**pare** cheese-paring  
**paring** cheese-paring  
**parole** out on parole  
**parrot** parrot-fashion  
**part** in part  
**part** part and parcel of something  
**part** parting of the ways  
**party** life (and soul) of the party  
**party** party line  
**party** throw a party (for someone)  
**pass** come to a pretty pass  
**pass** pass as someone or something  
**pass** pass muster  
**pass** pass the buck
- pass** pass the hat round  
**pass** pass the time of day (with someone)  
**pass** ships that pass in the night  
**past** past it  
**past** past someone's or something's best  
**past** past someone's or something's sell-by date  
**pasture** (fresh fields and) pastures new  
**pasture** put someone or something out to pasture  
**path** lead someone up the garden path  
**patience** try someone's patience  
**Paul** rob Peter to pay Paul  
**pause** give someone pause for thought  
**pay** pay an arm and a leg (for something)  
**pay** pay lip-service (to something)  
**pay** pay one's debt to society  
**pay** pay one's dues  
**pay** pay someone a back-handed compliment  
**pay** pay someone a compliment  
**pay** pay the earth  
**pay** pay the piper  
**pay** pay through the nose (for something)  
**pay** rob Peter to pay Paul  
**peace** hold one's peace  
**peak** in the peak of condition  
**pedestal** put someone on a pedestal  
**peg** square peg in a round hole  
**peg** take someone down a peg (or two)  
**penchant** have a penchant for doing something  
**penny** cost a pretty penny  
**penny** not worth a penny  
**penny** spend a penny  
**penny** ten a penny  
**penny** two a penny  
**people** knock people's heads together  
**person** feel like a new person

- Peter** rob Peter to pay Paul  
**pick** have a bone to pick (with someone)  
**pick** pick a quarrel (with someone)  
**pick** pick and choose  
**pick** pick holes in something  
**pick** pick on someone  
**pickle** in a (pretty) pickle  
**picture** put someone in the picture  
**pie** eat humble pie  
**pie** have one's finger in the pie  
**pie** pie in the sky  
**piece** give someone a piece of one's mind  
**piece** piece of cake  
**piece** villain of the piece  
**pig** buy a pig in a poke  
**pig** pig(gy)-in-the-middle  
**pig** pigs might fly  
**pig** serve as a guinea pig  
**pigeon** put the cat among the pigeons  
**pigeon** set the cat among the pigeons  
**piggy** pig(gy)-in-the-middle  
**pikestaff** (as) plain as a pikestaff  
**pile** pile in(to something)  
**pill** bitter pill to swallow  
**pill** sugar the pill  
**pill** sweeten the pill  
**pillar** from pillar to post  
**pin** pin one's faith on someone or something  
**pin** pins and needles  
**pinch** at a pinch  
**pinch** pinch and scrape  
**pink** in the pink (of condition)  
**pipe** pipe down  
**pipe** pipe-dream  
**pipe** Put that in your pipe and smoke it!  
**piper** pay the piper  
**pipped** pipped at the post  
**pit** pit someone or something against someone or something  
**pitch** (as) black as pitch  
**pitch** make a pitch for someone or something  
**pitch** pitch in (and help)  
**pity** more's the pity  
**place** in place  
**place** know one's place  
**place** out of place  
**place** pride of place  
**place** put one in one's place  
**plague** avoid someone or something like the plague  
**plain** (as) plain as a pikestaff  
**plain** in plain English  
**plain** plain sailing  
**plain** put something plainly  
**plank** (as) thick as two short planks  
**play** foul play  
**play** game at which two can play  
**play** horse-play  
**play** play both ends (against the middle)  
**play** play cat and mouse (with someone)  
**play** play devil's advocate  
**play** play fair  
**play** play fast and loose (with someone or something)  
**play** play gooseberry  
**play** play hard to get  
**play** play havoc with someone or something  
**play** play into someone's hands  
**play** play on something  
**play** play one's cards close to one's chest  
**play** play one's cards right  
**play** play one's trump card  
**play** play politics  
**play** play possum  
**play** play safe  
**play** play second fiddle (to someone)  
**play** play the field  
**play** play the fool  
**play** play the game  
**play** play the market  
**play** play to the gallery  
**play** play tricks (on someone)

- play** play up  
**play** play up to someone  
**play** play with fire  
**play** played out  
**play** two can play at that game  
**please** (as) pleased as Punch  
**please** less than pleased  
**plough** put one's hand to the plough  
**pluck** pluck up (one's) courage  
**pocket** have someone in one's pocket  
**pocket** out-of-pocket expenses  
**poetic** poetic justice  
**point** have a low boiling-point  
**point** jumping-off point  
**point** make a point of (doing) something  
**point** miss the point  
**point** point the finger at someone  
**point** touch a sore point  
**poke** buy a pig in a poke  
**poke** poke fun (at someone or something)  
**pole** be poles apart  
**politics** play politics  
**port** any port in a storm  
**position** jockey for position  
**possum** play possum  
**post** by return post  
**post** from pillar to post  
**post** keep someone posted  
**post** pipped at the post  
**pot** pot calling the kettle black  
**pound** pound for pound  
**pound** pound the streets  
**pour** pour cold water on something  
**pour** pour money down the drain  
**pour** pour oil on troubled waters  
**powder** sitting on a powder keg  
**power** have no staying-power  
**power** power behind the throne  
**power** powers that be  
**practice** out of practice  
**practice** sharp practice  
**practise** practise what you preach  
**praise** damn someone or something with faint praise  
**praise** praise someone or something to the skies  
**praise** sing someone's praises  
**preach** practise what you preach  
**preach** preach to the converted  
**presence** presence of mind  
**press** press-gang someone into doing something  
**pretty** come to a pretty pass  
**pretty** cost a pretty penny  
**pretty** in a (pretty) pickle  
**pretty** pretty kettle of fish  
**pretty** sitting pretty  
**price** have a price on one's head  
**prick** prick up one's ears  
**pride** pride of place  
**pride** pride oneself on something  
**pride** swallow one's pride  
**prime** prime mover  
**print** out of print  
**probability** in all probability  
**progress** in progress  
**promise** give something a lick and a promise  
**proper** go through the proper channels  
**proud** do someone proud  
**proud** house-proud  
**public** in the public eye  
**pull** pull a face  
**pull** pull a fast one  
**pull** pull one's punches  
**pull** pull one's socks up  
**pull** pull oneself together  
**pull** pull oneself up by one's bootstraps  
**pull** pull out all the stops  
**pull** pull someone's leg  
**pull** pull something out of a hat  
**pull** pull something out of thin air  
**pull** pull strings  
**pull** pull the rug out from under someone('s feet)  
**pull** pull the wool over someone's eyes  
**Punch** (as) pleased as Punch  
**punch** pull one's punches  
**punishment** glutton for punishment

- pup** sell someone a pup  
**push** push one's luck  
**put** put a brave face on it  
**put** put all one's eggs in one basket  
**put** put ideas into someone's head  
**put** put in a good word for someone  
**put** put it on  
**put** put on airs  
**put** put on one's thinking-cap  
**put** put on weight  
**put** put one across someone  
**put** put one in one's place  
**put** put one through one's paces  
**put** put one's best foot forward  
**put** put one's foot down (about something)  
**put** put one's foot in it  
**put** put one's hand to the plough  
**put** put one's house in order  
**put** put one's oar in  
**put** put one's shoulder to the wheel  
**put** put out (some) feelers  
**put** put paid to something  
**put** put someone in mind of someone or something  
**put** put someone in the picture  
**put** put someone on a pedestal  
**put** put someone on the spot  
**put** put someone or something out to pasture  
**put** put someone through the wringer  
**put** put someone to shame  
**put** put someone to the test  
**put** put someone up to something  
**put** put someone wise to someone or something  
**put** put someone's nose out of joint  
**put** put something on ice  
**put** put something on paper  
**put** put something on the back burner  
**put** put something over  
**put** put something plainly
- put** put something right  
**put** Put that in your pipe and smoke it!  
**put** put the cart before the horse  
**put** put the cat among the pigeons  
**put** put two and two together  
**put** put up a (brave) front  
**put** put upon someone  
**put** put words into someone's mouth  
**put** Put your money where your mouth is!  
**putty** putty in someone's hands  
**Q's** mind one's P's and Q's  
**quake** quake in one's shoes  
**quandary** in a quandary  
**quarrel** pick a quarrel (with someone)  
**Queer** in Queer Street  
**question** out of the question  
**question** vexed question  
**queue** queue up  
**quick** cut someone to the quick  
**quick** quick on the draw  
**quick** quick on the uptake  
**quid** quids in with someone  
**quiet** (as) quiet as the grave  
**race** race against time  
**race** rat race  
**rack** go to rack and ruin  
**rack** rack one's brains  
**rag** from rags to riches  
**rag** in rags  
**ragged** run someone ragged  
**rain** (come) rain or shine  
**rain** rain cats and dogs  
**rain** rain or shine  
**rain** rained off  
**rain** save something for a rainy day  
**raise** raise a few eyebrows  
**raise** raise one's sights  
**rake** (as) thin as a rake  
**rally** rally round someone or something  
**rant** rant and rave  
**rap** rap someone's knuckles  
**rare** rarin' to go

- raring** rarin' to go  
**rat** rat race  
**rate** at a rate of knots  
**rave** rant and rave  
**raw** in the raw  
**read** read between the lines  
**read** read someone like a book  
**read** read someone the Riot Act  
**read** read someone's mind  
**read** read something into something  
**read** take something as read  
**rear** rear its ugly head  
**reason** listen to reason  
**reason** lose one's reason  
**reason** stand to reason  
**reason** without rhyme or reason  
**receive** receive someone with open arms  
**record** for the record  
**record** on record  
**record** one for the record (books)  
**record** set the record straight  
**red** draw a red herring  
**red** red herring  
**red** red tape  
**red** see red  
**redbrick** redbrick university  
**regain** regain one's composure  
**rest** rest on one's laurels  
**retreat** beat a (hasty) retreat  
**return** by return post  
**return** return ticket  
**rhyme** without rhyme or reason  
**riches** from rags to riches  
**riddance** good riddance (to bad rubbish)  
**ride** let something ride  
**ride** ride roughshod over someone or something  
**ride** riding for a fall  
**right** give one's right arm (for someone or something)  
**right** have the right of way  
**right** hit someone (right) between the eyes  
**right** in one's right mind  
**right** left, right, and centre  
**right** play one's cards right  
**right** put something right  
**right** right up someone's street  
**right** set something right  
**right** strike the right note  
**right** take the words (right) out of one's mouth  
**ring** have a familiar ring  
**ring** ring a bell  
**ring** ring down the curtain (on something)  
**ring** ring in the New Year  
**ring** ring off  
**ring** ring someone or something up  
**ring** ring the changes  
**ring** ring true  
**ring** ring up someone or something  
**riot** read someone the Riot Act  
**riot** run riot  
**ripe** ripe old age  
**ripe** when the time is ripe  
**rise** rise and shine  
**rise** rise to the occasion  
**risk** risk one's neck (to do something)  
**road** get the show on the road  
**road** middle-of-the-road  
**road** road-hog  
**rob** rob Peter to pay Paul  
**robbery** daylight robbery  
**Robinson** before you can say Jack Robinson  
**rock** hit rock bottom  
**rock** rock the boat  
**roll** get the ball rolling  
**roll** heads will roll  
**roll** keep the ball rolling  
**roll** roll on something  
**roll** set the ball rolling  
**roll** start the ball rolling  
**Rome** fiddle while Rome burns  
**romp** romp home  
**roost** come home to roost  
**roost** rule the roost  
**root** rooted to the spot  
**rope** know the ropes  
**rope** learn the ropes  
**rope** money for old rope



- rose** bed of roses  
**rote** learn something by rote  
**rough** rough it  
**rough** take the rough with the smooth  
**roughshod** ride roughshod over someone or something  
**round** come round  
**round** go round in circles  
**round** other way round  
**round** pass the hat round  
**round** rally round someone or something  
**round** round on someone  
**round** square peg in a round hole  
**row** kick up a row  
**rub** rub along with someone  
**rub** rub salt in the wound  
**rub** rub shoulders (with someone)  
**rub** rub someone up the wrong way  
**rub** rub someone's nose in it  
**rubbish** good riddance (to bad rubbish)  
**Rubicon** cross the Rubicon  
**ruffle** ruffle someone's feathers  
**rug** pull the rug out from under someone('s feet)  
**ruin** go to rack and ruin  
**rule** hard-and-fast rule  
**rule** rule the roost  
**run** dry run  
**run** get a good run for one's money  
**run** in the long run  
**run** make someone's blood run cold  
**run** out of the running  
**run** run a fever  
**run** run a temperature  
**run** run a tight ship  
**run** run against the clock  
**run** run for it  
**run** run for one's life  
**run** run high  
**run** run in the family  
**run** run of the mill  
**run** run riot
- run** run someone or something to earth  
**run** run someone ragged  
**run** run to seed  
**run** run wild  
**runaround** get the runaround  
**rush** fools rush in (where angels fear to tread)  
**rush** in a mad rush  
**rush** rush one's fences  
**sacred** sacred cow  
**safe** (as) safe as houses  
**safe** play safe  
**safe** safe and sound  
**said** no sooner said than done  
**sail** plain sailing  
**sail** sail through something  
**sail** sail under false colours  
**sail** take the wind out of someone's sails  
**sale** for sale  
**sale** on sale  
**salt** rub salt in the wound  
**salt** salt of the earth  
**same** by the same token  
**same** cast in the same mould  
**same** in the same boat  
**same** in the same breath  
**same** not in the same league as someone or something  
**same** same old story  
**same** speak the same language  
**same** tarred with the same brush  
**sanctity** air of sanctity  
**sanctity** odour of sanctity  
**sandboy** (as) happy as a sandboy  
**save** save one's breath  
**save** save someone's skin  
**save** save something for a rainy day  
**save** saved by the bell  
**save** scrimp and save  
**say** before you can say Jack Robinson  
**say** go so far as to say something  
**say** goes without saying  
**say** have a say (in something)  
**say** say something under one's breath

- say** say the word  
**scale** tip the scales at something  
**scare** scare someone stiff  
**school** of the old school  
**school** tell tales out of school  
**scrape** bow and scrape  
**scrape** pinch and scrape  
**scrape** scrape the bottom of the barrel  
**scratch** make something from scratch  
**scratch** not up to scratch  
**scratch** scratch someone's back  
**scratch** scratch the surface  
**screw** screw up one's courage  
**scrimp** scrimp and save  
**sea** (all) at sea (about something)  
**seal** signed, sealed, and delivered  
**seam** fall apart at the seams  
**search** search something with a fine-tooth comb  
**season** open season for something  
**season** out of season  
**season** silly season  
**seat** by the seat of one's pants  
**second** come off second-best  
**second** get one's second wind  
**second** in (just) a second  
**second** in a split second  
**second** in one's second childhood  
**second** on second thoughts  
**second** play second fiddle (to someone)  
**second** second nature to someone  
**second** second to none  
**secret** open secret  
**see** can't see beyond the end of one's nose  
**see** can't see one's hand in front of one's face  
**see** not able to see the wood for the trees  
**see** not see further than the end of one's nose  
**see** see double  
**see** see eye to eye (about something)  
**see** see eye to eye (on something)  
**see** see red  
**see** see someone home  
**see** see something with half an eye  
**see** see stars  
**see** see the light  
**see** see the light at the end of the tunnel  
**see** see the light of day  
**see** see the writing on the wall  
**see** seeing is believing  
**seed** go to seed  
**seed** run to seed  
**seen** have seen better days  
**sell** past someone's or something's sell-by date  
**sell** sell someone a pup  
**sell** sell someone or something short  
**send** send someone or something up  
**send** send someone packing  
**send** send someone to Coventry  
**sense** horse sense  
**sense** in a sense  
**sense** sixth sense  
**sense** take leave of one's senses  
**separate** separate the men from the boys  
**separate** separate the sheep from the goats  
**separate** separate the wheat from the chaff  
**serve** serve as a guinea pig  
**serve** serve notice  
**service** out of service  
**service** pay lip-service (to something)  
**set** dead set against someone or something  
**set** not set foot somewhere  
**set** set foot somewhere  
**set** set great store by someone or something  
**set** set one back on one's heels  
**set** set someone straight  
**set** set someone's teeth on edge  
**set** set something right  
**set** set the ball rolling

- set** set the cat among the pigeons  
**set** set the record straight  
**set** set the table  
**set** set the world on fire  
**set** set up shop somewhere  
**set** set upon someone or something  
**seven** at sixes and sevens  
**seven** in seventh heaven  
**shade** shades of someone or something  
**shadow** afraid of one's own shadow  
**shadow** beyond the shadow of a doubt  
**shadow** worn to a shadow  
**shaggy** shaggy-dog story  
**shake** in two shakes of a lamb's tail  
**shake** shake in one's shoes  
**shame** hide one's face in shame  
**shame** put someone to shame  
**shape** lick something into shape  
**shape** whip something into shape  
**share** lion's share (of something)  
**share** share and share alike  
**sharp** sharp practice  
**sheep** black sheep (of the family)  
**sheep** separate the sheep from the goats  
**shell** come out of one's shell  
**shift** shift one's ground  
**shine** (come) rain or shine  
**shine** rain or shine  
**shine** rise and shine  
**ship** run a tight ship  
**ship** ships that pass in the night  
**ship** spoil the ship for a ha'porth of tar  
**shipshape** shipshape (and Bristol fashion)  
**shirk** shirk one's duty  
**shirt** give someone the shirt off one's back  
**shock** get the shock of one's life  
**shoe** fill dead men's shoes  
**shoe** fill someone's shoes  
**shoe** get by (on a shoe-string)  
**shoe** quake in one's shoes  
**shoe** shake in one's shoes  
**shoe** step into dead men's shoes  
**shoot** whole (bang) shooting match  
**shop** bull in a china shop  
**shop** set up shop somewhere  
**shop** shut up shop  
**shop** talking-shop  
**short** (as) thick as two short planks  
**short** cut a long story short  
**short** nothing short of something  
**short** sell someone or something short  
**short** short and sweet  
**shot** give something one's best shot  
**shot** not by a long shot  
**shot** shot across the bows  
**shot** shot in the arm  
**shot** shot in the dark  
**shot** shot-gun wedding  
**shoulder** carry the weight of the world on one's shoulders  
**shoulder** have a chip on one's shoulder  
**shoulder** have a good head on one's shoulders  
**shoulder** head and shoulders above someone or something  
**shoulder** put one's shoulder to the wheel  
**shoulder** rub shoulders (with someone)  
**shoulder** straight from the shoulder  
**shout** all over bar the shouting  
**shove** shove one's oar in  
**show** get the show on the road  
**show** make a great show of something  
**show** not show one's face  
**show** show of hands  
**show** show one's hand  
**show** show one's paces  
**show** show one's teeth  
**show** show oneself in one's true colours  
**show** show the flag

**show** show the white feather  
**show** steal the show  
**shut** keep one's mouth shut  
(about someone or something)  
**shut** open-and-shut case  
**shut** shut up shop  
**shy** fight shy of something  
**side** be a thorn in someone's side  
**side** get on the good side of  
someone  
**side** get out of the wrong side of  
the bed  
**side** keep one's side of the  
bargain  
**sight** love at first sight  
**sight** lower one's sights  
**sight** raise one's sights  
**sign** sign one's own death-warrant  
**sign** signed, sealed, and delivered  
**silly** silly season  
**silver** born with a silver spoon in  
one's mouth  
**since** since the year dot  
**sing** sing someone's praises  
**single** (in) single file  
**sink** everything but the kitchen  
sink  
**sink** sink or swim  
**sink** sink our differences  
**sinker** swallow something hook,  
line, and sinker  
**sit** like a sitting duck  
**sit** like sitting ducks  
**sit** sit (idly) by  
**sit** sit at someone's feet  
**sit** sit on one's hands  
**sit** sitting on a powder keg  
**sit** (sitting) on top of the world  
**sit** sitting pretty  
**six** at sixes and sevens  
**six** six of one and half a dozen of  
the other  
**six** sixth sense  
**size** cut someone down to size  
**skate** skate over something  
**skate** (skating) on thin ice  
**skeleton** skeleton in the cupboard  
**skin** all skin and bones  
**skin** by the skin of one's teeth

**skin** get under someone's skin  
**skin** jump out of one's skin  
**skin** no skin off someone's nose  
**skin** nothing but skin and bones  
**skin** save someone's skin  
**skin** thick-skinned  
**skin** thin-skinned  
**sky** go sky-high  
**sky** pie in the sky  
**sky** praise someone or something  
to the skies  
**slap** get a slap on the wrist  
**slate** slate something  
**slate** start (off) with a clean slate  
**sleep** not sleep a wink  
**sleeve** have something up one's  
sleeve  
**sleeve** laugh up one's sleeve  
**slice** slice of the cake  
**slide** let something slide  
**slip** let something slip (out)  
**slip** let the chance slip by  
**slip** slip of the tongue  
**sly** on the sly  
**small** be thankful for small  
mercies  
**small** small hours  
**smell** smell of the lamp  
**smoke** Put that in your pipe and  
smoke it!  
**smooth** take the rough with the  
smooth  
**snag** hit a snag  
**snake** snake in the grass  
**snook** cock a snook at someone  
**snowball** have a snowball's  
chance in hell  
**so** go so far as to say something  
**so** never had it so good  
**society** pay one's debt to society  
**socks** pull one's socks up  
**soft** have a soft spot for someone  
or something  
**some** put out (some) feelers  
**song** buy something for a song  
**song** swan-song  
**soon** no sooner said than done  
**sore** stick out like a sore thumb  
**sore** touch a sore point

- sore** touch a sore spot  
**sorrow** drown one's sorrows  
**sort** out of sorts  
**sort** sort the men from the boys  
**sought** much sought after  
**soul** keep body and soul together  
**soul** life (and soul) of the party  
**soul** with all one's heart and soul  
**sound** (as) sound as a bell  
**sound** safe and sound  
**soup** in the soup  
**spade** call a spade a spade  
**span** spick and span  
**spanner** throw a spanner in the works  
**spare** in one's spare time  
**speak** speak of the devil  
**speak** speak one's mind  
**speak** speak out of turn  
**speak** speak the same language  
**speech** maiden speech  
**spend** spend a penny  
**spick** spick and span  
**spike** spike someone's guns  
**spill** cry over spilled milk  
**spill** spill the beans  
**spin** make someone's head spin  
**splash** splash out on something  
**spleen** vent one's spleen  
**split** in a split second  
**split** split hairs  
**split** split the difference  
**spoil** spoil the ship for a ha'porth of tar  
**spoon** born with a silver spoon in one's mouth  
**spoon** spoon-feed  
**sporting** sporting chance  
**spot** have a soft spot for someone or something  
**spot** in a (tight) spot  
**spot** on the spot  
**spot** put someone on the spot  
**spot** rooted to the spot  
**spot** spot on  
**spot** touch a sore spot  
**spread** spread oneself too thin  
**spring** no spring chicken  
**spur** on the spur of the moment  
**square** square deal  
**square** square meal  
**square** square peg in a round hole  
**squib** damp squib  
**stab** take a stab at something  
**stack** stack the cards (against someone or something)  
**stage** in a stage whisper  
**stamp** one's old stamping-ground  
**stand** make someone's hair stand on end  
**stand** stand a chance  
**stand** stand corrected  
**stand** stand down  
**stand** stand on ceremony  
**stand** stand someone in good stead  
**stand** stand to reason  
**stand** standing joke  
**star** see stars  
**star** thank one's lucky stars  
**start** by fits and starts  
**start** get a start  
**start** get off to a flying start  
**start** start (off) with a clean slate  
**start** start the ball rolling  
**state** fine state of affairs  
**station** above one's station  
**stay** have no staying-power  
**stay** stay the distance  
**stead** stand someone in good stead  
**steal** steal a march on someone  
**steal** steal someone's thunder  
**steal** steal the show  
**steam** blow off steam  
**steam** full steam ahead  
**steam** let off steam  
**stem** from stem to stern  
**step** step in(to the breach)  
**step** step into dead men's shoes  
**step** step on someone's toes  
**stern** from stem to stern  
**stew** in a stew (about someone or something)  
**stew** stew in one's own juice  
**stick** one's words stick in one's throat

**stick** something sticks in one's  
craw

**stick** stick it out

**stick** stick one's neck out

**stick** stick one's oar in

**stick** stick out like a sore thumb

**stick** stick to one's guns

**stiff** keep a stiff upper lip

**stiff** scare someone stiff

**stir** stir up a hornets' nest

**stitch** keep someone in stitches

**stock** have something in stock

**stock** in stock

**stock** lock, stock, and barrel

**stock** out of stock

**stomach** get butterflies in one's  
stomach

**stomach** one's eyes are bigger  
than one's stomach

**stone** have a heart of stone

**stone** leave no stone unturned

**stool** fall between two stools

**stop** pull out all the stops

**store** have something in store (for  
someone)

**store** set great store by someone  
or something

**storm** any port in a storm

**storm** storm in a teacup

**story** cock-and-bull story

**story** cut a long story short

**story** same old story

**story** shaggy-dog story

**straight** give it to someone  
straight

**straight** keep a straight face

**straight** set someone straight

**straight** set the record straight

**straight** straight away

**straight** straight from the  
shoulder

**straw** clutch at straws

**straw** straw in the wind

**stream** change horses in mid-  
stream

**Street** in Queer Street

**street** pound the streets

**street** right up someone's  
street

**strength** on the strength of  
something

**stretch** at full stretch

**stretch** stretch one's legs

**stride** take something in one's  
stride

**strike** strike a bargain

**strike** strike a chord

**strike** strike a happy medium

**strike** strike the right note

**strike** strike while the iron is hot

**string** get by (on a shoe-string)

**string** have someone on a string

**string** keep someone on a string

**string** pull strings

**string** tied to one's mother's  
apron-strings

**stuff** kids' stuff

**stuff** stuff and nonsense

**stumble** stumbling-block

**style** cramp someone's style

**suck** teach one's grandmother to  
suck eggs

**sugar** sugar the pill

**suit** cut one's coat to suit one's  
cloth

**suit** follow suit

**suit** in one's birthday suit

**suit** suit someone down to the  
ground

**suit** suit someone to a T

**sun** catch the sun

**surface** scratch the surface

**survival** survival of the fittest

**swallow** bitter pill to swallow

**swallow** look like the cat that  
swallowed the canary

**swallow** look like the cat that  
swallowed the cream

**swallow** swallow one's pride

**swallow** swallow something hook,  
line, and sinker

**swan** swan around

**swan** swan-song

**sweat** by the sweat of one's brow

**sweep** make a clean sweep

**sweep** sweep something under  
the carpet

**sweet** have a sweet tooth

- sweet** short and sweet  
**sweet** sweeten the pill  
**swim** in the swim (of things)  
**swim** make someone's head swim  
**swim** out of the swim of things  
**swim** sink or swim  
**swim** swim against the tide  
**swing** get into full swing  
**swing** get into the swing of things  
**swing** in full swing  
**sword** cross swords (with someone)  
**sympathy** extend one's sympathy (to someone)  
**system** get something out of one's system  
**T** suit someone to a T  
**table** lay the table  
**table** set the table  
**table** turn the tables (on someone)  
**tack** get down to brass tacks  
**tail** can't make head nor tail of someone or something  
**tail** hang on to someone's coat-tails  
**tail** in two shakes of a lamb's tail  
**tail** tail wagging the dog  
**take** as a duck takes to water  
**take** do a double take  
**take** have what it takes  
**take** not take no for an answer  
**take** take a leaf out of someone's book  
**take** take a stab at something  
**take** take leave of one's senses  
**take** take one's medicine  
**take** take someone down a peg (or two)  
**take** take someone to task  
**take** take someone under one's wing  
**take** take something as read  
**take** take something in one's stride  
**take** take something lying down  
**take** take something on the chin  
**take** take something to heart  
**take** take the rough with the smooth  
**take** take the wind out of someone's sails  
**take** take the words (right) out of one's mouth  
**take** take up the cudgels on behalf of someone or something  
**tale** tell tales out of school  
**talk** have a heart-to-heart (talk)  
**talk** money talks  
**talk** talk nineteen to the dozen  
**talk** talk of the town  
**talk** talk through one's hat  
**talk** talk until one is blue in the face  
**talk** talking-shop  
**tangent** go off at a tangent  
**tape** red tape  
**tar** spoil the ship for a ha'porth of tar  
**tar** tarred with the same brush  
**task** take someone to task  
**taste** leave a bad taste in someone's mouth  
**tat** give someone tit for tat  
**tea** not someone's cup of tea  
**teach** teach one's grandmother to suck eggs  
**teacup** storm in a teacup  
**teeth** armed to the teeth  
**teeth** by the skin of one's teeth  
**teeth** cut one's eye-teeth on something  
**teeth** cut one's teeth on something  
**teeth** cut teeth  
**teeth** get one's teeth into something  
**teeth** grit one's teeth  
**teeth** lie through one's teeth  
**teeth** set someone's teeth on edge  
**teeth** show one's teeth  
**telegraph** bush telegraph  
**tell** Tell it to the marines.  
**tell** tell tales out of school  
**temper** lose one's temper  
**temperature** run a temperature

**ten** ten a penny  
**tenterhook** keep someone on tenterhooks  
**term** contradiction in terms  
**term** on first-name terms (with someone)  
**test** put someone to the test  
**tether** at the end of one's tether  
**than** holier-than-thou  
**than** in less than no time  
**than** less than pleased  
**than** no sooner said than done  
**than** not see further than the end of one's nose  
**than** one's eyes are bigger than one's stomach  
**than** wear more than one hat  
**thank** thank one's lucky stars  
**thankful** be thankful for small mercies  
**that** bite the hand that feeds one  
**that** hair of the dog (that bit one)  
**that** look like the cat that swallowed the canary  
**that** look like the cat that swallowed the cream  
**that** powers that be  
**that** Put that in your pipe and smoke it!  
**that** ships that pass in the night  
**that** two can play at that game  
**them** pack them in  
**thick** (as) thick as thieves  
**thick** (as) thick as two short planks  
**thick** thick and fast  
**thick** thick-skinned  
**thick** through thick and thin  
**thief** (as) thick as thieves  
**thieves** (as) thick as thieves  
**thin** (as) thin as a rake  
**thin** have a thin time (of it)  
**thin** on thin ice  
**thin** out of thin air  
**thin** pull something out of thin air  
**thin** (skating) on thin ice  
**thin** spread oneself too thin  
**thin** thin end of the wedge  
**thin** thin on the ground

**thin** thin-skinned  
**thin** through thick and thin  
**thin** vanish into thin air  
**thing** get into the swing of things  
**thing** in the swim (of things)  
**thing** in thing (to do)  
**thing** know a thing or two (about someone or something)  
**thing** out of the swim of things  
**think** have another think coming  
**think** put on one's thinking-cap  
**this** in this day and age  
**this** not long for this world  
**this** out of this world  
**Thomas** doubting Thomas  
**thorn** be a thorn in someone's side  
**thou** holier-than-thou  
**thought** food for thought  
**thought** give someone pause for thought  
**thought** lose one's train of thought  
**thought** lost in thought  
**thought** on second thoughts  
**thousand** one in a thousand  
**thread** hang by a thread  
**throat** get a lump in one's throat  
**throat** jump down someone's throat  
**throat** one's words stick in one's throat  
**throne** power behind the throne  
**through** go through something with a fine-tooth comb  
**through** go through the motions  
**through** go through the proper channels  
**through** have been through the mill  
**through** lie through one's teeth  
**through** pay through the nose (for something)  
**through** put one through one's paces  
**through** put someone through the wringer  
**through** sail through something  
**through** talk through one's hat



- through** through hell and high water
- through** through thick and thin
- through** win through
- throw** throw a fit
- throw** throw a party (for someone)
- throw** throw a spanner in the works
- throw** throw caution to the winds
- throw** throw cold water on something
- throw** throw down the gauntlet
- throw** throw good money after bad
- throw** throw in one's hand
- throw** throw the book at someone
- thrust** cut and thrust
- thumb** all thumbs
- thumb** have someone under one's thumb
- thumb** stick out like a sore thumb
- thumb** thumb a lift
- thumb** thumb one's nose at someone or something
- thunder** steal someone's thunder
- tick** tick over
- ticket** return ticket
- tickle** tickle someone's fancy
- tide** swim against the tide
- tide** turn the tide
- tie** tie someone in knots
- tie** tie the knot
- tie** tied to one's mother's apron-strings
- tight** in a (tight) spot
- tight** run a tight ship
- tighten** tighten one's belt
- tightrope** walk a tightrope
- till** have one's hand in the till
- till** till the cows come home
- time** bide one's time
- time** every time one turns around
- time** find time to catch one's breath
- time** get time to catch one's breath
- time** hardly have time to breathe
- time** have a thin time (of it)
- time** have the time of one's life
- time** in less than no time
- time** in one's own time
- time** in one's spare time
- time** in the nick of time
- time** kill time
- time** live on borrowed time
- time** make good time
- time** make up for lost time
- time** not able to call one's time one's own
- time** not give someone the time of day
- time** once upon a time
- time** pass the time of day (with someone)
- time** race against time
- time** time out of mind
- time** when the time is ripe
- tip** on the tip of one's tongue
- tip** tip someone the wink
- tip** tip the scales at something
- tiptoe** on tiptoe
- tit** give someone tit for tat
- to** according to one's (own) lights
- to** (all) Greek to me
- to** all to the good
- to** armed to the teeth
- to** as a duck takes to water
- to** back to the drawing-board
- to** bitter pill to swallow
- to** break the news (to someone)
- to** bring something home to someone
- to** bring something to a head
- to** bring something to light
- to** can't hold a candle to someone
- to** cause tongues to wag
- to** chilled to the bone
- to** chilled to the marrow
- to** close one's eyes to something
- to** come down to earth
- to** come home to roost
- to** come to a bad end
- to** come to a head
- to** come to a pretty pass
- to** come to an untimely end

- to** come to grief
- to** come to light
- to** come to the fore
- to** cross a bridge before one comes to it
- to** cross one's heart (and hope to die)
- to** cut one's coat according to one's cloth
- to** cut one's coat to suit one's cloth
- to** cut someone down to size
- to** cut someone to the quick
- to** dead to the world
- to** death to something
- to** do justice to something
- to** done to a turn
- to** down to earth
- to** dressed (up) to the nines
- to** everything from A to Z
- to** extend one's sympathy (to someone)
- to** eyeball to eyeball
- to** feel it beneath one (to do something)
- to** find it in one's heart to do something
- to** find time to catch one's breath
- to** fools rush in (where angels fear to tread)
- to** from pillar to post
- to** from rags to riches
- to** from stem to stern
- to** generous to a fault
- to** get down to brass tacks
- to** get down to business
- to** get off to a flying start
- to** get time to catch one's breath
- to** get to one's feet
- to** get to the bottom of something
- to** get what is coming to one
- to** give it to someone straight
- to** give voice to something
- to** go from bad to worse
- to** go so far as to say something
- to** go to Davy Jones's locker
- to** go to hell
- to** go to rack and ruin
- to** go to seed
- to** go to someone's head
- to** go to the devil
- to** go to the limit
- to** go to the loo
- to** go to the toilet
- to** go to the wall
- to** go to town
- to** go to waste
- to** good riddance (to bad rubbish)
- to** Greek to me
- to** grind to a halt
- to** grist to the mill
- to** hand it to someone
- to** hang on to someone's coat-tails
- to** Hang on to your hat!
- to** hardly have time to breathe
- to** hark(en) back to something
- to** have a bone to pick (with someone)
- to** have a heart-to-heart (talk)
- to** have an axe to grind
- to** have half a mind to do something
- to** have money to burn
- to** have one's back to the wall
- to** have one's ear to the ground
- to** have other fish to fry
- to** have something coming to one
- to** have the wherewithal (to do something)
- to** have to live with something
- to** here's to someone or something
- to** Hold on to your hat!
- to** in no mood to do something
- to** in thing (to do)
- to** jump at the chance (to do something)
- to** jump at the opportunity (to do something)
- to** keep one's cards close to one's chest
- to** keep one's ear to the ground
- to** keep one's nose to the grindstone
- to** keep oneself to oneself
- to** lead someone to believe something
- to** lead someone to do something

- to** leap at the chance (to do something)
- to** leap at the opportunity (to do something)
- to** leave oneself wide open to something
- to** listen to reason
- to** live from hand to mouth
- to** look forward to something
- to** look to one's laurels
- to** look up to someone
- to** make something to order
- to** move heaven and earth to do something
- to** nail one's colours to the mast
- to** nine-to-five job
- to** not able to call one's time one's own
- to** not able to see the wood for the trees
- to** not able to wait
- to** not lift a finger (to help someone)
- to** not to darken someone's door
- to** not up to scratch
- to** nothing to it
- to** nothing to write home about
- to** old enough to be someone's father
- to** old enough to be someone's mother
- to** open one's heart (to someone)
- to** open the door to something
- to** pack someone off (to somewhere)
- to** pay lip-service (to something)
- to** pay one's debt to society
- to** play hard to get
- to** play one's cards close to one's chest
- to** play second fiddle (to someone)
- to** play to the gallery
- to** play up to someone
- to** praise someone or something to the skies
- to** preach to the converted
- to** put one's hand to the plough
- to** put one's shoulder to the wheel
- to** put paid to something
- to** put someone or something out to pasture
- to** put someone to shame
- to** put someone to the test
- to** put someone up to something
- to** put someone wise to someone or something
- to** rarin' to go
- to** rise to the occasion
- to** risk one's neck (to do something)
- to** rob Peter to pay Paul
- to** rooted to the spot
- to** run someone or something to earth
- to** run to seed
- to** second nature to someone
- to** second to none
- to** see eye to eye (about something)
- to** see eye to eye (on something)
- to** send someone to Coventry
- to** stand to reason
- to** stick to one's guns
- to** suit someone down to the ground
- to** suit someone to a T
- to** take someone to task
- to** take something to heart
- to** talk nineteen to the dozen
- to** teach one's grandmother to suck eggs
- to** Tell it to the marines.
- to** throw caution to the winds
- to** tied to one's mother's apron-strings
- to** to the bitter end
- to** to the letter
- to** true to one's word
- to** tumble to something
- to** turn a blind eye to someone or something
- to** turn something to good account
- to** turn something to one's advantage
- to** up to no good
- to** work one's fingers to the bone
- to** worn to a shadow

- toe** on one's toes  
**toe** step on someone's toes  
**toe** toe the line  
**toe** tread on someone's toes  
**together** keep body and soul together  
**together** knock people's heads together  
**together** pull oneself together  
**together** put two and two together  
**toilet** go to the toilet  
**token** by the same token  
**Tom** (every) Tom, Dick, and Harry  
**tomorrow** jam tomorrow  
**tongue** Cat got your tongue?  
**tongue** cause tongues to wag  
**tongue** find one's tongue  
**tongue** get a tongue-lashing  
**tongue** hold one's tongue  
**tongue** keep a civil tongue (in one's head)  
**tongue** on the tip of one's tongue  
**tongue** slip of the tongue  
**tongue** tongue-in-cheek  
**too** cut it (too) fine  
**too** have too many irons in the fire  
**too** none too something  
**too** spread oneself too thin  
**tooth** armed to the teeth  
**tooth** by the skin of one's teeth  
**tooth** cut one's eye-teeth on something  
**tooth** cut one's teeth on something  
**tooth** cut teeth  
**tooth** get one's teeth into something  
**tooth** go over something with a fine-tooth comb  
**tooth** go through something with a fine-tooth comb  
**tooth** grit one's teeth  
**tooth** have a sweet tooth  
**tooth** lie through one's teeth  
**tooth** search something with a fine-tooth comb
- tooth** set someone's teeth on edge  
**tooth** show one's teeth  
**top** at the top of one's voice  
**top** on top of the world  
**top** over the top  
**top** (sitting) on top of the world  
**torch** carry a torch for someone  
**touch** have the Midas touch  
**touch** touch a sore point  
**touch** touch a sore spot  
**touch** touch-and-go  
**touch** touch wood  
**tower** live in an ivory tower  
**town** go to town  
**town** night on the town  
**town** talk of the town  
**track** drop in one's tracks  
**track** off the beaten track  
**trade** jack-of-all-trades  
**trade** know all the tricks of the trade  
**trade** trade on something  
**train** lose one's train of thought  
**tread** fools rush in (where angels fear to tread)  
**tread** tread on someone's toes  
**tree** not able to see the wood for the trees  
**tremble** in fear and trembling  
**trespass** no trespassing  
**trick** do the trick  
**trick** know all the tricks of the trade  
**trick** play tricks (on someone)  
**trick** use every trick in the book  
**trouble** fish in troubled waters  
**trouble** pour oil on troubled waters  
**true** dream come true  
**true** hold true  
**true** moment of truth  
**true** ring true  
**true** show oneself in one's true colours  
**true** true to one's word  
**trump** play one's trump card  
**trump** turn up trumps  
**trumpet** blow one's own trumpet

- truth** moment of truth  
**try** try it on  
**try** try one's wings  
**try** try someone's patience  
**tuck** tuck into something  
**tucker** best bib and tucker  
**tumble** tumble to something  
**tune** change someone's tune  
**tunnel** see the light at the end of the tunnel  
**turn** done to a turn  
**turn** every time one turns around  
**turn** have turned the corner  
**turn** in turn  
**turn** out of turn  
**turn** speak out of turn  
**turn** turn a blind eye to someone or something  
**turn** turn someone's head  
**turn** turn something to good account  
**turn** turn something to one's advantage  
**turn** turn the other cheek  
**turn** turn the tables (on someone)  
**turn** turn the tide  
**turn** turn turtle  
**turn** turn up trumps  
**turtle** turn turtle  
**twice** (as) large as life (and twice as ugly)  
**two** (as) thick as two short planks  
**two** fall between two stools  
**two** game at which two can play  
**two** in two shakes of a lamb's tail  
**two** know a thing or two (about someone or something)  
**two** no two ways about it  
**two** put two and two together  
**two** take someone down a peg (or two)  
**two** two a penny  
**two** two can play at that game  
**ugly** (as) large as life (and twice as ugly)  
**ugly** rear its ugly head  
**under** brush something under the carpet  
**under** get something under one's belt  
**under** get under someone's skin  
**under** have someone under one's thumb  
**under** hide one's light under a bushel  
**under** hot under the collar  
**under** keep something under one's hat  
**under** keep something under wraps  
**under** let the grass grow under one's feet  
**under** pull the rug out from under someone('s feet)  
**under** sail under false colours  
**under** say something under one's breath  
**under** sweep something under the carpet  
**under** take someone under one's wing  
**under** water under the bridge  
**university** redbrick university  
**until** talk until one is blue in the face  
**untimely** come to an untimely end  
**unto** law unto oneself  
**unturned** leave no stone unturned  
**up** blow up in someone's face  
**up** curl up (and die)  
**up** dressed (up) to the nines  
**up** drive someone up the wall  
**up** fix someone up (with something)  
**up** give up the ghost  
**up** hang one's hat up somewhere  
**up** have something up one's sleeve  
**up** keep one's chin up  
**up** kick up a fuss  
**up** kick up a row  
**up** kick up one's heels  
**up** laugh up one's sleeve  
**up** lead someone up the garden path

- up** look up to someone  
**up** make up for lost time  
**up** not up to scratch  
**up** one-up (on someone)  
**up** play up  
**up** play up to someone  
**up** pluck up (one's) courage  
**up** prick up one's ears  
**up** pull one's socks up  
**up** pull oneself up by one's bootstraps  
**up** put someone up to something  
**up** put up a (brave) front  
**up** queue up  
**up** right up someone's street  
**up** ring someone or something up  
**up** ring up someone or something  
**up** rub someone up the wrong way  
**up** screw up one's courage  
**up** send someone or something up  
**up** set up shop somewhere  
**up** shut up shop  
**up** stir up a hornets' nest  
**up** take up the cudgels on behalf of someone or something  
**up** turn up trumps  
**up** up a blind alley  
**up** up and doing  
**up** up in arms  
**up** up in the air  
**up** up to no good  
**up** well up in something  
**upon** once upon a time  
**upon** put upon someone  
**upon** set upon someone or something  
**uppance** get one's come-uppance  
**upper** keep a stiff upper lip  
**upper** upper crust  
**upset** upset the applecart  
**uptake** quick on the uptake  
**use** use every trick in the book  
**utter** not utter a word  
**vain** in vain  
**value** face value  
**vanish** vanish into thin air  
**velvet** iron hand in a velvet glove
- vent** vent one's spleen  
**verse** chapter and verse  
**vex** vexed question  
**villain** villain of the piece  
**vine** wither on the vine  
**virtue** by virtue of something  
**visit** flying visit  
**voice** at the top of one's voice  
**voice** give voice to something  
**voice** have a voice (in something)  
**voice** lower one's voice  
**void** null and void  
**voyage** maiden voyage  
**culture** culture vulture  
**wag** cause tongues to wag  
**wag** tail wagging the dog  
**wait** not able to wait  
**wait** waiting in the wings  
**walk** cock of the walk  
**walk** walk a tightrope  
**walk** walk on air  
**walk** walk on eggs  
**wall** drive someone up the wall  
**wall** go to the wall  
**wall** have one's back to the wall  
**wall** see the writing on the wall  
**wall** walls have ears  
**want** want it both ways  
**warm** warm the cockles of someone's heart  
**warrant** sign one's own death-warrant  
**wart** warts and all  
**wash** come out in the wash  
**waste** go to waste  
**water** as a duck takes to water  
**water** fish in troubled waters  
**water** hold water  
**water** in deep water  
**water** keep one's head above water  
**water** like a fish out of water  
**water** like water off a duck's back  
**water** make someone's mouth water  
**water** not hold water  
**water** of the first water  
**water** pour cold water on something

- water** pour oil on troubled waters  
**water** through hell and high water  
**water** throw cold water on something  
**water** water under the bridge  
**water** won't hold water  
**Waterloo** meet one's Waterloo  
**way** cut both ways  
**way** have it both ways  
**way** have the right of way  
**way** in a bad way  
**way** in the family way  
**way** look the other way  
**way** meet someone half-way  
**way** mend one's ways  
**way** no two ways about it  
**way** one's way of life  
**way** other way round  
**way** parting of the ways  
**way** rub someone up the wrong way  
**way** want it both ways  
**wayside** fall by the wayside  
**wear** none the worse for wear  
**wear** wear more than one hat  
**wear** wear out one's welcome  
**weather** keep a weather eye open  
**weather** lovely weather for ducks  
**wedding** shot-gun wedding  
**wedge** thin end of the wedge  
**weep** weep buckets  
**weigh** weigh on someone's mind  
**weigh** weigh one's words  
**weight** carry the weight of the world on one's shoulders  
**weight** put on weight  
**welcome** wear out one's welcome  
**welcome** welcome someone with open arms  
**well** hail-fellow-well-met  
**well** leave well alone  
**well** let well alone  
**well** well up in something  
**what** get what is coming to one  
**what** have what it takes  
**what** just what the doctor ordered  
**what** practise what you preach  
**wheat** separate the wheat from the chaff  
**wheel** asleep at the wheel  
**wheel** put one's shoulder to the wheel  
**wheel** wheeling and dealing  
**wheel** wheels within wheels  
**when** when the time is ripe  
**where** fools rush in (where angels fear to tread)  
**where** give credit where credit is due  
**where** Put your money where your mouth is!  
**wherewithal** have the wherewithal (to do something)  
**which** game at which two can play  
**while** fiddle while Rome burns  
**while** make it worth someone's while  
**while** once in a while  
**while** strike while the iron is hot  
**whip** fair crack of the whip  
**whip** whip something into shape  
**whisper** in a stage whisper  
**whistle** whistle for something  
**white** in black and white  
**white** show the white feather  
**white** white elephant  
**whole** go the whole hog  
**whole** whole (bang) shooting match  
**wide** come from far and wide  
**wide** give someone or something a wide berth  
**wide** leave oneself wide open for something  
**wide** leave oneself wide open to something  
**wild** run wild  
**will** heads will roll  
**will** with the best will in the world  
**will not** won't hold water  
**win** win the day  
**win** win through  
**wind** get one's second wind  
**wind** get wind of something

- wind** in the wind  
**wind** straw in the wind  
**wind** take the wind out of someone's sails  
**wind** throw caution to the winds  
**wing** clip someone's wings  
**wing** take someone under one's wing  
**wing** try one's wings  
**wing** waiting in the wings  
**wink** not sleep a wink  
**wink** tip someone the wink  
**wise** put someone wise to someone or something  
**wise** wise after the event  
**wiser** none the wiser  
**wish** wish someone joy of something  
**wit** at one's wits' end  
**wit** have one's wits about one  
**wit** keep one's wits about one  
**wit** live by one's wits  
**with** at loggerheads (with someone)  
**with** born with a silver spoon in one's mouth  
**with** come down with something  
**with** cross swords (with someone)  
**with** curry favour (with someone)  
**with** damn someone or something with faint praise  
**with** fix someone up (with something)  
**with** go over something with a fine-tooth comb  
**with** go through something with a fine-tooth comb  
**with** green with envy  
**with** hand in glove (with someone)  
**with** handle someone with kid gloves  
**with** have a bone to pick (with someone)  
**with** have a brush with something  
**with** have a word with someone  
**with** have something out (with someone)  
**with** have to live with something  
**with** head over heels in love (with someone)  
**with** hit it off (with someone)  
**with** in league (with someone)  
**with** keep in with someone  
**with** knock someone down with a feather  
**with** leave word (with someone)  
**with** lock horns (with someone)  
**with** make do (with someone or something)  
**with** on a first-name basis (with someone)  
**with** on a par with someone or something  
**with** on first-name terms (with someone)  
**with** out of line (with something)  
**with** over and done with  
**with** pass the time of day (with someone)  
**with** pick a quarrel (with someone)  
**with** play cat and mouse (with someone)  
**with** play fast and loose (with someone or something)  
**with** play havoc with someone or something  
**with** play with fire  
**with** quids in with someone  
**with** receive someone with open arms  
**with** rub along with someone  
**with** rub shoulders (with someone)  
**with** search something with a fine-tooth comb  
**with** see something with half an eye  
**with** start (off) with a clean slate  
**with** take the rough with the smooth  
**with** tarred with the same brush  
**with** welcome someone with open arms  
**with** with all one's heart and soul  
**with** with every other breath



- with** with flying colours  
**with** with the best will in the world  
**wither** wither on the vine  
**within** wheels within wheels  
**within** within an inch of doing something  
**within** within an inch of one's life  
**within** within hailing distance  
**without** goes without saying  
**without** without batting an eye  
**without** without rhyme or reason  
**woe** woe betide someone  
**wolf** cry wolf  
**wolf** keep the wolf from the door  
**won't** won't hold water  
**wonder** nine days' wonder  
**wood** not able to see the wood for the trees  
**wood** out of the woods  
**wood** touch wood  
**wool** pull the wool over someone's eyes  
**word** beyond words  
**word** break one's word  
**word** by word of mouth  
**word** eat one's words  
**word** from the word go  
**word** get a word in (edgeways)  
**word** go back on one's word  
**word** hang on someone's every word  
**word** have a word with someone  
**word** in other words  
**word** keep one's word  
**word** leave word (with someone)  
**word** mark my word(s)  
**word** mum's the word  
**word** not breathe a word (about someone or something)  
**word** not breathe a word (of something)  
**word** not utter a word  
**word** one's words stick in one's throat  
**word** put in a good word for someone  
**word** put words into someone's mouth  
**word** say the word  
**word** take the words (right) out of one's mouth  
**word** true to one's word  
**word** weigh one's words  
**work** donkey-work  
**work** have one's work cut out (for one)  
**work** out of work  
**work** throw a spanner in the works  
**work** work one's fingers to the bone  
**world** carry the weight of the world on one's shoulders  
**world** come down in the world  
**world** dead to the world  
**world** not for anything in the world  
**world** not for the world  
**world** not have a care in the world  
**world** not long for this world  
**world** on top of the world  
**world** out of this world  
**world** set the world on fire  
**world** (sitting) on top of the world  
**world** with the best will in the world  
**worm** open a can of worms  
**worn** worn to a shadow  
**worse** go from bad to worse  
**worse** none the worse for wear  
**worse** Worse luck!  
**worth** get one's money's worth  
**worth** make it worth someone's while  
**worth** not worth a candle  
**worth** not worth a penny  
**would** look as if butter wouldn't melt in one's mouth  
**wound** rub salt in the wound  
**wrap** keep something under wraps  
**wringer** put someone through the wringer  
**wrist** get a slap on the wrist

**write** nothing to write home  
about

**write** see the writing on the  
wall

**wrong** get out of the wrong side  
of the bed

**wrong** rub someone up the wrong  
way

**wrongfoot** wrongfoot someone

**year** advanced in years

**year** donkey's years

**year** from the year dot

**year** getting on (in years)

**year** ring in the New Year

**year** since the year dot

**yesterday** not born yesterday

**you** before you can say Jack  
Robinson

**you** mind you

**you** More fool you!

**you** practise what you preach

**your** Cat got your tongue?

**your** Hang on to your hat!

**your** Hold on to your hat!

**your** Put that in your pipe and  
smoke it!

**your** Put your money where your  
mouth is!

**Z** everything from A to Z

**zero** zero hour