Common Phrases and Expressions in English

Word/Expression: to wolf something down
Quick translation: to eat something quickly
Example: "I wolfed down that sandwich so quickly."
My interpretation: Wolves are known for eating their food quickly, for fear that another wolf will get to it before them. So to "wolf something down" is to eat as quickly as a wolf does.

Word/Expression: gotta
Quick translation: to have to/to need to
Example: "I gotta leave now."

Word/Expression: to go (expression used where food is sold)
Quick translation: to carry out/to take out with you
Example: a waiter or salesperson may ask "Would you like (your food) to go?"

Word/Expression: sick (when used to describe a person's mind or an event)
Quick translation: strange or perverted
Example: "That person is sick!" or "What he did to her is sick!"

Word/Expression: What's up?
Quick translation: a very casual way to say "Hi" or "How are you?" or "What is happening here?"

Word/Expression: handy
Quick translation: very useful, very industrious, or able to fix things themself
Example: "Her husband is very handy around the house."

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Word/Expression: to catch a taxi / cab
to hail a cab/taxi
Quick translation: to get a taxi / cab
Example: "Let's catch a taxi to the restaurant."

Word/Expression: to catch a TV show/newstory/conversation
Quick translation: to hear or see something
Example: "Did you catch the news last night?"

Word/Expression: to have time
Quick translation: to have sufficient available time
Example: "If we have time, we can stay at the bar until 11:00 p.m."

Word/Expression: to threaten to kill someone
Quick translation: to be very mad with someone

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Example: "I'm going to kill her when I see her."

Word/Expression: "Whatever floats your boat."
Quick translation: whatever pleases you
Example: "I'd prefer to go on Sunday." Response: "OK, whatever floats your boat."

Word/Expression: shaky/sketchy
Quick translation: unsafe, unclear, not a good idea
Examples: "I'm not sure what my boss wants me to do. His directions were a bit sketchy." OR "Should you go there? Isn't that neighborhood a bit shaky/sketchy?"

Word/Expression: "I'm outta here" (I am out of here)
Quick translation: I am leaving now

Word/Expression: guy/guys
Quick translation: a man/a group of men or a group of men AND women.
Examples: "Hi guys (men and/OR women)... what's up?" "That guy (man only) is strange." "Those guys (men, or group of men and women) are also coming with us."
Further clarification: Guy (singular) can only refer to a MAN. Guys (plural) can apply to a group of men and/or women.

Word/Expression: to double-check
Quick translation: to re-check or verify
Example: "You should double-check our bank account balance before we plan our vacation trip."

Word/Expression: "You gotta be kidding me."
Quick translation: "You must be joking." OR "What you are saying cannot be true."

Word/Expression: gonna (pronounced like "gunna")
Quick translation: going to ....
Example: "I'm gonna clean the bathroom today."

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An **idiom** is a phrase where the words together have a meaning that is different from the dictionary definitions of the individual words, which can make idioms hard for ESL students and learners to understand. Here, we provide a dictionary of **3,169 English idiomatic expressions** with definitions.

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- Show Definitions
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168 Idioms Beginning With 'A'

ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ

~ A ~

A bit much
: If something is excessive or annoying, it is a bit much.

A chain is no stronger than its weakest link
: This means that processes, organisations, etc, are vulnerable because the weakest person or part can always damage or break them.

A day late and a dollar short
: (USA) If something is a day late and a dollar short, it is too little, too late.

A fool and his money are soon parted
: This idiom means that people who aren't careful with their money spend it quickly. 'A fool and his money are easily parted' is an alternative form of the idiom.

A fool at 40 is a fool forever
: If someone hasn't matured by the time they reach forty, they never will.

A hitch in your giddy-up
: If you have a hitch in your giddy-up, you're not feeling well. ('A hitch in your gittie-up' is also used.)

A lick and a promise
: If you give something a lick and a promise, you do it hurriedly, most often incompletely, intending to return to it later.

A little bird told me
: If someone doesn't want to say where they got some information from, they can say that a little bird told them.

A little learning is a dangerous thing
: A small amount of knowledge can cause people to think they are more expert than they really are.eg. he said he'd done a course on home electrics, but when he tried to mend my table lamp, he fused all the lights! I think a little learning is a dangerous thing

A long row to hoe
: Something that is a long row to hoe is a difficult task that takes a long time.

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A lost ball in the high weeds

A lost ball in the high weeds is someone who does not know what they are doing, where they are or how to do something.

A OK

If things are A OK, they are absolutely fine.

A penny for your thoughts

This idiom is used as a way of asking someone what they are thinking about.

A penny saved is a penny earned

This means that we shouldn't spend or waste money, but try to save it.

A picture is worth a thousand words

A picture can often get a message across much better than the best verbal description.

A poor man's something

Something or someone that can be compared to something or someone else, but is not as good is a poor man's version; a writer who uses lots of puns but isn't very funny would be a poor man's Oscar Wilde.

A pretty penny

If something costs a pretty penny, it is very expensive.

A problem shared is a problem halved

If you talk about your problems, it will make you feel better.

A rising tide lifts all boats

This idiom, coined by John F Kennedy, describes the idea that when an economy is performing well, all people will benefit from it.

A rolling stone gathers no moss

People say this to mean that that an ambitious person is more successful than a person not trying to achieve anything. Originally it meant the opposite and was critical of people trying to get ahead.

A slice off a cut loaf is never missed

Used colloquially to describe having sexual intercourse with someone who is not a virgin, especially when they are in a relationship. The analogy refers to a loaf of bread; it is not readily apparent, once the end has been removed, exactly how many slices have been taken.('You never miss a slice from a cut loaf' is also used.)

A steal

If something is a steal, it costs much less than it is really worth.

A still tongue keeps a wise head

Wise people don't talk much.

A watched pot never boils

Some things work out in their own time, so being impatient and constantly checking will just make things seem longer.

A1

If something is A1, it is the very best or finest.

Abide by a decision

If you abide by a decision, you accept it and comply with it, even though you might disagree with it.

Abject lesson

(India) An abject lesson serves as a warning to others. (In some varieties of English 'object lesson' is used.)

About as useful as a chocolate teapot

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Someone or something that is of no practical use is about as useful as a chocolate teapot.

About face

If someone changes their mind completely, this is an about face. It can be used when companies, governments, etc, change their position on an issue.

Above board

If things are done above board, they are carried out in a legal and proper manner.

Above par

Better than average or normal

Absence makes the heart grow fonder

This idiom means that when people are apart, their love grows stronger.

Accident waiting to happen

If something is an accident waiting to happen, there's definitely going to be an accident or it's bound to go wrong. ('Disaster waiting to happen' is also used.)

Ace in the hole

An ace in the hole is something other people are not aware of that can be used to your advantage when the time is right.

Ace up your sleeve

If you have an ace up your sleeve, you have something that will give you an advantage that other people don't know about.

Achilles' heel

A person's weak spot is their Achilles' heel.

Acid test

An acid test is something that proves whether something is good, effective, etc, or not.

Across the board

If something applies to everybody, it applies across the board.

Across the ditch

(NZ) This idiom means on the other side of the Tasman Sea, used to refer to Australia or New Zealand depending on the speaker's location.

Across the pond

(UK) This idiom means on the other side of the Atlantic Ocean, used to refer to the US or the UK depending on the speaker's location.

Act of God

An act of God is something like an earthquake or floods that human beings cannot prevent or control.

Act of war

An act of war is a action that is either intended to start a war or that is interpreted as being sufficient cause for a war.

Actions speak louder than words

This idiom means that what people actually do is more important than what they say- people can promise things but then fail to deliver.

Adam's apple

The Adam's apple is a bulge in the throat, mostly seen in men.

Add fuel to the fire

If people add fuel to the fire, they make a bad situation worse.

Add insult to injury

When people add insult to injury, they make a bad situation even worse.

After your own heart

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A person after your own heart thinks the same way as you.

Against the clock

If you do something against the clock, you are rushed and have very little time to do it.

Against the grain

If doing something goes against the grain, you're unwilling to do it because it contradicts what you believe in, but you have no real choice.

Age before beauty

When this idiom is used, it is a way of allowing an older person to do something first, though often in a slightly sarcastic way.

Agony aunt

An agony aunt is a newspaper columnist who gives advice to people having problems, especially personal ones.

Ahead of the pack

If you are ahead of the pack, you have made more progress than your rivals.

Ahead of time

If something happens ahead of time, it happens early or before the set time.

Air your dirty laundry in public

If you air your dirty laundry in public, you reveal aspects of your private life that should really remain private, by telling a secret, arguing in public, etc.

Albatross around your neck

An albatross around, or round, your neck is a problem resulting from something you did that stops you from being successful.

Alike as two peas

If people or things are as alike as two peas, they are identical.

Alive and kicking

If something is active and doing well, it is alive and kicking. (It can be used for people too.)

All along

If you have known or suspected something all along, then you have felt this from the beginning.

All and sundry

This idiom is a way of emphasising 'all', like saying 'each and every one'.

All bark and no bite

When someone talks tough but really isn't, they are all bark and no bite.

All bets are off

(USA) If all bets are off, then agreements that have been made no longer apply.

All dressed up and nowhere to go

You're prepared for something that isn't going to happen.

All ears

If someone says they're all ears, they are very interested in hearing about something.

All eyes on me

If all eyes are on someone, then everyone is paying attention to them.

All fingers and thumbs

If you're all fingers and thumbs, you are too excited or clumsy to do something properly that requires manual dexterity. 'All thumbs' is an alternative form of the idiom.

All hat, no cattle

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(USA) When someone talks big, but cannot back it up, they are all hat, no cattle.('Big hat, no cattle' is also used.)

All heart

Someone who is all heart is very kind and generous.

All hell broke loose

When all hell breaks loose, there is chaos, confusion and trouble.

All in a day's work

If something is all in a day's work, it is nothing special.

All in your head

If something is all in your head, you have imagined it and it is not real.

All mod cons

If something has all mod cons, it has all the best and most desirable features. It is an abbreviation of 'modern convenience' that was used in house adverts.

All mouth and trousers

(UK) Someone who's all mouth and trousers talks or boasts a lot but doesn't deliver. 'All mouth and no trousers' is also used, though this is a corruption of the original.

All my eye and Peggy Martin

(UK) An idiom that appears to have gone out of use but was prevalent in the English north Midlands of Staffordshire, Cheshire and Derbyshire from at least the turn of the 20th century until the early 1950s or so. The idiom's meaning is literally something said or written that is unbelievable, rumor, over embellished, the result of malicious village gossip etc.

All of the above

This idiom can be used to mean everything that has been said or written, especially all the choices or possibilities.

All over bar the shouting

When something is all over bar the shouting, the outcome is absolutely certain.('All over but the shouting' is also used.)

All over the map

(USA) If something like a discussion is all over the map, it doesn't stick to the main topic and goes off on tangents.

All over the place

If something is completely disorganised or confused, it is all over the place.

All over the shop

If something is completely disorganised or confused, it is all over the shop.

All over the show

If something is all over the show, it's in a complete mess.An alternative to 'All over the shop'.

All roads lead to Rome

This means that there can be many different ways of doing something.

All set

If you're all set, you are ready for something.

All sixes

If something is all sixes, it doesn't matter how it's done; it's the same as 'six of one and half a dozen of the other'.

All skin and bone

If a person is very underweight, they are all skin and bone, or bones.

All square

If something is all square, nobody has an advantage or is ahead of the others.

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All talk and no trousers

(UK) Someone who is all talk and no trousers, talks about doing big, important things, but doesn't take any action.

All that glitters is not gold

This means that appearances can be deceptive and things that look or sound valuable can be worthless. ('All that glistens is not gold' is an alternative.)

All the rage

If something's all the rage, it is very popular or fashionable at the moment.

All the tea in China

If someone won't do something for all the tea in China, they won't do it no matter how much money they are offered.

All your eggs in one basket

If you put all your eggs in one basket, you risk everything at once, instead of trying to spread the risk. (This is often used as a negative imperative- 'Don't put all your eggs in one basket'. 'Have your eggs in one basket' is also used.)

All's fair in love and war

This idiom is used to say that where there is conflict, people can be expected to behave in a more vicious way.

All's well that ends well

If the end result is good, then everything is good.

All-singing, all-dancing

If something's all-singing, all-dancing, it is the latest version with the most up-to-date features.

Alter ego

An alter ego is a very close and intimate friend. It is a Latin phrase that literally means 'other self'.

Always a bridesmaid, never a bride

If someone is always a bridesmaid, never a bride, they never manage to fulfill their ambition- they get close, but never manage the recognition, etc, they crave.

Ambulance chaser

A lawyer who encourages people who have been in accidents or become ill to sue for compensation is an ambulance chaser.

Amen

Some use 'Amen' or 'Amen to that' as a way of agreeing with something that has just been said.

An apple a day keeps the doctor away

Eating healthy food keeps you healthy.

An old flame

An old flame is a person that somebody has had an emotional, usually passionate, relationship with, who is still looked on fondly and with affection.

An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure

This expression means that is is better to try to avoid problems in the first place, rather than trying to fix them once they arise.

And all that jazz

This idiom means that everything related or similar is included.

Angry as a bear

If someone is as angry as a bear, they are very angry.('Angry as a bear with a sore foot' is also used.)

Angry as a bull

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If someone is as angry as a bull, they are very angry.

Answers on a postcard

This idiom can be used to suggest that the answer to something is very obvious or that the person would really like to hear what people think.

Ants in your pants

If someone has ants in their pants, they are agitated or excited about something and can't keep still.

Any port in a storm

This means that in an emergency any solution will do, even one that would normally be unacceptable.

Any Tom, Dick or Harry

If something could be done by any Tom, Dick or Harry, it could be done by absolutely anyone.

Apple of your eye

Something or, more often, someone that is very special to you is the 'apple of your' eye.

Apple pie order

Everything is in perfect order and tidy if it is in apple pie order.

Apples and oranges

Tis used when people compare or describe two totally different things. ('Apples to oranges' is also used.)

Apples for apples

An apples for apples comparison is a comparison between related or simialr things. ('Apples to apples' is also used.)

Apron strings

A man who is tied to a woman's apron strings is excessively dependent on her, especially when it is his mother's apron strings.

Argue the toss

(UK) If you argue the toss, you refuse to accept a decision and argue about it.

Arm and a leg

If something costs an arm and a leg, it is very expensive.

Armchair critic

An armchair critic is someone who offers advice but never shows that they could actually do any better.

Armed to the teeth

If people are armed to the teeth, they have lots of weapons.

Around the clock

If something is open around the clock, it is open 24 hours a day. For example, an airport is open around the clock.

Arrow in the quiver

An arrow in the quiver is a strategy or option that could be used to achieve your objective.

As a rule

If you do something as a rule, then you usually do it.

As cold as ice

This idiom can be used to describe a person who does not show any emotion.

As cold as stone

If something is as cold as stone, it is very cold. If a person is as cold as stone, they are unemotional.

As cool as a cucumber

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If someone is as cool as a cucumber, they don't get worried by anything.

As good as new

If something has been used but is still in extremely good condition, it is as good as new.

As mad as a hatter

This simile means that someone is crazy or behaves very strangely. In the past many people who made hats went insane because they had a lot of contact with mercury.

As mad as a wrongly shot hog

(USA) If someone is as mad as a wrongly shot hog, they are very angry. (Same as, Angry as a bear or Angry as a bull).

As much use as a chocolate fire-guard

A fire-guard is used in front of a fireplace for safety. A chocolate fire-guard is of no use. An alternative to 'As much use as a chocolate teapot'.

As much use as a chocolate teapot

Something that is as much use as a chocolate teapot is not useful at all.

As much use as a handbrake on a canoe

This idiom is used to describe someone or something as worthless or pointless.

As neat as a new pin

This idiom means tidy and clean.

As one man

If people do something as one man, then they do it at exactly the same time or in complete agreement.

As the actress said to the bishop

(UK) This idiom is used to highlight a sexual reference, deliberate or accidental.

As the crow flies

This idiom is used to describe the shortest possible distance between two places.

As you sow, so shall you reap

This means that if you do bad things to people, bad things will happen to you, or good things if you do good things.

Asleep at the switch

If someone is asleep at the switch, they are not doing their job or taking their responsibilities very carefully. 'Asleep at the wheel' is an alternative.

Asleep at the wheel

If someone is asleep at the wheel, they are not doing their job or taking their responsibilities very carefully. 'Asleep at the switch' is an alternative.

At a drop of a dime

(USA) If someone will do something at the drop of a dime, they will do it instantly, without hesitation.

At a loose end

(UK) If you are at a loose end, you have spare time but don't know what to do with it.

At a loss

If you are at a loss, you are unable to understand or comply.

At a snail's pace

If something moves at a snail's pace, it moves very slowly.

At arm's length

If something is at arm's length, it is a safe distance waway from you.

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At cross purposes
: When people are at cross purposes, they misunderstand each other or have different or opposing objectives.

At daggers drawn
: If people are at daggers drawn, they are very angry and close to violence.

At death's door
: If someone looks as if they are at death's door, they look seriously unwell and might actually be dying.

At each other's throats
: If people are at each other's throats, they are fighting, arguing or competing ruthlessly.

At full tilt
: If something is at full tilt, it is going or happening as fast or as hard as possible.

At large
: If a criminal is at large, they have not been found or caught.

At loggerheads
: If people are at loggerheads, they are arguing and can't agree on anything.

At loose ends
: (USA) If you are at a loose end, you have spare time but don't know what to do with it.

At odds
: If you are at odds with someone, you cannot agree with them and argue.

At sea
: If things are at sea, or all at sea, they are disorganized and chaotic.

At the bottom of the totem pole
: (USA) If someone is at the bottom of the totem pole, they are unimportant. Opposite is at the top of the totem pole.

At the coalface
: If you work at the coalface, you deal with the real problems and issues, rather than sitting in a office discussing things in a detached way.

At the drop of a hat
: If you would do something at the drop of a hat, you'd do it immediately.

At the end of the day
: This is used to mean 'in conclusion' or 'when all is said and done'.

At the end of your rope
: (USA) If you are at the end of your rope, you are at the limit of your patience or endurance.

At the end of your tether
: (UK) If you are at the end of your tether, you are at the limit of your patience or endurance.

At the fore
: In a leading position

At the top of my lungs
: If you shout at the top of your lungs, you shout as loudly as you possibly can.

At the top of the list
: If something is at the top of the list, it is of highest priority, most important, most urgent, or the next in one's line of attention.

At the top of your lungs
: If you shout at the top of your lungs, you shout as loudly as you possibly can.

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At the top of your voice
: If you talk, shout or sing at the top of your voice, you do it as loudly as you can.

At your wit's end
: If you're at your wit's end, you really don't know what you should do about something, no matter how hard you think about it.

At your wits' end
: If you are at your wits' end, you have no idea what to do next and are very frustrated.

Average Joe
: An average Joe is an ordinary person without anything exceptional about them.

Avowed intent
: If someone makes a solemn or serious promise publicly to attempt to reach a certain goal, this is their avowed intent.

Away with the fairies
: If someone is away with the fairies, they don't face reality and have unrealistic expectations of life.

Awe inspiring
: Something or someone that is awe inspiring amazes people in a slightly frightening but positive way.

AWOL
: AWOL stands for "Absent Without Leave", or "Absent Without Official Leave". Orignially a military term, it is used when someone has gone missing without telling anyone or asking for permission.

Axe to grind
: If you have an axe to grind with someone or about something, you have a grievance, a resentment and you want to get revenge or sort it out. In American English, it is 'ax'.

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~ B ~

Babe in arms
: A babe in arms is a very young child, or a person who is very young to be holding a position.

Babe in the woods
: A babe in the woods is a naive, defenceless, young person.

Baby boomer
: (USA) A baby boomer is someone born in the years after the end of the Second World War, a period when the population was growing very fast.

Back burner
: If an issue is on the back burner, it is being given low priority.

Back foot
: (UK) If you are on your back foot, you are at a disadvantage and forced to be defensive of your position.

Back number

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Something that's a back number is dated or out of fashion.

Back the wrong horse

If you back the wrong horse, you give your support to the losing side in something.

Back to back

If things happen back to back, they are directly one after another.

Back to square one

If you are back to square one, you have to start from the beginning again.

Back to the drawing board

If you have to go back to the drawing board, you have to go back to the beginning and start something again.

Back to the salt mine

If someone says they have to go back to the salt mine, they have to return to work.

Back to the wall

If you have your back to the wall, you are in a difficult situation with very little room for manoeuvre.

Backseat driver

A backseat driver is an annoying person who is fond of giving advice to the person performing a task or doing something, especially when the advice is either wrong or unwelcome.

Bad Apple

A person who is bad and makes other bad is a bad apple.

Bad blood

If people feel hate because of things that happened in the past, there is bad blood between them.

Bad egg

A person who cannot be trusted is a bad egg. Good egg is the opposite.

Bad hair day

If you're having a bad hair day, things are not going the way you would like or had planned.

Bad mouth

(UK) When you are bad mouthing,you are saying negative things about someone or something.('Bad-mouth' and 'badmouth' are also used.)

Bad shape

If something's in bad shape, it's in bad condition. If a person's in bad shape, they are unfit or unhealthy.

Bad taste in your mouth

If something leaves you with a bad taste in your mouth, you feel there is something wrong or bad about it.

Bad workers always blame their tools

"A bad worker always blames their tools" - If somebody does a job badly or loses in a game and claims that they were let down by their equipment, you can use this to imply that this was not the case.

Bag of bones

If someone is a bag of bones, they are very underweight.

Bag of nerves

If someone is a bag of nerves, they are very worried or nervous.

Baker's dozen

A Baker's dozen is 13 rather than 12.

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Bald as a coot

A person who is completely bald is as bald as a coot.

Ball is in your court

If the ball is in your court, it is up to you to make the next decision or step.

Ballpark figure

A ballpark figure is a rough or approximate number (guesstimate) to give a general idea of something, like a rough estimate for a cost, etc.

Balls to the walls

(USA) If you do something balls to the wall, you apply full acceleration or exertion.

Banana republic

Banana republic is a term used for small countries that are dependent on a single crop or resource and governed badly by a corrupt elite.

Banana skin

(UK) A banana skin is something that is an embarrassment or causes problems.

Bandit territory

An area or an industry, profession, etc, where rules and laws are ignored or flouted is bandit territory.

Baptism of fire

A baptism of fire was a soldier's first experience of shooting. Any unpleasant experience undergone, usually where it is also a learning experience, is a baptism of fire.

Bar fly

A bar fly is a person who spends a lot of time drinking in different bars and pubs.

Bare your heart

If you bare your heart to someone, you tell them your personal and private feelings. ('Bare your soul' is an alternative form of the idiom.)

Barefaced liar

A barefaced liar is one who displays no shame about lying even if they are exposed.

Bark is worse than their bite

Someone who's bark is worse than their bite may well get angry and shout, but doesn't take action.

Barking up the wrong tree

If you are barking up the wrong tree, it means that you have completely misunderstood something or are totally wrong.

Barkus is willing

This idiom means that someone is willing to get married.

Barrack-room lawyer

(UK) A barrack-room lawyer is a person who gives opinions on things they are not qualified to speak about.

Barrel of laughs

If someone's a barrel of laughs, they are always joking and you find them funny.

Basket case

If something is a basket case, it is so bad that it cannot be helped.

Bat an eyelid

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If someone doesn't bat an eyelid, they don't react or show any emotion when surprised, shocked, etc.

Bated breath

If someone says they're waiting with bated breath, they're very excited and find it difficult to be patient.('Baited breath' is a common mistake.)

Batten down the hatches

If you batten down the hatches, you prepare for the worst that could happen to you.

Battle of nerves

A battle of nerves is a situation where neither side in a conflict or dispute is willing to back down and is waiting for the other side to weaken. ('A war of nerves' is an alternative form.)

Be all ears

If you are all ears, you are very eager to hear what someone has to say.

Be careful what you wish for

If you get things that you desire, there may be unforeseen and unpleasant consequences.('Be careful what you wish for, lest it come true.' and 'Be careful what you wish for; you may receive it.' are also used.)

Be on the pig's back

If you're on the pig's back, you're happy / content / in fine form.

Be out in force

If people are out in force, they are present somewhere in large numbers.

Be out in left field

(USA) To be out in left field is not to know what's going on. Taken from baseball, when youngsters assign less capable players to the outfield where the ball is less likely to be hit by a young player. In business, one might say, 'Don't ask the new manager; he's out in left field and doesn't know any answers yet.'

Be that as it may

Be that as it may is an expression which means that, while you are prepared to accept that there is some truth in what the other person has just said, it's not going to change your opinions in any significant manner.

Be true blue

If a person/object/situation is considered to be 'true blue', it is considered genuine.

Be up the spout

(UK) If a woman is up the spout, she is pregnant.

Bean counter

A bean counter is an accountant.

Bear fruit

If something bears fruit, it produces positive results.

Bear market

A bear market is a period when investors are pessimistic and expect financial losses so are more likely to sell than to buy shares.

Bear the brunt

People who bear the brunt of something endure the worst of something bad.

Beard the lion in his own den

If you confront a powerful or dangerous rival on their territory, you are bearding the lion in his own den.

Beat about the bush

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If someone doesn't say clearly what they mean and try to make it hard to understand, they are beating about (around) the bush.

Beat someone to the draw

(USA) If you beat someone to the draw, you do something before they do.

Beat swords into ploughshares

If people beat swords into ploughshares, they spend money on humanitarian purposes rather than weapons. (The American English spelling is 'plowshares')

Beat the daylights out of someone

If someone beats the daylights out of another person, they hit them repeatedly. ('Knock' can also be used and it can be made even stronger by saying 'the living daylights'.)

Beat the rap

If you beat the rap, you escape conviction and punishment for a crime or something you have done wrong.

Beat to the punch

If you beat someone to the punch, you act before them and gain an advantage.

Beat your brains out

If you beat your brains out, you think hard about something but cannot solve, understand or remember it.

Beating a dead horse

(USA) If someone is trying to convince people to do or feel something without any hope of succeeding, they're beating a dead horse. This is used when someone is trying to raise interest in an issue that no-one supports anymore; beating a dead horse will not make it do any more work.

Beauty is in the eye of the beholder

Beauty is in the eye of the beholder means that different people will find different things beautiful and that the differences of opinion don't matter greatly.

Beauty is only skin deep

This idiom means that appearances can be deceptive and something that seems or looks good may turn out to be bad.

Beck and call

Someone who does everything for you, no matter when you ask, is at your beck and call.

Bedroom eyes

Someone with bedroom eyes has a sexy look in their eyes.

Bee in your bonnet

If someone is very excited about something, they have a bee in their bonnet.

Bee's Knees

If something is the bee's knees, it's outstanding or the best in its class.

Beeline for

If you make a beeline for a place, you head there directly.

Been in the wars

(UK) If someone has been in the wars, they have been hurt or look as if they have been in a struggle.

Been there, done that

People say this when they have already experienced what is being discussed.

Beer and skittles

(UK) People say that life is not all beer and skittles, meaning that it is not about self-indulgence and pleasure.

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Before the ink is dry
: If people make an agreement or contract and then the situation changes very quickly, it changes before the ink is dry.

Before you can say Jack Robinson
: The term Jack Robinson represents 'a short amount of time'. When you do something before you can say Jack Robinson, you do it very quickly.

Beg the question
: In philosophy "to beg the question" is to assume something to be true that has not yet been proved. I have seen the idiom also to mean that a question is crying out to be asked.

Beggars can't be choosers
: This idiom means that people who are in great need must accept any help that is offered, even if it is not a complete solution to their problems.

Behind bars
: When someone is behind bars, they are in prison.

Behind closed doors
: If something happens away from the public eye, it happens behind closed doors.

Behind someone's back
: If you do something behind someone's back, you do it without telling them.

Behind the eight ball
: A difficult position from which it is unlikely one can escape.

Behind the times
: Someone that is behind the times is old-fashioned and has ideas that are regarded as out-dated.

Believe in the hereafter
: A belief in the hereafter is a belief in the afterlife, or life after death. It is, therefore, associated with religions and the soul's journey to heaven or to hell, whichever way being just deserts for the person based on how they led their life.

Bells and whistles
: Bells and whistles are attractive features that things like computer programs have, though often a bit unnecessary.

Bells on
: (USA) To be somewhere with bells on means to arrive there happy and delighted to attend.

Belly up
: If things go belly up, they go badly wrong.

Below par
: If something isn't up to standard, or someone isn't feeling or doing very well, they are below par.

Below the belt
: If someone says something that is cruel or unfair, it is below the belt, like the illegal punches in boxing.

Belt and braces
: (UK) Someone who wears belt and braces is very cautious and takes no risks.

Belt and suspenders
: (USA) Someone who wears belt and suspenders is very cautious and takes no risks.

Bend over backwards

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If someone bends over backwards, they do everything they can to help someone.

Bend someone's ear

To bend someone's ear is to talk to someone about something for a long-enough period that it becomes tiresome for the listener.

Benjamin of the family

The Benjamin of the family is the youngest child.

Beside the point

If something is beside the point, it's not relevant to the matter being discussed or considered.

Beside themselves

If people are beside themselves, they are very worried or emotional about something.

Beside yourself

If you are beside yourself, you are extremely angry.

Best of a bad bunch

The best that could be obtained from a list of options that were not exactly what was required.

Best of both worlds

If you have the best of both worlds, you benefit from different things that do not normally go together.

Best thing since sliced bread

If something is the best thing since sliced bread, it is excellent. ('The greatest thing since sliced bread' is also used.)

Bet your bottom dollar

(USA) If you can bet your bottom dollar on something, you can be absolutely sure about it.

Better half

Your better half is your husband or wife.

Better late than never

This idiom suggests that doing something late is better than not doing it at all.

Better safe than sorry

This idiom is used to recommend being cautious rather than taking a risk.

Better than a kick in the teeth

If something is better than a kick in the teeth, it isn't very good, but it is better than nothing.

Better than a stick in the eye

If something is better than a stick in the eye, it isn't very good, but it is better than nothing.

Better the devil you know

This is the shortened form of the full idiom, 'better the devil you know than the devil you don't', and means that it is often better to deal with someone or something you are familiar with and know, even if they are not ideal, than take a risk with an unknown person or thing.

Between a rock and a hard place

If you are caught between a rock and a hard place, you are in a position where you have to choose between unpleasant alternatives, and your choice might cause you problems; you will not be able to satisfy everyone.

Between the devil and the deep blue sea

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If you are caught between the devil and the deep blue sea, you are in a dilemma; a difficult choice.

Between you and me and the cat's whiskers

This idiom is used when telling someone something that you want them to keep secret.

Beyond a shadow of a doubt

If something's beyond a shadow of a doubt, then absolutely no doubts remain about it.

Beyond belief

If people behave in such a way that you find it almost impossible to accept that they actually did it, then you can say that their behaviour was beyond belief.

Beyond our ken

If something's beyond your ken, it is beyond your understanding.

Beyond the black stump

(AU) An Australian idiom idicating that even if you go as far as you can, the black stump is still a little further.

Beyond the pale

If something's beyond the pale, it is too extreme to be acceptable morally or socially.

Big Apple

(USA) The Big Apple is New York.

Big bucks

If someone is making big bucks, they are making a lot of money.

Big cheese

The big cheese is the boss.

Big Easy

(USA) The Big Easy is New Orleans, Louisiana

Big fish

An important person in a company or an organisation is a big fish.

Big fish in a small pond

A big fish in a small pond is an important person in a small place or organisation.

Big girl's blouse

A person who is very weak or fussy is a big girl's blouse.

Big hitter

A big hitter is someone who commands a lot of respect and is very important in their field.

Big nose

If someone has a big nose, it means they are excessively interested in everyone else's business.

Big picture

The big picture of something is the overall perspective or objective, not the fine detail.

Big time

This can be used to with the meaning 'very much'- if you like something big time, you like it a lot.

Bigger fish to fry

If you aren't interested in something because it isn't important to you and there are more important things for you to do, you have bigger fish to fry.

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Bird in the hand is worth two in the bush

'A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush' is a proverb meaning that it is better to have something that is certain than take a risk to get more, where you might lose everything.

Bird's eye view

If you have a bird's eye view of something, you can see it perfectly clearly.

Bird-brain

Someone who has a bird-brain, or is bird-brained, is stupid.

Birds and the bees

If a child is taught about the birds and the bees, they are taught about sex.

Birds of a feather flock together

This idiom means that people with similar interests will stick together.

Birthday suit

If you are in your birthday suit, you are naked.

Bit between your teeth

If you take or have the bit between your teeth, you take or have control of a situation. (Bit = piece of metal in a horse's mouth)

Bit part

If someone has a small or unimportant role in something, they have a bit part.

Bit player

A bit player has a small or unimportant role in something.

Bite off more than you can chew

If you bite off more than you can chew, you take on more responsibilities than you can manage. 'Don't bite off more than you can chew' is often used to advise people against agreeing to more than they can handle.

Bite someone's head off

If you bite someone's head off, you criticise them angrily.

Bite the bullet

If you have to bite the bullet, you have to accept or face something unpleasant because it cannot be avoided.

Bite the dust

This is a way of saying that somebody has died, especially if they are killed violently like a soldier in battle.

Bite your lip

If you have to bite your lip, you have to make a conscious effort not to react or to keep quiet about something that displeases you.

Bite your tongue

If you bite your tongue, you refrain from speaking because it is socially or otherwise better not to.

Bits and bobs

Bits and bobs are small, remnant articles and things- the same as 'odds and ends'.

Bitter end

If you do something to the bitter end, you do it to the very end, no matter how unsuccessful you are.

Bitter pill to swallow

A bitter pill to swallow is something that is hard to accept.

Black and blue

This means bruised, either physically or metaphorically.

Black and white

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When it is very clear who or what is right and wrong, then the situation is black and white.

Black as Newgate's knocker

(UK) If things are as black as Newgate's knocker, they are very bad. Newgate was an infamous prison in England, so its door knocker meant trouble.

Black hole

If there is a black hole in financial accounts, money has disappeared.

Black sheep

Someone who is the black sheep doesn't fit into a group or family because their behaviour or character is not good enough.

Blackball

If you vote against allowing someone to be a member of an organisation or group, you are blackballing him or her.

Blank cheque

If you are given a blank cheque, you are allowed to use as much money as you need for a project.

Bleeding edge

Similar to 'cutting edge', this implies a technology or process that is at the forefront or beyond current practices. However, because it is unproven, it is often dangerous to use (hence the 'bleeding').

Bleeding heart

A bleeding heart is a person who is excessively sympathetic towards other people.

Bless your pointy little head

This expression is used as to patronise someone, especially when they don't realise that they're not very clever.('Bless your pointes little head' is also used.)

Blessing in disguise

If some bad luck or misfortune ultimately results in something positive, it's a blessing in disguise.

Blind acceptance

If people accept thing blindly, they accept them without questioning them at all.

Blind as a bat

If you are in total darkness and can't see anything at all, you are as blind as a bat.

Blind leading the blind

When the blind are leading the blind, the people in charge of something don't know anything more than the people they are in charge of, when they should have greater knowledge.

Blind-sided

If you are blind-sided, an event with a negative impact takes you completely by surprise.

Blink of an eye

If something happens in the blink of an eye, it happens so fast it is almost impossible to notice it.

Blood and thunder

An emotional speech or performance is full of blood and thunder.

Blood from a turnip

It is impossible to get something from someone if they don't have it, just as you cannot get blood from a turnip.

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Blood is thicker than water
: This idiom means that family relationships are stronger than others.

Blood is worth bottling
: (AU) If an Australian says to you "Your blood is worth bottling", he/she is complimenting or praising you for doing something or being someone very special.

Blood out of a stone
: If something is like getting blood out of a stone, it is very difficult indeed.

Blood, sweat and tears
: If something will take blood, sweat and tears, it will be very difficult and will require a lot of effort and sacrifice.

Blow a gasket
: If you blow a gasket, you get very angry.

Blow by blow
: A blow-by-blow description gives every detail in sequence.

Blow hot and cold
: If you blow hot and cold on an idea, your attitude and opinion keeps changing; one minute you are for it, the next you are against.

Blow me down
: People say '(well,) blow me down' when you have just told them something surprising, shocking or unexpected. ('Blow me down with a feather' is also used.)

Blow off steam
: (USA) If you blow off steam, you express your anger or frustration.

Blow out of the water
: If something, like an idea, is blown out of the water, it is destroyed or defeated comprehensively.

Blow smoke
: (USA) If people blow smoke, they exaggerate or say things that are not true, usually to make themselves look better.

Blow the cobwebs away
: If you blow the cobwebs away, you make sweeping changes to something to bring fresh views and ideas in.

Blow the whistle
: If somebody blows the whistle on a plan, they report it to the authorities.

Blow your mind
: Something that will blow your mind is something extraordinary that will amaze you beyond explanation.

Blow your own horn
: If you blow your own horn, you boast about your achievements and abilities. ('Blow your own trumpet' is an alternative form.)

Blow your own trumpet
: If someone blows their own trumpet, they boast about their talents and achievements. ('Blow your own horn' is an alternative form.)

Blow your stack
: If you blow your stack, you lose your temper.

Blow your top
: If someone blows their top, they lose their temper.

Blue blood
: Someone with blue blood is royalty.

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Blue-eyed boy

Someone's blue-eyed boy is their favourite person.

Bob's your uncle

(UK) This idiom means that something will be successful: Just tell him that I gave you his name and Bob's your uncle- he'll help you.

Body politic

A group of people organised under a single government or authority (national or regional) is a body politic.

Bold as brass

Someone who is as bold as brass is very confident and not worried about how other people will respond or about being caught.

Bolt from the blue

If something happens unexpectedly and suddenly, it is a bolt from the blue.

Bone of contention

If there is an issue that always causes tension and arguments, it is a bone of contention.

Bone to pick

If you have a bone to pick with someone, you are annoyed about something they have done and want to tell them how you feel.

Boot is on the other foot

When the boot's on the other foot, a person who was in a position of weakness is now in a position of strength.

Born to the purple

Someone who is born to the purple is born in a royal or aristocratic family. ("Born in the purple" is also used.)

Born with a silver spoon in your mouth

If you are born with a silver spoon in your mouth, you are born into a rich family.

Both ends meet

If you make both ends meet, you live off the money you earn and don't go into debt.

Bottom line

In accountancy, the bottom line is net income, and is used idiomatically to mean the conclusion.

Bounce ideas

If you bounce ideas off someone, you share your ideas with them to know whether they think they would work.

Bounce off the walls

If someone's bouncing off the walls, they are very excited about something.

Bouquet of orchids

Id someone deserves a bouquet of orchids, they have done something worthy of praise.

Box and dice

Box and dice means everything.

Box clever

(UK) If you box clever, you use your intelligence to get what you want, even if you have to cheat a bit.

Boxing and coxing

If people are boxing and coxing, they are sharing responsibilities so that one of them is working while the other isn't. It can also be used when couples are

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sharing a house, but their relationship has broken down and when one is at home, the other stays out.

Boys in blue

The boys in blue are the police.

Brain surgery

If something is not brain surgery, it isn't very complicated or difficult to understand or master.

Brass monkey

If it's brass monkey weather, or cold enough to freeze the balls off a brass monkey, it is extremely cold.

Brass neck

(UK) Someone who has the brass neck to do something has no sense of shame about what they do.

Brass tacks

If you get down to brass tacks, you get down to the real business.

Bread and butter

Bread and butter issues are ones that affect people directly and in a very important way.

Breadwinner

Used to describe the person that earns the most money. For example - She's the breadwinner in the family.

Break a leg

This idiom is a way of wishing someone good luck.

Break even

If you break even, you don't make any money, but you don't lose any either.

Break ground

If you break ground, or break new ground, you make progress, taking things into a new area or going further than anyone has gone before. 'Ground-breaking' is used an adjective.

Break the back of the beast

If you break the back of the beast, you accomplish a challenge.

Break the ice

When you break the ice, you get over any initial embarrassment or shyness when you meet someone for the first time and start conversing.

Break your duck

(UK) If you break your duck, you do something for the first time.

Break your heart

If someone upsets you greatly, they break your heart, especially if they end a relationship.

Breathe down your neck

If someone follows you or examines what you're doing very closely, they are breathing down your neck.

Breathe life into

If you breathe life into something, you give people involved more energy and enthusiasm again. ('Breathe new life' is also used.)

Breathe your last

When you breathe your last, you die.

Bridge the gap

If you bridge the gap, you make a connection where there is a great difference.

Bright and breezy

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When someone is cheerful and full of energy, they are bright and breezy.

Bright as a button

A person who is as bright as a button is very intelligent or smart.

Bright-eyed and bushy-tailed

If someone's bright-eyed and bushy-tailed, they are full of energy and enthusiasm.

Brighten up the day

If something brightens up your day, something happens that makes you feel positive and happy all day long.

Bring a knife to a gunfight

If someone brings a knife to a gunfight, they are very badly prepared for something.

Bring home the bacon

A person who brings home the bacon earns the money that a family live on.

Bring on board

To make people embrace the ideas intended by the leader or agree to join a team or project is to bring them on board.

Bring someone to book

If somebody is brought to book, they are punished or made to account for something they have done wrong.

Bring someone to heel

If you bring someone to heel, you make them obey you.('Call someone to heel' is also used.)

Bring the house down

Something that brings the house down is acclaimed and praised vigorously.

Bring to the table

If you bring something to the table, you make a contribution or an offer in a discussion or negotiation..

Broad church

If an organisation is described as broad church, it is tolerant and accepting of different opinions and ideas.

Broad strokes

If something is described or defined with broad stokes, then only an outline is given, without fine details.

Broke as a joke and it ain't funny

This idiom in my opinion describes how it's not funny to be without a cent and just uses broke and joke as rhyming words that help explain this idiom a lot better.

Broken record

When someone sounds like a broken record, they keep on repeating the same things. ('Stuck record' is also used.)

Broken reed

If something or someone fails to give you the support you were hoping for, they are a broken reed.

Brown nose

When someone tries to make themselves popular with somebody, usually in a position of authority, especially by flattering them, they are brown nosing.

Browned off

To be tired of or fed up with

Brownie points

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If you try to earn Brownie points with someone, you do things you know will please them.

Brush under the carpet

If you brush something under the carpet, you are making an attempt to ignore it, or hide it from others.

Buggles' turn

(UK) If it Buggles' turn, someone gets promotion through length of service rather than ability, especially in the British civil service.

Bull in a China shop

If someone behaves like a bull in a China shop, they are clumsy when they should be careful.

Bull market

A bull market is a period when investors are optimistic and there are expectations that good financial results will continue.

Bull session

If you have a bull session, you have an informal group discussion about something.

Bull-headed

If you're a bull-headed, you're stubborn or inflexible.

Bums on seats

The people who have paid to watch a performance are bums on seats.

Bun in the oven

If a woman has a bun in the oven, she is pregnant.

Bundle of nerves

Someone who is a bundle of nerves is very worried or nervous.

Bur under my saddle

A bur under your saddle is something that annoys you or spurs you into action.('Burr' is an alternative spelling.)

Burn rubber

If you burn rubber, you drive very fast to get somewhere.

Burn the candle at both ends

Someone who burns the candle at both ends lives life at a hectic pace, doing things which are likely to affect their health badly.

Burn the midnight oil

If you stay up very late working or studying, you burn the midnight oil.

Burn your bridges

If you burn your bridges, you do something that makes it impossible to go back from the position you have taken.

Burn your fingers

If you burn your fingers, you suffer a loss or something unpleasant as the result of something you did, making you less likely to do it again.

Burning question

A burning question is something we all want to know about.

Burst at the seams

To be filled to or beyond normal capacity: This room will be bursting at the seams when all the guests arrive.

Bury the hatchet

If you bury the hatchet, you make peace with someone and stop arguing or fighting.

Bury your head in the sand

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If someone buries their head in the sand, they ignore something that is obviously wrong.

Busman's holiday

A busman's holiday is when you spend your free time doing the same sort of work as you do in your job.

Bust my chops

When someone says that they're not going to bust their chops, it means they are not going to work that hard or make much effort.

Busted flush

Someone or something that had great potential but ended up a useless failure is a busted flush.

Busy as a beaver

If you're as busy as a beaver, you're very busy indeed.

Busy as a bee

If you are as busy as a bee, you are very busy indeed.

Butt naked

If someone is butt naked, they have no clothes on at all, often when they can be seen.

Butt of a joke

If something or someone becomes the butt of a joke it or they are not taken seriously anymore.

Butter wouldn't melt in their mouth

If someone looks as if butter wouldn't melt in their mouth, they look very innocent.

Butterfingers

Someone who has butterfingers is clumsy and drops things.

Butterflies in your stomach

The nervous feeling before something important or stressful is known as butterflies in your stomach.

Button your lip

If you button your lip, you keep quiet and don't speak. It is also used as a way of telling someone to shut up.

Buy the farm

When somebody has bought the farm, they have died.

By a hair's breadth

If a person escapes from some danger by a hair's breadth, they only just managed to avoid it. The breadth is the thickness of a hair, so they probably feel somewhat lucky because the margin between success and what could easily have been failure was so close.

By a long chalk

(UK) If you beat somebody by a long chalk, you win easily and comfortably.

By a whisker

If you do something by a whisker, you only just manage to do it and come very near indeed to failing.

By and large

By and large means usually or generally.

By cracky

A term used by rural folks in years past to emphasize a matter of importance or urgency. An example: 'By cracky, you need to get out there in the field with that mule and plow and finish the sod-busting before dark.'

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By dint of
: This means 'as a result of' or 'because of': It would be good to think he'd risen to position of Chief Executive by dint of hard work.

By heart
: If you learn something by heart, you learn it word for word.

By hook or by crook
: If you are prepared to do something by hook or by crook, you are willing to do anything, good or bad, to reach your goal.

By leaps and bounds
: Something that happens by leaps and bounds happens very quickly in big steps.

By the back door
: If something is started or introduced by the back door, then it is not done openly or by following the proper procedures.

By the book
: If you do something by the book, you do it exactly as you are supposed to.

By the by
: This is used as a way of introducing an incidental topic in a conversation or to say that something is irrelevant. ('By the bye' is also used.)

By the numbers
: If something is done by the numbers, it is done in a mechanical manner without room for creativity.

By the same token
: If someone applies the same rule to different situations, they judge them by the same token: If things go well, he's full of praise, but, by the same token, when things go wrong he gets furious.

By the seat of your pants
: If you do something by the seat of your pants, you achieve something, but only by a narrow margin or do something without advance preparation.

By the skin of your teeth
: If you do something by the skin of your teeth, you only just manage to do it and come very near indeed to failing.

By word of mouth
: If something becomes known by word of mouth, it gets known by being talked about rather than through publicity or advertising, etc.

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Cake's not worth the candle
: If someone says that the cake's not worth the candle, they mean that the result will not be worth the effort put in to achieve it.

Calf lick
: A calf lick is the weird parting in your fringe where your hair grows in a different direction, usually to one side.

Call a spade a spade
: A person who calls a spade a spade is one speaks frankly and makes little or no attempt to conceal their opinions or to spare the feelings of their audience.

Call it a day
: If you call it a day, you stop doing something for a while, normally at least until the following day.

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Call on the carpet
: If you are called on the carpet, you are summoned for a reprimand by superiors or others in power.

Call the dogs off
: If someone calls off their dogs, they stop attacking or criticising someone.

Call the shots
: If you call the shots, you are in charge and tell people what to do.

Call the tune
: The person who calls the tune makes the important decisions about something.

Calm before the storm
: A calm time immediately before period of violent activity or argument is the calm before the storm.

Can of worms
: If an action can create serious problems, it is opening a can of worms.

Can't dance and it's too wet to plow
: (USA) When you can't dance and it's too wet to plow, you may as well do something because you can't or don't have the opportunity to do anything else.

Can't do it for toffee
: If you can't so something for toffee, you are incapable of doing something properly or to any sort of standard.

Can't hack it
: Unable to perform an act, duty, job etc. (example: I have to quit my job as a computer technician; I just can't hack it.)

Can't hold a candle
: If something can't hold a candle to something else, it is much worse.

Can't see the forest for its trees
: If someone can't see the forest for its trees, they are too focused on specific details to see the picture as a whole.

Canary in a coal mine
: (UK) A canary in a coal mine is an early warning of danger.

Card up your sleeve
: If you have a card up your sleeve, you have a surprise plan or idea that you are keeping back until the time is right.

Carpetbagger
: A carpetbagger is an opportunist without any scruples or ethics, or a politican who wants to represent a place they have no connection with.

Carrot and stick
: If someone offers a carrot and stick, they offer an incentive to do something combined with the threat of punishment.

Carry the can
: If you carry the can, you take the blame for something, even though you didn't do it or are only partly at fault.

Carry the day
: If something carries the day, it wins a battle (the sense is that the battle has been long and could have gone either way) or competition for supremacy.

Case by case
: If things are done case by case, each situation or issue is handled separately on its own merits and demerits.

Case in point

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Meaning an instance of something has just occurred that was previously discussed. For instance, a person may have told another that something always happens. Later that day, they see it happening, and the informer might say, 'case in point'.

Cash cow

A product, business, etc, that generates a continuous flow of money or a high proportion of overall profits is a cash cow.

Cash in your chips

If you cash in your chips, you sell something to get what profit you can because you think its value is going to fall. It can also mean 'to die'.

Cast a long shadow

Something or someone that casts a long shadow has considerable influence on other people or events.

Cast aspersion

If you cast aspersion, you try to blacken someone's name and make people think badly of them.

Cast doubt on

If you make other people not sure about a matter, then you have cast doubt on it.

Cast iron stomach

A person with a cast iron stomach can eat or drink anything without any ill effects.

Cast pearls before swine

If you cast pearls before swine, you offer something of value to someone who doesn't appreciate it- 'swine' are 'pigs'.

Cast sheep's eyes at

If you cast sheep's eyes at at someone, you look lovingly or with longing at them.

Cast your mind back

If somebody tells you to cast your mind back on something, they want you to think about something that happened in the past, but which you might not remember very well, and to try to remember as much as possible.

Cast your net widely

If you cast your net widely, you use a wide range of sources when trying to find something.

Casting vote

The casting vote is a vote given to a chairman or president that is used when there is a deadlock.

Castles in the air

Plans that are impractical and will never work out are castles in the air.

Cat among the pigeons

If something or someone puts, or sets or lets, the cat among the pigeons, they create a disturbance and cause trouble.

Cat and dog life

If people lead a cat and dog life, they are always arguing.

Cat burglar

A cat burglar is a skillful thief who breaks into places without disturbing people or setting off alarms.

Cat fur and kitty britches

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(USA) When I used to ask my grandma what was for dinner, she would say 'cat fur and kitty britches'. This was her Ozark way of telling me that I would get what she cooked. (Ozark is a region in the center of the United States)

Cat got your tongue?

If someone asks if the cat has got your tongue, they want to know why you are not speaking when they think you should.

Cat nap

If you have a short sleep during the day, you are cat napping.

Cat's lick

(Scot) A cat's lick is a very quick wash.

Cat's pajamas

(USA) Something that is the cat's pajamas is excellent.

Cat's whiskers

Something excellent is the cat's whiskers.

Catch as catch can

This means that people should try to get something any way they can.

Catch hell

If you catch hell, you get into trouble or get scolded. ('Catch heck' is also used.)

Catch some z's

If you catch some z's, you get some sleep.

Catch someone red-handed

If someone is caught red-handed, they are found doing something wrong or illegal.

Catch-22

Catch-22 is a situation where conflicting rules make the desired outcome impossible. It comes from a novel by the American author Joseph Heller, in which pilots would not have to fly missions if they were mentally ill, but not wanting to fly dangerous missions was held to be proof of sanity, so they had to fly anyway. ('Catch 22', without the hyphen, is also used.)

Caught with your hand in the cookie jar

(USA) If someone is caught with his or her hand in the cookie jar, he or she is caught doing something wrong.

Chalk and cheese

Things, or people, that are like chalk and cheese are very different and have nothing in common.

Champ at the bit

If someone is champing at the bit, they are very eager to accomplish something. ('Chomping at the bit' is also used.)

Champagne taste on a beer budget

Someone who lives above their means and likes things they cannot afford has champagne taste on a beer budget.

Change horses in midstream

If people change horses in midstream, they change plans or leaders when they are in the middle of something, even though it may be very risky to do so.

Change of heart

If you change the way you think or feel about something, you have a change of heart.

Change tack

If you change tack, you use a different method for dealing with something.

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Change your tune
: If someone changes their ideas or the way they talk about them, they change their tune.

Chaps my ass
: When something/someone really annoys you, it chaps your ass.

Chapter and verse
: When you know something very well, and can quote it, you know it chapter and verse.

Charity begins at home
: This idiom means that family members are more important than anyone else, and should be the focus of a person's efforts.

Chase rainbows
: If someone chases rainbows, they try to do something that they will never achieve.

Chase your tail
: If you are chasing your tail, you are very busy but not being very productive.

Cheap as chips
: (UK) If something is very inexpensive, it is as cheap as chips.

Cheap at half the price
: If something's cheap at half the price, it's very cheap indeed.

Cheap shot
: A cheap shot is an unprincipled criticism.

Cheat death
: If someone cheats death, they narrowly avoid a major problem or accident.

Cheek by jowl
: If things or people are cheek by jowl, they are very close together.

Cherry pick
: If people cherry pick, they choose things that support their position, while ignoring things that contradict it.

Chew on a bone
: If someone is chewing on a bone, he or she is thinking about something intently.

Chew the cud
: If you chew the cud, you think carefully about something.

Chew the fat
: If you chew the fat with someone, you talk at leisure with them.

Chickenfeed
: If something is small or unimportant, especially money, it is chickenfeed.

Child's play
: If something is child's play, it is very easy and simple.

Chinese walls
: Chinese walls are regulatory information barriers that aim to stop the flow of information that could be misused, especially in financial corporations.

Chinese whispers
: (UK) When a story is told from person to person, especially if it is gossip or scandal, it inevitably gets distorted and exaggerated. This process is called Chinese whispers.

Chip off the old block
: If someone is a chip off the old block, they closely resemble one or both of the parents in character.

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Chip on your shoulder

If someone has a chip on their shoulder, they are resentful about something and feel that they have been treated badly.

Chop and change

If things chop and change, they keep changing, often unexpectedly.

Cigarette paper

If you cannot get or put a cigarette paper between people, they are so closely bonded that nothing will separate them or their positions on issues.

Circle the wagons

(USA) If you circle the wagons, you stop communicating with people who don't think the same way as you to avoid their ideas. It can also mean to bring everyone together to defend a group against an attack.

Circling the drain

If someone is circling the drain, they are very near death and have little time to live. The phrase can also describe a project or plan or campaign that that is on the brink of failure.

Class act

Someone who's a class act is exceptional in what they do.

Clean as a whistle

If something is as clean as a whistle, it is extremely clean, spotless. It can also be used to mean 'completely', though this meaning is less common nowadays. If somebody is clean as a whistle, they are not involved in anything illegal.

Clean bill of health

If something or someone has a clean bill of health, then there's nothing wrong; everything's fine.

Clean break

If you make a clean break, you break away completely from something.

Clean hands

Someone with clean hands, or who keeps their hands clean, is not involved in illegal or immoral activities.

Clean sheet

When someone has a clean sheet, they have got no criminal record or problems affecting their reputation. In football and other sports, a goalkeeper has a clean sheet when let no goals in.

Clean slate

If you start something with a clean slate, then nothing bad from your past is taken into account.

Clean sweep

If someone makes a clean sweep, they win absolutely everything in a competition or contest.

Clean your clock

If you clean your clock, you beat someone decisively in a contest or fight.

Clear as a bell

If something is as clear as a bell, it is very clear or easy to understand.

Clear as mud

If something is as clear as mud, then it is very confusing and unclear.

Cliffhanger

If something like a sports match or an election is a cliffhanger, then the result is so close that it cannot be predicted and will only be known at the very end.

Climb on the bandwagon

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When people climb on the bandwagon they do something because it is popular and everyone else is doing it.

Climb the greasy pole

Advance within an organisation - especially in politics.

Cling to hope

If people cling to hope, they continue to hope though the chances of success are very small.

Close at hand

If something is close at hand, it is nearby or conveniently located.

Close but no cigar

(USA) If you are close but no cigar, you are close to success, but have not got there.

Close call

If the result of something is a close call, it is almost impossible to distinguish between the parties involved and to say who has won or whatever. It can also mean that you very nearly have a serious accident or get into trouble.

Close shave

If you have a close shave, you very nearly have a serious accident or get into trouble.

Close the stable door after the horse has bolted

If people try to fix something after the problem has occurred, they are trying to close the stable door after the horse has bolted. 'Close the barn door after the horse has bolted' is alternative, often used in American English.

Close to your heart

If something is close to your heart, you care a lot about it. ('Dear to your heart' is an alternative.)

Closed book to me

If a subject is a closed book to you, it is something that you don't understand or know anything about.

Cloth ears

If you don't listen to people, they may suggest you have cloth ears.

Cloud cuckoo land

If someone has ideas or plans that are completely unrealistic, they are living on cloud cuckoo land.

Cloud nine

If you are on cloud nine, you are extremely happy. ('cloud seven' is a less common alternative)

Cloud of suspicion

If a cloud of suspicion hangs over an individual, it means that they are not believed or are distrusted.

Cloud on the horizon

If you can see a problem ahead, you can call it a cloud on the horizon.

Clutch at straws

If someone is in serious trouble and tries anything to help them, even though their chances of success are probably nil, they are clutching at straws.

Clutch play

If an activity is referred to as a clutch play, it means that the activity was the key to the success or failure of the venture. For instance, a clutch play in a baseball game may be striking out a batter with the bases loaded.

Coals to Newcastle

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(UK) Taking, bringing, or carrying coals to Newcastle is doing something that is completely unnecessary.

Coast is clear

When the coast is clear, the people supposed to be watching you are not there and you are able to move or leave.

Cock a snook

To make a rude gesture by putting one thumb to the nose with the fingers outstretched.

Cock and bull story

A cock and bull story is a lie someone tells that is completely unbelievable.

Cock in the henhouse

This is used to describe a male in an all-female environment.

Cock of the walk

A man who is excessively confident and thinks he's better than other people is the cock of the walk.

Cold day in hell

This is used as a prediction there is no chance some event or condition will ever happen.'There will be a cold day in hell before he manages it.'

Cold feet

If you get cold feet about something, you lose the courage to do it.

Cold fish

A cold fish is a person who doesn't show how they feel.

Cold light of day

If you see things in the cold light of day, you see them as they really are, not as you might want them to be.

Cold shoulder

If you give or show someone the cold shoulder, you are deliberately unfriendly and unco-operative towards them.

Cold sweat

If something brings you out in a cold sweat, it frightens you a lot.

Cold turkey

If someone suddenly stops taking drugs, instead of slowly cutting down, they do cold turkey.

Colder than a witches tit

If it is colder than a witches tit, it is extremely cold outside.

Collateral damage

Accidental or unintended damage or casualties are collateral damage.

Collect dust

If something is collecting dust, it isn't being used any more.

Color bar

Rules that restrict access on the basis of race or ethnicity are a color bar.

Come a cropper

(UK) Someone whose actions or lifestyle will inevitably result in trouble is going to come a cropper.

Come clean

If someone comes clean about something, they admit to deceit or wrongdoing.

Come hell or high water

If someone says they'll do something come hell or high water, they mean that nothing will stop them, no matter what happens.

Come of age

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When something comes of age it develops completely and reaches maturity. When someone comes of age, they reach adulthood or fulfill their potential.

Come on hard

If you come on hard, you are aggressive in your dealing with someone.

Come on the heels of

If something comes on the heels of something, it follows very soon after it.

Come out in the wash

If something will come out in the wash, it won't have any permanent negative effect.

Come out of the woodwork

When things come out of the woodwork, they appear unexpectedly. ('Crawl out of the woodwork' is also used.)

Come out of your shell

If someone comes out of their shell, they stop being shy and withdrawn and become more friendly and sociable.

Come rain or shine

If I say I'll be at a place come rain or shine, I mean that I can be relied on to turn up; nothing, not even the vagaries of British weather, will deter me or stop me from being there.

Come to a head

If events reach a crisis point, they come to a head.

Come to bear

If something comes to bear on you, you start to feel the pressure or effect of it.

Come to call

If someone comes to call, they respond to an order or summons directly.

Come to grips

If you come to grips with a problem or issue, you face up to it and deal with it.

Come to heel

If someone comes to heel, they stop behaving in a way that is annoying to someone in authority and start being obedient.

Come up roses

If things come up roses, they produce a positive result, especially when things seemed to be going badly at first.

Come up smelling of roses

(UK) If someone comes up smelling of roses, they emerge from a situation with their reputation undamaged.

Come up trumps

When someone is said to have 'come up trumps', they have completed an activity successfully or produced a good result, especially when they were not expected to.

Come what may

If you're prepared to do something come what may, it means that nothing will stop or distract you, no matter how hard or difficult it becomes.

Come with the territory

If something comes with the territory, it is part of a job or responsibility and just has to be accepted, even if unpleasant.

Comes with the territory

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If something comes with the territory, especially when undesirable, it is automatically included with something else, like a job, responsibility, etc.('Goes with the territory' is also used.)

Comfort zone

It is the temperature range in which the body doesn't shiver or sweat, but has an idiomatic sense of a place where people feel comfortable, where they can avoid the worries of the world. It can be physical or mental.

Connect the dots

When you connect the dots, you understand the connections and relationships.

Constitution of an ox

If someone has the constitution of an ox, they are less affected than most people by things like tiredness, illness, alcohol, etc.

Cook someone's goose

If you cook someone's goose, you ruin their plans.

Cook the books

If people cook the books, they keep false accounts to make money illegally or avoid paying tax.

Cool as a cat

To act fine when you a actually scared or nervous

Cool your heels

If you leave someone to cool their heels, you make them wait until they have calmed down.

Coon's age

(USA) A very long time, as in 'I haven't seen her in a coon's age!'

Corner a market

If a business is dominant in an area and unlikely to be challenged by other companies, it has cornered the market.

Couch potato

A couch potato is an extremely idle or lazy person who chooses to spend most of their leisure time horizontal in front of the TV and eats a diet that is mainly junk food.

Could eat a horse

If you are very hungry, you could eat a horse.

Couldn't give two hoots

If you couldn't give two hoots about something, you don't care at all about it.

Count sheep

If people cannot sleep, they are advised to count sheep mentally.

Count your blessings

When people count their blessings, they concentrate on all the good things in their lives instead of the negative ones.

Country mile

(USA) A country mile is used to describe a long distance.

Cover all the bases

If you cover all the bases, you deal with all aspects of a situation or issue, or anticipate all possibilities. ('Cover all bases' is also used.)

Crack a nut with a sledgehammer

If you use a sledgehammer to crack a nut, you apply too much force to achieve a result. ('Jackhammer' is also used.)

Crash a party

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If you crash a party, or are a gatecrasher, you go somewhere you haven't been invited to.

Cream of the crop

The cream of the crop is the best there is.

Cream rises to the top

A good person or idea cannot go unnoticed for long, just as cream poured in coffee or tea eventually rises to the top.

Creature comforts

If a person said "I hate camping. I don't like giving up my creature comforts." the person would be referring, in particular, to the comfortable things he/she would have at home but not when camping. At home, for example, he/she would have complete shelter from the weather, a television, a nice comfortable warm bed, the ability to take a warm bath or shower, comfortable lounge chairs to relax in and so on. The person doesn't like giving up the material and psychological benefits of his/her normal life.

Crème de la crème

The crème de la crème is the very best of something.

Crocodile tears

If someone cries crocodile tears, they pretend to be upset or affected by something.

Crooked as a dog's hind leg

Someone who is very dishonest is as crooked as a dog's hind leg.

Cross swords

When people cross swords, they argue or dispute. This expression is used when some groups accuse each other for non-adherence to norms. Actually no sword is used but the tempo of the argument is high enough to cause worsening of the already bad situation. It is a tussle (vehement struggle without use of arms) between the parties to establish supremacy.

Cross that bridge when you come to it

If you will cross that bridge when you come to it, you will deal with a problem when it arises, but not until that point

Cross to bear

If someone has a cross to bear, they have a heavy burden of responsibility or a problem that they alone must cope with.

Crossing the Rubicon

When you are crossing the Rubicon, you are passing a point of no return. After you do this thing, there is no way of turning around. The only way left is forward.

Crunch time

When people, companies, etc, have to make an important decision that will have a considerable effect on their future, it is crunch time.

Cry wolf

If someone cries wolf, they raise a false alarm about something.

Cry your eyes out

If you cry your eyes out, you cry uncontrollably.

Cry-baby

A cry-baby is a person who gets emotional and cries too easily.

Cuckoo in the nest

Is an issue or a problem, etc, is a cuckoo in the nest, it grows quickly and crowds out everything else.

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Cupboard love
: (UK) To show love to gain something from someone

Curate's egg
: (UK) If something is a bit of a curate's egg, it is only good in parts.

Curiosity killed the cat
: As cats are naturally curious animals, we use this expression to suggest to people that excessive curiosity is not necessarily a good thing, especially where it is not their business.

Curry favour
: If people try to curry favour, they try to get people to support them. ('Curry favor' is the American spelling.)

Curve ball
: (USA) If something is a curve ball, it is deceptive.

Cut a long story short
: This idiom is used as a way of shortening a story by getting to to the end or the point.

Cut a rug
: To cut a rug is to dance.

Cut above
: If a person is described as a cut above other people, they are better in some way.

Cut and dried
: If something is cut and dried, then everything has already been decided and, in the case of an opinion, might be a little stale and predictable.

Cut and run
: If people cut and run, they take what they can get and leave before they lose everything.

Cut corners
: If people try to do something as cheaply or as quickly as possible, often sacrificing quality, they are cutting corners.

Cut down the tall poppies
: (AU) If people cut down the tall poppies, they criticise people who stand out from the crowd.

Cut it fine
: If you cut it fine, you only just manage to do something- at the very last moment. 'Cut things fine' is the same. 'Cut it a bit fine' is a common variation.

Cut off your nose to spite your face
: If you cut off your nose to spite your face, you do something rash or silly that ends up making things worse for you, often because you are angry or upset.

Cut someone some slack
: To relax a rule or make an allowance, as in allowing someone more time to finish something.

Cut the Gordian knot
: If someone cuts the Gordian knot, they solve a very complex problem in a simple way.

Cut the mustard
: (UK) If somebody or something doesn't cut the mustard, they fail or it fails to reach the required standard.

Cut to the chase

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If you cut to the chase, you get to the point, or the most interesting or important part of something without delay.

Cut to the quick

If someone's cut to the quick by something, they are very hurt and upset indeed.

Cut your coat according to your cloth

If you cut your coat according to your cloth, you only buy things that you have sufficient money to pay for.

Cut your losses

If you cut your losses, you avoid losing any more money than you already have by getting out of a situation before matters worsen.

Cut your teeth on

The place where you gain your early experience is where you cut your teeth.

Cute as a bug

(USA) If something is as cute as a bug, it is sweet and endearing.

Cuts no ice

If something cuts no ice, it doesn't have any effect or influence.

Cutting edge

Something that is cutting edge is at the forefront of progress in its area.

~ D ~

Daft as a brush

(UK) Someone who is daft as a brush is rather stupid.

Damp squib

(UK) If something is expected to have a great effect or impact but doesn't, it is a damp squib.

Dancing on someone's grave

If you will dance on someone's grave, you will outlive or outlast them and will celebrate their demise.

Dark horse

If someone is a dark horse, they are a bit of a mystery.

Davey Jones' locker

Davey Jones' locker is the bottom of the sea or resting place of drowned sailors.('Davy Jones' locker' is an alternative spelling.)

Day in the sun

If you have your day in the sun, you get attention and are appreciated.

Daylight robbery

If you are overcharged or underpaid, it is a daylight robbery; open, unfair and hard to prevent. Rip-off has a similar meaning.

Days are numbered

When someone’s days are numbered, they are expected to die soon.

Dead air

When there is a period of total silence, there is dead air.

Dead and buried

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If something is dead and buried, it has all long been settled and is not going to be reconsidered.

Dead as a dodo

If something's dead as a dodo, it is lifeless and dull. The dodo was a bird that lived the island of Mauritius. It couldn't fly and was hunted to extinction.

Dead as a doornail

This is used to indicate that something is lifeless.

Dead duck

If something is a dead duck, it is a failure.

Dead even

If people competing are dead even, they are at exactly the same stage or moving at exactly the same speed.

Dead from the neck up

Someone who's dead from the neck up is very stupid indeed.

Dead heat

If a race ends in a dead heat, two or more finish with exactly the same result.

Dead in the water

If something is dead in the water, it isn't going anywhere or making any progress.

Dead level best

If you try your dead level best, you try as hard as you possibly could to do something.

Dead man walking

A dead man walking is someone who is in great trouble and will certainly get punished, lose their job or position, etc, soon.

Dead meat

This is used as a way of threatening someone: You'll be dead meat if you don't go along.

Dead men's shoes

If promotion or success requires replacing somebody, then it can only be reached by dead men's shoes' by getting rid of them.

Dead right

This means that something or someone is absolutely correct, without doubt.

Dead to the world

If somebody's fast asleep and completely unaware of what if happening around them, he or she's dead to the world.

Dead wrong

If someone is dead wrong, they are absolutely in error, absolutely incorrect or of incorrect opinion.

Deaf as a post

Someone who is as deaf as a post is unable to hear at all.

Dear John letter

A letter written by a partner explaining why they are ending the relationship is a Dear John letter.

Death of a thousand cuts

If something is suffering the death of a thousand cuts, or death by a thousand cuts, lots of small bad things are happening, none of which are fatal in themselves, but which add up to a slow and painful demise.

Death warmed up

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(UK) If someone looks like death warmed up, they look very ill indeed. ('death warmed over' is the American form)

Decorate the mahogany

(USA) When someone buys a round a pub or bar, they decorate the mahogany; putting cash on the bar.

Deep pockets

If someone has deep pockets, they are wealthy.

Deep pockets but short arms

Someone who has money but never puts his hand in his pocket to pay for anything has deep pockets but short arms.

Deer in the headlights

When one is caught offguard and needs to make a decision, but cannot react quickly.

Deliver the goods

Do what is required, come up to expectations. For example, Kate delivered the goods and got us the five votes we needed. This phrase alludes to delivering an order of groceries or other items. [Colloquial; second half of 1800s]

Demon weed

Tobacco is the demon weed.

Derring-do

If a person shows derring-do, they show great courage.

Devil finds work for idle hands

When people say that the devil finds work for idle hands, they mean that if people don't have anything to do with their time, they are more likely to get involved in trouble and criminality.

Devil is in the detail

When people say that the devil in the detail, they mean that small things in plans and schemes that are often overlooked can cause serious problems later on.

Devil may care

If you live a devil-may-care life it means you are willing to take more risks than most people.

Devil's advocate

If someone plays Devil's advocate in an argument, they adopt a position they don't believe in just for the sake of the argument

Diamond in the rough

A diamond in the rough is someone or something that has great potential, but isn't not refined and polished.

Die is cast

If the die is cast, a decision has been made that cannot be altered and fate will decide the consequences.

Different kettle of fish

If something is a different kettle of fish, it is very different from the other things referenced.

Different ropes for different folks

(USA) This idiom means that different people do things in different ways that suit them.

Different strokes for different folks

(USA) This idiom means that different people do things in different ways that suit them.

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Dig way down deep
: When someone digs way down deep, they look into their inner feelings to see how they feel about it.

Dig your heels in
: If you dig your heels in, you start to resist something.

Dime a dozen
: (USA) If something is a dime a dozen, it is extremely common, possibly too common.

Dine on ashes
: I someone is dining on ashes he or she is excessively focusing attention on failures or regrets for past actions.

Dinosaur
: A dinosaur is a person who is thought to be too old for their position.

Dip your toes in the water
: If you dip your toes in the water, you try something tentatively because you are not sure whether it will work or not.

Dirty dog
: A dirty dog is an untrustworthy person.

Discerning eye
: If a person has a discerning eye, they are particularly good at judging the quality of something.

Discretion is the better part of valour
: This idiom means that it is often better to think carefully and not act than to do something that may cause problems.

Dish the dirt
: If you dish the dirt on something or someone, you make unpleasant or shocking information public.

Do a Devon Loch
: (UK) If someone does a Devon Loch, they fail when they were very close to winning. Devon Loch was a horse that collapsed just short of the winning line of the Grand National race.

Do a Lord Lucan
: (UK) If someone disappears without a trace or runs off, they do a Lord Lucan. (Lord Lucan disappeared after a murder)

Do a runner
: (UK) If people leave a restaurant without paying, they do a runner.

Do as you would be done by
: Treat and respect others as you would hope to be respected and treated by them.

Do the needful
: (India) If you do the needful, you do what is necessary.

Do the running
: (UK) The person who has to do the running has to make sure that things get done. ('Make the running' is also used.)

Do their dirty work
: Someone who does someone's dirty work, carries out the unpleasant jobs that the first person doesn't want to do. Someone who seems to enjoy doing this is sometimes known as a 'henchman'.

Do's and don't's

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The do's and don't's are what is acceptable or allowed or not within an area or issue, etc.

Dodge the bullet

If someone has dodged a bullet, they have successfully avoided a very serious problem.

Dog and pony show

(USA) A dog and pony show is a presentation or some marketing that has lots of style, but no real content.

Dog days

Dog days are very hot summer days.

Dog eat dog

In a dog eat dog world, there is intense competition and rivalry, where everybody thinks only of himself or herself.

Dog in the manger

(UK) If someone acts like a dog in the manger, they don't want other people to have or enjoy things that are useless to them.

Dog tired

If you are dog tired, you are exhausted.

Dog's dinner

Something that is a dog's dinner is a real mess.

Dog's life

If some has a dog's life, they have a very unfortunate and wretched life.

Dog-eared

If a book is dog-eared, it is in bad condition, with torn pages, etc.

Dog-whistle politics

(AU) When political parties have policies that will appeal to racists while not being overtly racist, they are indulging in dog-whistle politics.

Doggy bag

If you ask for a doggy bag in a restaurant, they will pack the food you haven't eaten for you to take home.

Doldrums

If a person is in the doldrums, they are depressed. If a project or something similar is in the doldrums, it isn't making any progress.

Dollars for doughnuts

(USA) If something is dollars for doughnuts, it is a sure bet or certainty.

Don't bite the hand that feeds

When someone says this to you, they are trying to tell you not to act against those on whom you depend.

Don't catch your chickens before they're hatched

This means that you should wait until you know whether something has produced the results you desire, rather than acting beforehand. ('Don't count your chickens until they've hatched' is an alternative.)

Don't cry over spilt milk

When something bad happens and nothing can be done to help it people say, 'Don't cry over spilt milk'.

Don't give up the day job

This idiom is used a way of telling something that they do something badly.

Don't hold your breath

If you are told not to hold your breath, it means that you shouldn't have high expectations about something.

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Don't judge a book by the cover
: This idiom means that you should not judge something or someone by appearances, but should look deeper at what is inside and more important.

Don't know whether to wind a watch or bark at the moon
: If you don't know what to do, you don't know whether to wind a watch or bark at the moon.

Don't look a gift horse in the mouth
: This means that if you are given something, a present or a chance, you should not waste it by being too critical or examining it too closely.

Don't mention the war
: This means that you shouldn't speak about things that could cause an argument or tension.This idiom was used in a classic episode of the much-loved British comedy series Fawlty Towers. As a consequence if you use this phrase in Britain, listeners will understand you to be referring to Germans, or just start laughing.

Don't push my buttons!
: This can be said to someone who is starting to annoy you.

Don't shoot the messenger
: This phrase can be used when breaking some bad news to someone and you don't want to be blamed for the news. ('Don't kill the messenger' is also used.)

Don't stand there with curlers in your hair
: This means 'don't keep me waiting'. It's said to someone who is taking too long to get moving.

Don't sweat the small stuff
: (USA) This is used to tell people not to worry about trivial or unimportant issues.

Don't take any wooden nickels
: (USA) This idiom is used to advise people not to be cheated or ripped off.

Don't throw bricks when you live in a glass house
: Don't call others out on actions that you, yourself do. Don't be a hypocrite.

Don't trouble trouble until trouble troubles you
: Don't go looking for trouble or problems- let them come to you.

Don't upset the applecart
: If you are advised not to upset the applecart, you are being told not to disturb the way things are done because it might ruin things.

Don't wash your dirty laundry in public
: (UK) People, especially couples, who argue in front of others or involve others in their personal problems and crises, are said to be washing their dirty laundry in public; making public things that are best left private. (In American English, 'don't air your dirty laundry in public' is used.)

Done to death
: If a joke or story has been done to death, it has been told so often that it has stopped being funny.

Donkey work
: Donkey work is any hard, boring work or task.

Donkey's years
: This idiom means 'a very long time'.

Doormat
: A person who doesn't stand up for themselves and gets treated badly is a doormat.

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Dot all the i's and cross all the t's
: If you dot all the i's and cross all the t's, you do something very carefully and thoroughly.

Double Dutch
: (UK) If something is double Dutch, it is completely incomprehensible.

Double take
: If someone does a double take, they react very slowly to something to show how shocked or surprised they are.

Double whammy
: A double whammy is when something causes two problems at the same time, or when two setbacks occur at the same time.

Double-edged sword
: If someone uses an argument that could both help them and harm them, then they are using a double-edged sword sword; it cuts both ways.

Doubting Thomas
: A Doubting Thomas is someone who only believes what they see themselves, not what they are told.

Down and out
: If someone is down and out, they are desperately poor and need help.

Down at heel
: Someone who is down at heel is short of money. ('Down in heel' is used in American English)

Down for the count
: If someone is down for the count, they have lost a struggle, like a boxer who has been knocked out.

Down in the doldrums
: If somebody's down in the doldrums, they are depressed and lacking energy.

Down in the dumps
: If someone's down in the dumps, they are depressed.

Down in the mouth
: If someone is down in the mouth, they look unhappy or depressed.

Down the drain
: If something goes down the drain, especially money or work, it is wasted or produces no results.

Down the hatch
: This idiom can be said before drinking alcohol in company.

Down the pan
: If something has gone down the pan, it has failed or been ruined.

Down the tubes
: If something has gone down the tubes, it has failed or been ruined.

Down to the wire
: (USA) If something goes down to the wire, like a competition, then it goes to the very last moment before it is clear who has won.

Down-to-earth
: Someone who's down-to-earth is practical and realistic. It can also be used for things like ideas.

Drag your feet
: If someone is dragging their feet, they are taking too long to do or finish something, usually because they don't want to do it.

Drag your heels

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If you drag your heels, you either delay doing something or do it as slowly as possible because you don't want to do it.

Draw a blank

If you try to find something out and draw a blank, you don't get any useful information.

Draw a line in the sand

If you draw a line in the sand, you establish a limit beyond which things will be unacceptable.

Draw a long bow

If someone draws a long bow, they lie or exaggerate.

Draw the line

When you draw the line, you set out limits of what you find acceptable, beyond which you will not go.

Draw the shortest straw

If someone draws the shortest straw, they lose or are chosen to do something unpleasant.

Dress someone down

If you dress someone down, you scold them.

Dress to kill

When someone is dressed to kill, they are dressed very smartly.

Dressed to the nines

If you are in your very best clothes, you're dressed to the nines.

Drink like a fish

If someone drinks like a fish, they drink far too much alcohol.

Drive a wedge

If you drive a wedge between people, you exploit an issue so that people start to disagree.

Drive home

The idiomatic expression 'drive home' means 'reinforce' as in 'The company offered unlimited technical support as a way to drive home the message that customer satisfaction was its highest priority.'

Drive someone up the wall

If something or someone drives you up the wall, they do something that irritates you greatly.

Drive you spare

If someone or something drives you spare, it is extremely annoying.

Driven by a motor

This is used to describe people with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder when they talk excessively: 'they act as if driven by a motor.'

Drop a bombshell

If someone drops a bombshell, they announce something that changes a situation drastically and unexpectedly.

Drop a dime

(USA) If you tell someone to drop a dime, you're suggesting he or she telephone you at some future time.

Drop in the bucket

(USA) A drop in the bucket is something so small that it won't make any noticeable difference.

Drop in the ocean

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A drop in the ocean implies that something will have little effect because it is small and mostly insignificant.

Drop into your lap

If something drops into your lap, you receive it suddenly, without any warning. ('Fall into your lap' is also used.)

Drop like flies

This means that something is disappearing very quickly. For example, if you said people were dropping like flies, it would mean that they were dying off, quitting or giving up something rapidly.

Drop someone a line

If you drop someone a line, you send a letter to them.

Drop the ball

If someone drops the ball, they are not doing their job or taking their responsibilities seriously enough and let something go wrong.

Dropped like a hot cake

If something is dropped like a hot cake, it is rejected or disposed of very quickly.

Drown your sorrows

If someone gets drunk or drinks a lot to try to stop feeling unhappy, they drown their sorrows.

Drunk as a lord

(UK) Someone who is very drunk is as drunk as a lord.

Drunker than a peach orchard boar

(USA) Southern US expression - Very drunk, as when a boar would eat fermented peaches that have fallen from the tree.

Dry as a bone

If your lawn is as dry as a bone, the soil is completely dry.

Dry as snuff

If something is as dry as snuff, it is very dry indeed.

Dry run

A dry run is a full rehearsal or trial exercise of something to see how it will work before it is launched.

Dry spell

If something or someone is having a dry spell, they aren't being as successful as they normally are.

Duck soup

(USA) If something is duck soup, it is very easy.

Duck to water

If you take to something like a duck to water, you find when you start that you have a natural affinity for it.

Ducks in a row

(USA) If you have your ducks in a row, you are well-organized.

Dull as ditchwater

(UK) If something is as dull as ditchwater, it is incredibly boring. A ditch is a long narrow hole or trench dug to contain water, which is normally a dark, dirty colour and stagnant (when water turns a funny colour and starts to smell bad). (In American English,'things are 'dull as dishwater'.)

Dumb as a rock

If you are dumb as a rock, you have no common sense and are stupid.

Dunkirk spirit

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(UK) Dunkirk spirit is when people pull together to get through a very difficult time.

Dutch auction

If something is sold by setting a price, then reducing it until someone buys it, it is sold in a Dutch auction. It can also mean that something is changed until it is accepted by everyone.

Dutch courage

Dutch courage is the reckless bravery caused by drinking too much.

Dutch treat

If something like a meal is a Dutch treat, then each person pays their own share of the bill.

Dutch uncle

A Dutch uncle is a person who gives unwelcome advice.

Dutch wife

A Dutch wife is a long pillow or a hot water bottle.

Dwell on the past

Thinking too much about the past, so that it becomes a problem is to dwell on the past.

Dyed-in-the-wool

If someone is a dyed-in-the-wool supporter of a political party, etc, they support them totally, without any questions.

~ E ~

Each to their own

Different people have different preferences. In American English, 'Each to his own' is more common.

Eager beaver

A person who is extremely keen is an eager beaver.

Eagle eyes

Someone who has eagle eyes sees everything; no detail is too small.

Early bath

(UK) If someone has or goes for an early bath, they quit or lose their job or position earlier than expected because things have gone wrong.

Early bird catches the worm

The early bird catches the worm means that if you start something early, you stand a better chance of success.

Early to bed, early to rise, makes a man healthy wealthy and wise

It means that sleeping well and not staying up late will help you out physically and financially.

Earn a living

To make money Ex: We need to get a good job to earn a decent living.

Easier said than done

If something is easier said than done, it is much more difficult than it sounds. It is often used when someone advises you to do something difficult and tries to make it sound easy.

Easy as ABC

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Something that is as easy as ABC is very easy or simple.

Easy as beans

Something that is so easy that anyone can do it is easy as beans.

Easy as pie

If something is easy as pie, it is very easy indeed.

Easy come, easy go

This idiom means that money or other material gains that come without much effort tend to get spent or consumed as easily.

Easy peasy

(UK) If something is easy peasy, it is very easy indeed. ('Easy peasy, lemon squeezy' is also used.)

Eat crow

(USA) If you eat crow, you have to admit that you were wrong about something.

Eat humble pie

If someone apologises and shows a lot of contrition for something they have done, they eat humble pie.

Eat like a bird

If someone eats like a bird, they eat very little.

Eat like a horse

Someone who eats like a horse, eats a lot.

Eat like a pig

If some eats like a pig, they either eat too much or they have bad table manners.

Eat my hat

People say this when they don't believe that something is going to happen e.g. 'If he passes that exam, I'll eat my hat!'

Eat someone alive

If you eat someone alive, you defeat or beat them comprehensively.

Eat your heart out

If someone tells you to eat your heart out, they are saying they are better than you at something.

Eat your words

If you eat your words, you accept publicly that you were wrong about something you said.

Economical with the truth

(UK) If someone, especially a politician, is economical with the truth, they leave out information in order to create a false picture of a situation, without actually lying.

Egg on your face

If someone has egg on their face, they are made to look foolish or embarrassed.

Elbow grease

If something requires elbow grease, it involves a lot of hard physical work.

Elbow room

If you haven't got enough elbow room, you haven't got enough space.

Elephant in the room

An elephant in the room is a problem that everyone knows very well but no one talks about because it is taboo, embarrassing, etc.

Eleventh hour

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If something happens at the eleventh hour, it happens right at the last minute.

Empty vessels make the most noise

The thoughtless often speak the most.

End in smoke

If something ends in smoke, it produces no concrete or positive result. This expression refers to the boasting by a person, of having put in a lot of efforts by him, for a particular cause or to attain a result which is very difficult to be done by any person. (This mainly refers to an investigation of a crime or solving a serious offence or a mystery). But at the end, when the desired result is not obtained, his claims are found to be false and not worth mentioning. So, he looses his credibility.

Etched in stone

Something, especially rules and customs, that cannot be changed at all is said to be etched in stone.

Even a blind squirrel finds a nut once in a while

This expression means that even if people are ineffective or misguided, sometimes they can still be correct just by being lucky.

Even a broken clock is right twice a day

This is used when people get lucky and are undeservedly successful.('Even a stopped clock is right twice a day' is also used.)

Even keel

If something is on an even keel, it is balanced.

Even Stevens

If everything is equal between people, they are even Stevens.

Even the dogs in the street know

(Irish) This idiom is used frequently in Ireland, and means something is so obvious that even the dogs in the street know it.

Every ass likes to hear himself bray

This means that people like the sound of their own voice.

Every cloud has a silver lining

People sometimes say that every cloud has a silver lining to comfort somebody who's having problems. They mean that it is always possible to get something positive out of a situation, no matter how unpleasant, difficult or even painful it might seem.

Every dog has its day

This idiom means that everyone gets their moment to shine.

Every man and his dog

A lot of people - as in sending out invitations to a large number of people

Every man for himself

If it's every man for himself, then people are trying to save themselves from a difficult situation without trying to help anyone else.

Every man has his price

Anyone's opinion or support can be bought, everyone's principles have a limit.

Every man jack

If every man jack was involved in something, it is an emphatic way of saying that absolutely everybody was involved.

Every nook and cranny

If you search every nook and cranny, you look everywhere for something.

Every Tom, Dick and Harry

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If every Tom, Dick and Harry knows about something, then it is common knowledge.

Every trick in the book

If you try every trick in the book, you try every possible way, including dishonesty and deceit, to get what you want.

Everybody and their uncle

This basically means a lot of people or too many people; everybody and their uncle was there.

Everything but the kitchen sink

If people include everything but the kitchen sink, they include every possibility, regardless of whether they are useful.

Exception that proves the rule

This expression is used by many to indicate that an exception in some way confirms a rule. Others say that the exception tests the rule. In its original legal sense, it meant that a rule could sometimes be inferred from an exemption or exception. In general use, the first meaning predominates nowadays, much to the annoyance of some pedants.

Explore all avenues

If all avenues are being explored, then every conceivable approach is being tried that could possibly get the desired result.

Eye candy

When a person is very attractive, they can be described as eye candy - sweet to look at!

Eye for an eye

This is an expression for retributive justice, where the punishment equals the crime.

Eye- wash

This expression 'eye-wash' is generally used to cover up the anxiety of a person who is seeking a concrete reply or justification for an act or an event that had affected his personal image or caused him a loss. The affected person usually represents his case to the higher-ups and puts forth his demands for redressal. But the authority, in order to avoid embarassment to his organisation or to himself, is not in a position to expose the entire material or evidence which in turn tell upon the credibility of the organisation. In such circumstances, he will usually call for an investigation to satisfy the complainant, but will not be keen in disposing the case. The authority will drag on the issue, (at the same time pretending to be serious) until the seriousness of the issue dies down and no finality is reached. So, ' The investigation on the issue by the authority is an eye-wash'.

Eye-opener

Something surprising, unexpected which reveals the truth about something or someone.

Eyes are bigger than one's stomach

If someone's eyes are bigger than their stomach, they are greedy and take on more than they can consume or manage.

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~ F ~

Face like thunder
: If someone has a face like thunder, they are clearly very angry or upset about something.

Face only a mother could love
: When someone has a face only a mother could love, they are ugly.

Face the music
: If you have to face the music, you have to accept the negative consequences of something you have done wrong.

Face value
: If you take something at face value, you accept the appearance rather than looking deeper into the matter.

Face your demons
: If you face your demons, you confront your fears or something that you have been trying hard to avoid.

Facts of life
: When someone is taught the facts of life, they learn about sex and reproduction.

Failure is the mother of success
: Failure is often a stepping stone towards success.

Faint heart never won fair lady
: This means that you will not get the partner of your dreams if you lack the confidence to let them know how you feel.

Fair and square
: If someone wins something fair and square, they follow the rules and win conclusively.

Fair crack of the whip
: (UK) If everybody has a fair crack of the whip, they all have equal opportunities to do something.

Fair shake of the whip
: (USA) If everybody has a fair shake of the whip, they all have equal opportunities to do something.

Fair thee well
: Meaning completely and fully: I am tied up today to a fair-thee-well.

Fairweather friend
: A fairweather friend is the type who is always there when times are good but forgets about you when things get difficult or problems crop up.

Fall by the wayside
: To fall by the wayside is to give up or fail before completion.

Fall from grace
: If a person falls from grace, they lose favor with someone.

Fall off the back of a lorry
: (UK) If someone tries to sell you something that has fallen of the back of a lorry, they are trying to sell you stolen goods.

Fall off the turnip truck
: (USA) If someone has just fallen off the turnip truck, they are uninformed, naive and gullible. (Often used in the negative)

Fall off the wagon

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If someone falls off the wagon, they start drinking after having given up completely for a time.

Fall on our feet

If you fall on your feet, you succeed in doing something where there was a risk of failure.

Fall on your sword

If someone falls on their sword, they resign or accept the consequences of some wrongdoing.

Familiarity breeds contempt

This means that the more you know something or someone, the more you start to find faults and dislike things about it or them.

Famous last words

This expression is used as a way of showing disbelief, rejection or self-deprecation.'They said we had no chance of winning- famous last words!'

Fast and furious

Things that happen fast and furious happen very quickly without stopping or pausing.

Fat cat

A fat cat is a person who makes a lot of money and enjoys a privileged position in society.

Fat chance!

This idiom is a way of telling someone they have no chance.

Fat head

A fat head is a dull, stupid person.

Fat hits the fire

When the fat hits the fire, trouble breaks out.

Fat of the land

Living off the fat of the land means having the best of everything in life.

Fate worse than death

Describing something as a fate worse than death is a fairly common way of implying that it is unpleasant.

Feast today, famine tomorrow

If you indulge yourself with all that you have today, you may have to go without tomorrow.

Feather in your cap

A success or achievement that may help you in the future is a feather in your cap.

Feather your own nest

If someone feathers their own nest, they use their position or job for personal gain.

Feathers fly

When people are fighting or arguing angrily, we can say that feathers are flying.

Fed up to the back teeth

When you are extremely irritated and fed up with something or someone, you are fed up to the back teeth.

Feel at home

If you feel relaxed and comfortable somewhere or with someone, you feel at home.

Feel free

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If you ask for permission to do something and are told to feel free, the other person means that there is absolutely no problem

Feel like a million

If you feel like a million, you are feeling very well (healthy) and happy.

Feel the pinch

If someone is short of money or feeling restricted in some other way, they are feeling the pinch.

Feeling blue

If you feel blue, you are feeling unwell, mainly associated with depression or unhappiness.

Feet of clay

If someone has feet of clay, they have flaws that make them seem more human and like normal people.

Feet on the ground

A practical and realistic person has their feet on the ground.

Fence sitter

Someone that try to support both side of an argument without committing to either is a fence sitter.

Few and far between

If things are few and far between, they happen very occasionally.

Fiddle while Rome burns

If people are fiddling while Rome burns, they are wasting their time on futile things while problems threaten to destroy them.

Fifth columnist

(UK) A fifth columnist is a member of a subversive organisation who tries to help an enemy invade.

Fifth wheel

(USA) A fifth wheel is something unnecessary or useless.

Fight an uphill battle

When you fight an uphill battle, you have to struggle against very unfavourable circumstances.

Fight tooth and nail

If someone will fight tooth and nail for something, they will not stop at anything to get what they want. ('Fight tooth and claw' is an alternative.)

Fighting chance

If you have a fighting chance, you have a reasonable possibility of success.

Find your feet

When you are finding your feet, you are in the process of gaining confidence and experience in something.

Fine and dandy

(UK) If thing's are fine and dandy, then everything is going well.

Fine tuning

Small adjustments to improve something or to get it working are called fine tuning.

Fine words butter no parsnips

This idiom means that it's easy to talk, but talk is not action.

Finger in the pie

If you have a finger in the pie, you have an interest in something.

Fingers and thumbs

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If you are all fingers and thumbs, you are being clumsy and not very skilled with your hands.

Fire away

If you want to ask someone a question and they tell you to fire away, they mean that you are free to ask what you want.

Fire in the hole!

This is used as a warning when a planned explosion is about to happen.

Fire on all cylinders

If something is firing on all cylinders, it is going as well as it could.

First come, first served

This means there will be no preferential treatment and a service will be provided to those that arrive first.

First out of the gate

When someone is first out of the gate, they are the first to do something that others are trying to do.

First port of call

The first place you stop to do something is your first port of call.

Fish in troubled waters

Someone who fishes in troubled waters tries to takes advantage of a shaky or unstable situation. The extremists were fishing in troubled waters during the political uncertainty in the country.

Fish or cut bait

(USA) This idiom is used when you want to tell someone that it is time to take action.

Fish out of water

If you are placed in a situation that is completely new to you and confuses you, you are like a fish out of water.

Fishy

If there is something fishy about someone or something, there is something suspicious; a feeling that there is something wrong, though it isn't clear what it is.

Fit as a fiddle

If you are fit as a fiddle, you are in perfect health.

Fit for a king

If something is fit for a king, it is of the very highest quality or standard.

Fit like a glove

If something fits like a glove, it is suitable or the right size.

Fit of pique

If someone reacts badly because their pride is hurt, this is a fit of pique.

Fit the bill

If something fits the bill, it is what is required for the task.

Fit to be tied

If someone is fit to be tied, they are extremely angry.

Five o'clock shadow

A five o'clock shadow is the facial hair that a man gets if he doesn't shave for a day or two.

Flash in the pan

If something is a flash in the pan, it is very noticeable but doesn't last long, like most singers, who are very successful for a while, then forgotten.

Flat as a pancake

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It is so flat that it is like a pancake- there is no head on that beer it is as flat as a pancake.

Flat out

If you work flat out, you work as hard and fast as you possibly can.

Fleet of foot

If someone is fleet of foot, they are very quick.

Flesh and blood

Your flesh and blood are your blood relatives, especially your immediate family.

Flogging a dead horse

(UK) If someone is trying to convince people to do or feel something without any hope of succeeding, they're flogging a dead horse. This is used when someone is trying to raise interest in an issue that no-one supports anymore; beating a dead horse will not make it do any more work.

Flowery speech

Flowery speech is full of lovely words, but may well lack substance.

Fly by the seat of one's pants

If you fly by the seat of one's pants, you do something difficult even though you don't have the experience or training required.

Fly in the ointment

A fly in the ointment is something that spoils or prevents complete enjoyment of something.

Fly off the handle

If someone flies off the handle, they get very angry.

Fly on the wall

If you are able to see and hear events as they happen, you are a fly on the wall.

Fly the coop

When children leave home to live away from their parents, they fly the coop.

Fly the flag

If someone flies the flag, they represent or support their country. ('Wave the flag' and 'show the flag' are alternative forms of this idiom)

Foam at the mouth

If you foam at the mouth, you are very, very angry.

Follow your nose

When giving directions, telling someone to follow their nose means that they should go straight ahead.

Food for thought

If something is food for thought, it is worth thinking about or considering seriously.

Fool me once, shame on you; fool me twice, shame on me

This means that you should learn from your mistakes and not allow people to take advantage of you repeatedly.

Fools rush in where angels fear to tread

This idiom is used where people who are inexperienced or lack knowledge do something that more informed people would avoid.

Foot in mouth

This is used to describe someone who has just said something embarrassing, inappropriate, wrong or stupid.

Foot in the door

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If you have or get your foot in the door, you start working in a company or organisation at a low level, hoping that you will be able to progress from there.

Foot the bill

The person who foots the bill pays the bill for everybody.

Football's a game of two halves

(UK) If something's a game of two halves, it means that it's possible for someone's fortunes or luck to change and the person who's winning could end up a loser.

For a song

If you buy or sell something for a song, it is very cheap.

For donkey's years

(UK) If people have done something, usually without much if any change, for an awfully long time, they can be said to have done it for donkey's years.

For England

(UK) A person who talks for England, talks a lot- if you do something for England, you do it a lot or to the limit.

For kicks

If you do something for kicks, or just for kicks, you do it purely for fun or thrills.

For my money

This idiom means 'in my opinion'.

For Pete's sake

This is used as an exclamation to show exasperation or irritation.

For the birds

If something is worthless or ridiculous, it is for the birds.

For the love of Pete

Usually used in exasperation, as in 'Oh, for the love of Pete!'

For the time being

For the time being indicates that an action or state will continue into the future, but is temporary. I'm sharing an office for the time being.

Forbidden fruit

Something enjoyable that is illegal or immoral is forbidden fruit.

Foregone conclusion

If the result of, say, a football match is a foregone conclusion, then the result is obvious before the game has even begun.

Forest for the trees

(USA) If someone can't see the forest for the trees, they get so caught up in small details that they fail to understand the bigger picture.

Fortune knocks once at every man's door

Everyone gets one good chance in a lifetime.

Foul play

If the police suspect foul play, they think a crime was committed.

Four corners of the earth

If something goes to, or comes from, the four corners of the earth, it goes or comes absolutely everywhere.

Four-eyes

A person who wears glasses

Four-square behind

If someone stands four-square behind someone, they give that person their full support.

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Fourth estate
: This is an idiomatic way of describing the media, especially the newspapers.

Free rein
: If someone has a free rein, they have the authority to make the decisions they want without any restrictions. ('Free reign' is a common mistake.)

Free-for-all
: A free-for-all is a fight or contest in which everyone gets involved and rules are not respected.

French leave
: To take French leave is to leave a gathering without saying goodbye or without permission.

Fresh from the oven
: If something is fresh from the oven, it is very new.

Freudian Slip
: If someone makes a Freudian slip, they accidentally use the wrong word, but in doing so reveal what they are really thinking rather than what they think the other person wants to hear.

Friendly footing
: When relationships are on a friendly footing, they are going well.

Frog in my throat
: If you have a frog in your throat, you can't speak or you are losing your voice because you have a problem with your throat.

From a different angle
: If you look at something from a different angle, you look at it from a different point of view.

From Missouri
: (USA) If someone is from Missouri, then they require clear proof before they will believe something.

From pillar to post
: If something is going from pillar to post, it is moving around in a meaningless way, from one disaster to another.

From rags to riches
: Someone who starts life very poor and makes a fortune goes from rags to riches.

From scratch
: This idiom means 'from the beginning'.

From soup to nuts
: If you do something from soup to nuts, you do it from the beginning right to the very end.

From the bottom of your heart
: If someone does something from the bottom of their heart, then they do it with genuine emotion and feeling.

From the get-go
: (USA) If something happens from the get-go, it happens from the very beginning.

From the horse's mouth
: If you hear something from the horse's mouth, you hear it directly from the person concerned or responsible.

From the sublime to the ridiculous

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If something declines considerably in quality or importance, it is said to have gone from the sublime to the ridiculous.

From the word go
: From the word go means from the very beginning of something.

Full as a tick
: If you are as full as a tick, you have eaten too much.

Full bore
: If something is full bore, it involves the maximum effort or is complete and thorough.

Full circle
: When something has come full circle, it has ended up where it started.

Full Monty
: (UK) If something is the Full Monty, it is the real thing, not reduced in any way.

Full of beans
: If someone's full of beans, they are very energetic.

Full of hot air
: Someone who is full of hot air talks a lot of rubbish.

Full of oneself
: Someone who acts in a arrogant or egotistical manner is full of himself/herself.

Full of piss and vinegar
: Someone who's full of piss and vinegar is full of youthful energy.

Full of the joys of spring
: If you are full of the joys of spring, you are very happy and full of energy.

Full swing
: If a something is in full swing, it is going or doing well.

Full throttle
: If you do something full throttle, you do it with as much speed and energy as you can.

Fullness of time
: If something happens in the fullness of time, it will happen when the time is right and appropriate.

Fur coat and no knickers
: Someone with airs and graces, but no real class is fur coat and no knickers.

Fuzzy thinking
: Thinking or ideas that do not agree with the facts or information available

~ G ~

Game on
: When someone says 'Game on!', it means that they are accepting a challenge or ready to get something done.

Game plan
: A game plan is a strategy.

Garbage fee

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A garbage fee is a charge that has no value and doesn't provide any real service.

Garbage in, garbage out

If a computer system or database is built badly, then the results will be bad.

Gardening leave

(UK) If someone is paid for a period when they are not working, either after they have given in their notice or when they are being investigated, they are on gardening leave.

Gather pace

If events gather pace, they move faster.

Gather steam

If something gathers speed, it moves or progresses at an increasing speed.

Get a grip

If you get a grip, you control your emotions so that they don't overwhelm you.

Get a handle on

When you get a handle on something, you come to understand it.

Get a sheepskin

Getting a sheepskin (or your sheepskin) means getting a degree or diploma. (Sheepskin refers to the parchment that a degree is printed on- parchment comes from sheepskin.)

Get along famously

If people get along famously, they have an exceedingly good relationship.

Get away scot-free

If someone gets away scot-free, they are not punished when they have done something wrong. ('Get off scot-free' is an alternative.)

Get away with murder

If you get away with murder, you do something bad and don't get caught or punished.('Get away with blue murder' is also used.)

Get back on the horse that bucked you

When you start drinking again after being hungover from drinking the previous night.

Get in on the act

If people want to get in on the act, they want to participate in something that is currently profitable or popular.

Get in on the ground floor

If you get in on the ground floor, you enter a project or venture at the start before people know how successful it might be.

Get it in the neck

(UK) If you get it in the neck, you are punished or criticised for something.

Get it off your chest

If you get something off your chest, you confess to something that has been troubling you.

Get my drift

If you get someone's drift, you understand what they are trying to say. ('Catch their drift' is an alternative form.)

Get off the ground

If a project or plan gets off the ground, it starts to be put into operation.

Get on like a house on fire

If people get on like a house on fire, they have a very close and good relationship.

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Get on your nerves
: If something gets on your nerves, it annoys or irritates you.

Get on your soapbox
: If someone on their soapbox, they hold forth (talk a lot) about a subject they feel strongly about.

Get out of bed on the wrong side
: If you get out of bed on the wrong side, you wake up and start the day in a bad mood for no real reason.

Get the axe
: If you get the axe, you lose your job. ('Get the ax' is the American spelling.)

Get the ball rolling
: If you get the ball rolling, you start something so that it can start making progress.

Get the green light
: If you get the green light to do something, you are given the necessary permission, authorisation.

Get the monkey off your back
: If you get the monkey off your back, you pass on a problem to someone else.

Get the nod
: (UK) If you get the nod to something, you get approval or permission to do it.

Get the picture
: If you get the picture, you understand a situation fully.

Get the show on the road
: If you get the show on the road, you put a plan into operation or begin something.

Get to grips
: If you get to grips with something, you take control and do it properly.

Get up and go
: If someone has lots of get up and go, they have lots of enthusiasm and energy.

Get wind of
: If you get wind of something, you hear or learn about it, especially if it was meant to be secret.

Get your ducks in a row
: If you get your ducks in a row, you organise yourself and your life.

Get your feathers in a bunch
: If you get your feathers in a bunch, you get upset or angry about something.

Get your feet wet
: If you get your feet wet, you gain your first experience of something.

Get your goat
: If something gets your goat, it annoys you.

Get your hands dirty
: If you get your hands dirty, you become involved in something where the realities might compromise your principles. It can also mean that a person is not just stuck in an ivory tower dictating strategy, but is prepared to put in the effort and hard work to make the details actually happen.

Get your head around something
: If you get your head around something, you come to understand it even though it is difficult to comprehend.

Get your teeth into

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If you get your teeth into something, you become involved in or do something that is intellectually challenging or satisfying. ('Dig you teeth into' and 'sink your teeth into' are also used.)

Get your wires crossed

If people get their wires cross, they misunderstand each other, especially when making arrangements. ('Get your lines crossed' is also used.)

Ghost of a chance

If something or someone hasn't got a ghost of a chance, they have no hope whatsoever of succeeding.

Ghostly presence

You can feel or otherwise sense a ghostly presence, but you cannot do it clearly only vaguely.

Gift of the gab

If someone has the gift of the gab, they speak in a persuasive and interesting way.

Gild the lily

If you gild the lily, you decorate something that is already ornate.

Gilded cage

If someone is in a gilded cage, they are trapped and have restricted or no freedom, but have very comfortable surroundings- many famous people live in luxury but cannot walk out of their house alone.

Girl Friday

A girl Friday is a female employee who assists someone without any specific duties.

Give a big hand

Applaud by clapping hands. 'Let's give all the contestents a big hand.'

Give a dog a bad name

A person who is generally known to have been guilty of some offence will always be suspected to be the author of all similar types of offence. Once someone has gained a bad reputation, it is very difficult to lose it.

Give and take

Where there is give and take, people make concessions in order to get things they want in negotiations.

Give as good as you get

If you give as good as you get, you are prepared to treat people as badly as they treat you and to fight for what you believe.

Give it some stick

(UK) If you give something some stick, you put a lot of effort into it.

Give me a hand

If someone gives you a hand, they help you.

Give me five

If someone says this, they want to hit your open hand against theirs as a way of congratulation or greeting.

Give someone a leg up

If you give someone a leg up, you help them to achieve something that they couldn't have done alone.

Give someone a piece of your mind

If you give someone a piece of your mind, you criticise them strongly and angrily.

Give someone a run for their money

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If you can give someone a run for the money, you are as good, or nearly as good, as they are at something.

Give someone enough rope

If you give someone enough rope, you give them the chance to get themselves into trouble or expose themselves. (The full form is 'give someone enough rope and they'll hang themselves)

Give someone stick

(UK) If someone gives you stick, they criticise you or punish you.

Give someone the runaround

If someone gives you the runaround, they make excuses and give you false explanations to avoid doing something.

Give the nod

(UK) If you give the nod to something, you approve it or give permission to do it.

Give up the ghost

People give up the ghost when they die. Machines stop working when they give up the ghost.

Give your eye teeth

If you really want something and would be prepared to sacrifice a lot to get it, you would give your eye teeth for it.

Given the day that's in it

(Irish) This idiom is used when something is obvious because of the day that it occurs: traffic, for example would be busy around a football stadium on game day, given the day that's in it. On any other day the traffic would be unexplainable, but because its game day its obvious why there is traffic.

Glass ceiling

The glass ceiling is the discrimination that prevents women and minorities from getting promoted to the highest levels of companies and organisations.

Glory hound

A glory hound is a person seeking popularity, fame and glory.

Gloves are off

When the gloves are off, people start to argue or fight in a more serious way. ('The gloves come off' and 'take the gloves off' are also used. It comes from boxing, where fighters normally wear gloves so that they don't do too much damage to each other.)

Glutton for punishment

If a person is described as a glutton for punishment, the happily accept jobs and tasks that most people would try to get out of. A glutton is a person who eats a lot.

Gnaw your vitals

If something gnaws your vitals, it troubles you greatly and affects you at a very deep level. ('Gnaw at your vitals' is also used.)

Go against the grain

A person who does things in an unconventional manner, especially if their methods are not generally approved of, is said to go against the grain. Such an individual can be called a maverick.

Go awry

If things go awry, they go wrong.

Go bananas

If you go bananas, you are wild with excitement, anxiety, or worry.

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Go blue
: If you go blue, you are very cold indeed. ('Turn blue' is an alternative form.)

Go bust
: If a company goes bust, it goes bankrupt.

Go by the board
: When something has gone by the board, it no longer exists or an opportunity has been lost.

Go by the boards
: If something goes by the boards, it fails to get approved or accepted.

Go down like a cup of cold sick
: (UK) An idea or excuse that will not be well accepted will go down like a cup of cold sick.

Go down like a lead balloon
: (UK) If something goes down like a lead balloon, it fails or is extremely badly received.

Go down swinging
: If you want to go down swinging, you know you will probably fail, but you refuse to give up.

Go down without a fight
: If someone goes down without a fight, they surrender without putting up any resistance.

Go Dutch
: If you go Dutch in a restaurant, you pay equal shares for the meal.

Go fly a kite
: (USA) This is used to tell someone to go away and leave you alone.

Go for broke
: If someone goes for broke, they risk everything they have for a potentially greater gain.

Go for the jugular
: If you go for the jugular, you attack someone where they are most vulnerable.

Go fry an egg
: (USA) This is used to tell someone to go away and leave you alone.

Go hand in hand
: If things go hand in hand, they are associated and go together.

Go nuts
: If someone goes nuts, they get excited over something.

Go off on a tangent
: If someone goes off on a tangent, they change the subject completely in the middle of a conversation or talk.

Go over like a lead balloon
: (USA) If something goes over like a lead balloon, it will not work well, or go over well.

Go overboard
: If you go overboard, you do something excessively.

Go pear-shaped
: If things have gone wrong, they have gone pear-shaped.

Go play in traffic
: This is used as a way of telling someone to go away.

Go round in circles

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If people are going round in circles, they keep discussing the same thing without reaching any agreement or coming to a conclusion.

Go south

If things go south, they get worse or go wrong.

Go spare

(UK) If you go spare, you lose your temper completely.

Go tell it to birds

This is used when someone says something that is not credible or is a lie.

Go the distance

If you go the distance, you continue until something ends, no matter how difficult.

Go the extra mile

If someone is prepared to go the extra mile, they will do everything they can to help or to make something succeed, going beyond their duty what could be expected of them .

Go the whole hog

If you go the whole hog, you do something completely or to its limits.

Go through the motions

When you go through the motions, you do something like an everyday routine and without any feelings whatsoever.

Go to seed

If someone has gone to seed, they have declined in quality or appearance.

Go to the wire

If someone goes to the wire, they risk their life, job, reputation, etc, to help someone.

Go to your head

If something goes to your head, it makes you feel vain. If alcohol goes to your head, it makes you feel drunk quickly.

Go under the hammer

If something goes under the hammer, it is sold in an auction.

Go west

If something goes west, it goes wrong. If someone goes west, they die.

Go with the flow

If you go with the flow, you accept things as they happen and do what everyone else wants to do.

Go-to guy

A go-to guy is a person whose knowledge of something is considerable so everyone wants to go to him or her for information or results.

Going concern

A successful and active business is a going concern.

Going Jesse

(USA) If something is a going Jesse, it's a viable, successful project or enterprise.

Going overboard

If you go overboard with something, then you take something too far, or do too much.

Golden handshake

A golden handshake is a payment made to someone to get them to leave their job.

Golden rule

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The golden rule is the most essential or fundamental rule associated with something. Originally, it was not a general reference to an all purpose first rule applicable to many groups or protocols, but referred to a verse in the Bible about treating people they way you would want them to treat you, which was considered the First Rule of behavior towards all by all.

Golden touch

Someone with a golden touch can make money from or be successful at anything they do.

Gone fishing

If someone has gone fishing, they are not very aware of what is happening around them.

Gone for a burton

(UK) If something's gone for a burton, it has been spoiled or ruined. If a person has gone for a burton, they are either in serious trouble or have died.

Gone pear-shaped

(UK) If things have gone pear-shaped they have either gone wrong or produced an unexpected and unwanted result.

Gone to pot

If something has gone to pot, it has gone wrong and doesn't work any more.

Gone to the dogs

If something has gone to the dogs, it has gone badly wrong and lost all the good things it had.

Good antennae

Someone with good antennae is good at detecting things.

Good as gold

If children are as good as gold, they behave very well.

Good egg

A person who can be relied on is a good egg. Bad egg is the opposite.

Good fences make good neighbours

This means that it is better for people to mind their own business and to respect the privacy of others. ('Good fences make good neighbors' is the American English spelling.)

Good hand

If you are a good hand at something, you do it well.

Good Samaritan

A good Samaritan is a persoon wh helps others in need.

Good shape

If something's in good shape, it's in good condition. If a person's in good shape, they are fit and healthy.

Good spell

A spell can mean a fairly or relatively short period of time; you'll hear weather forecasts predict a dry spell. Sports commentators will say that a sportsperson is going through a good spell when they're performing consistently better than they normally do.

Good time

If you make good time on a journey, you manage to travel faster than you expected.

Good to go

Someone or something that meets one's approval. 'He is good to go.' 'The idea you had is good to go.'

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Good walls make good neighbours
: Your relationship with your neighbours depends, among other things, on respecting one another's privacy.

Goody two-shoes
: A goody two-shoes is a self-righteous person who makes a great deal of their virtue.

Grab the bulls by its horns
: If you grab (take) the bull by its horns, you deal head-on and directly with a problem.

Grain of salt
: If you should take something with a grain of salt, you shouldn't necessarily believe it all. ('pinch of salt' is an alternative)

Grasp the nettle
: (UK) If you grasp the nettle, you deal bravely with a problem.

Grass may be greener on the other side but it's just as hard to mow
: 'The grass may be greener on the other side but it's just as hard to mow' is an expression used to mean a person's desire to have that which another person has in the belief it will make their life easieris false as all situations come with their own set of problems.

Grass roots
: This idioms is often used in politics, where it refers to the ordinary people or voters. It can be used to mean people at the bottom of a hierarchy.

Grass widow
: A grass widow is a woman whose husband is often away on work, leaving her on her own.

Graveyard shift
: If you have to work very late at night, it is the graveyard shift.

Gravy train
: If someone is on the gravy train, they have found and easy way to make lots of money.

Grease monkey
: A grease monkey is an idiomatic term for a mechanic.

Grease someone's palm
: If you grease someone's palm, you bribe them to do something.

Grease the skids
: If you grease the skids, you facilitate something.

Greased lightning
: If something or someone moves like greased lightning, they move very fast indeed.

Great guns
: If something or someone is going great guns, they are doing very well.

Great Scott
: An exclamation of surprise.

Great unwashed
: This is a term used for the working class masses.

Great white hope
: Someone who is expected to be a great success is a great white hope.

Greek to me
: If you don't understand something, it's all Greek to you.

Green around the gills

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If someone looks green around the gills, they look ill.

Green fingers

(UK) Someone with green fingers has a talent for gardening.

Green light

If you are given the green light, you are given approval to do something.

Green thumb

(USA) Someone with a talent for gardening has a green thumb.

Green with envy

If you are green with envy, you are very jealous.

Green-eyed monster

The green-eyed monster is an allegorical phrase for somebody's strong jealousy

Greenhorn

A greenhorn or someone who is described simply as green lacks the relevant experience and knowledge for their job or task

Grey area

A grey/gray area is one where there is no clear right or wrong.

Grey Cardinal

Someone who is a Grey Cardinal exerts power behind the scenes, without drawing attention to himself or herself.

Grey cells

'Grey cells' means 'brain' Eg: Use your grey cells to understand it

Grey matter

Grey/gray matter is the human brain.

Grey pound

(UK) In the UK, the grey pound is an idiom for the economic power of elderly people.

Grey suits

The men in grey suits are people who have a lot of power in business or politics, but aren't well-known or charismatic.

Grin and bear it

If you have to grin and bear it, you have to accept something that you don't like.

Grin like a Cheshire cat

If someone has a very wide smile, they have a grin like a Cheshire cat.

Grinds my gear

Something that is very annoying grinds your gear.

Grist for the mill

Something that you can use to your advantage is grist for the mill. ('Grist to the mill' is also used.)

Guinea-pig

If you are a guinea-pig, you take part in an experiment of some sort and are used in the testing.

Gunboat diplomacy

If a nation conducts its diplomatic relations by threatening military action to get what it wants, it is using gunboat diplomacy.

Gung ho

If someone is gung ho about something, they support it blindly and don't think about the consequences.

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~ H ~

Hail-fellow-well-met
: Someone whose behavior is hearty, friendly and congenial.

Hair of the dog
: If someone has a hair of the dog, they have an alcoholic drink as a way of getting rid of a hangover, the unpleasant effects of having drunk too much alcohol the night before. It is commonly used as a way of excusing having a drink early on in the day.

Hairy at the heel
: (UK) Someone who is hairy at the heel is dangerous or untrustworthy.

Hale and hearty
: Someone who is hale and hearty is in very good health.

Half a loaf is better than no bread
: It means that getting part of what you want is better than getting nothing at all.

Half a mind
: If you have half a mind to do something, you haven't decided to do it, but are thinking seriously about doing it.

Half-baked
: A half-baked idea or scheme hasn't not been thought through or planned very well.

Hammer and tongs
: If people are going at it hammer and tongs, they are arguing fiercely. The idiom can also be used hen people are doing something energetically.

Hand in glove
: If people are hand in glove, they have an extremely close relationship.

Hand in hand
: Hand in hand= work together closely When people in a group, say in an office or in a project, work together with mutual understanding to achieve the target, we say they work hand in hand. There is no lack of co-operation and each synchoranises the activity with that of the other.

Hand that rocks the cradle
: Women have a great power and influence because they have the greatest influence over the development of children- the hand that rocks the cradle. ('The hand that rocks the cradle rules the world' is the full form.)

Hand to mouth
: Someone who's living from hand to mouth, is very poor and needs the little money they have coming in to cover their expenses.

Hands down
: If someone is better hands down than everyone else, they are much better.

Handwriting like chicken scratch
: If your handwriting is very hard to read, it is like chicken scratch.

Hang by a thread
: If something hangs by a thread, there is a very small chance indeed of it being successful or surviving.

Hang in the balance

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If an outcome is hanging in the balance, there are at least two possibilities and it is impossible to predict which will win out.

Hang out to dry

If you hang someone out to dry, you abandon them when they are in trouble.

Hangdog expression

A hangdog expression is one where the person's showing their emotions very clearly, maybe a little too clearly for your liking. It's that mixture of misery and self-pity that is similar to a dog when it's trying to get something it wants but daren't take without permission.

Hanged for a sheep as a lamb

This is an expression meaning that if you are going to get into trouble for doing something, then you ought to stop worrying and should try to get everything you can before you get caught.

Happy medium

If you reach a happy medium, you are making a compromise; reaching a conclusion or decision.

Happy-go-lucky

If someone is happy-go-lucky, they don't worry or plan and accept things as they happen.

Hard as nails

A person who is as hard as nails is either physically tough or has little or no respect for other people's feelings.

Hard by

"Hard by" means mean "close to" or "near".

Hard cheese

(UK) Hard cheese means hard luck.

Hard of hearing

Someone who's hard of hearing is a bit deaf.

Hard on someone's heels

If you are hard on someone's heels, you are close to them and trying to catch or overtake them. ('Hot on someone's heels' is also used.)

Hard sell

If someone puts a lot of pressure on you to do or buy something, they are hard selling it.

Hard to come by

If something is hard to come by, it is difficult to find.

Hard up

If you are hard up, you have very little money.

Haste makes waste

This idiom means that if you try to do something quickly, without planning it, you're likely to end up spending more time, money, etc, doing it.

Hat trick

Three successes one after the other is a hat trick.

Hatchet job

A piece of criticism that destroys someone's reputation is a hatchet job.

Have a ball

If you have a ball, you have a great time, a lot of fun.

Have a bash

If you have a bash at something, you try to do it, especially when there isn't much chance of success.

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Have a blast
: It means "to have a lot of fun".

Have a crack
: If you have a crack at something, you try to do it. If someone is attempting to do something and they are unsuccessful, you might say, "Let me have a crack at it" suggesting that you might be successful at performing the task. ('Take a crack' is also used.)

Have a go
: If you have a go, you try to do something, often when you don't think you have much chance of succeeding.

Have a heart
: If someone has a heart, they arekind and sympathetic. If you say, 'Have a heart' to someone, you are asking them to be understanding and sympathetic.

Have a ripper
: If you have a ripper of a time, you enjoy yourself.

Have a trick up your sleeve
: If you have a trick up your sleeve, you have a secret strategy to use when the time is right.

Have no truck with
: If you have no truck with something or someone, you refuse to get involved with it or them.

Have the floor
: If someone has the floor, it is their turn to speak at a meeting.

Have the guts
: Someone who has enough courage to do something has the guts to do it.

Have your cake and eat it too
: If someone wants to have their cake and eat it too, they want everything their way, especially when their wishes are contradictory.

Have your collar felt
: If someone has their collar felt, they are arrested.

Have your fill
: If you have had your fill, you are fed up of somebody or something.

Have your lunch handed to you
: If you have you lunch handed to you, you are outperformed and shown up by someone better.

Have your moments
: Someone who has his or her moments exhibits a positive behavior pattern on an occasional basis but not generally.

Have your tail up
: If someone has their tail up, they are optimistic and expect to be successful.

Have your work cut out
: If you have your work cut out, you are very busy indeed.

Having a gas
: If you're having a gas, you are having a laugh and enjoying yourself in company.

Hay is for horses
: This idiom is used as a way of telling children not to say the word 'hey' as in hey you or hey there.

He that travels far knows much
: People who travel widely have a wide knowledge.

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He who hesitates is lost
: If one waits too long, the opportunity vanishes.

Head for the hills
: If people head for the hills, they run away from trouble.

Head is in the clouds
: If a person has their head in the clouds, they have unrealistic, impractical ideas.

Head is mince
: (Scot) When someone's thoughts are in a state of abject confusion, especially when facing a severe dilemma, their head is mince.

Head nor tail
: If you can't make head nor tail of something, you cannot understand it at all or make any sense of it.

Head on a spike
: If someone wants a head on a spike, they want to be able to destroy or really punish a person.

Head on the block
: If someone's head is on the block, they are going to be held responsible and suffer the consequences for something that has gone wrong.

Head over heels in love
: When someone falls passionately in love and is intoxicated by the feeling has fallen head over heels in love.

Head south
: If something head south, it begins to fail or start going bad.'The project proceeded well for the first two months, but then it headed south.'

Heads will roll
: If heads will roll, people will be punished or sacked for something that has gone wrong.

Headstrong
: A headstrong person is obstinate and does not take other people's advice readily.

Healthy as a horse
: If you're as healthy as a horse, you're very healthy.

Heap coals on someone's head
: To do something nice or kind to someone who has been nasty to you. If someone felt bad because they forgot to get you a Christmas gift, for you to buy them a specially nice gift is heaping coals on their head. ('Heap coals of fire' is also used.)

Hear a pin drop
: If there is complete silence in a room, you can hear a pin drop.

Hear on the grapevine
: To receive information indirectly through a series of third parties, similar to a rumour.

Heart in the right place
: If someone's heart is in the right place, they are good and kind, though they might not always appear to be so.

Heart in your boots
: If you're heart is in your boots, you are very unhappy.

Heart in your mouth
: If your heart is in your mouth, then you feel nervous or scared.

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Heart isn't in it
: If your heart is not in something, then you don't really believe in it or support it.

Heart misses a beat
: If your heart misses a beat, you are suddenly shocked or surprised. ('Heart skips a beat' is an alternative)

Heart of glass
: When someone has a heart of glass, they are easily affected emotionally.

Heart of gold
: Someone with a heart of gold is a genuinely kind and caring person.

Heart of steel
: When someone has a heart of steel, they do not show emotion or are not affected emotionally.

Heart-to-heart
: A heart-to-heart is a frank and honest conversation with someone, where you talk honestly and plainly about issues, no matter how painful.

Heaven knows
: If you ask someone a question and they say this, they have no idea.

Heavenly bodies
: The heavenly bodies are the stars.

Heavy-handed
: If someone is heavy-handed, they are insensitive and use excessive force or authority when dealing with a problem.

Hedge your bets
: If you hedge your bets, you don't risk everything on one opportunity, but try more than one thing.

Hell for leather
: If you do something hell for leather, especially running, you do it as fast as you can.

Hell in a handcart
: If something is going to hell in a handcart, it is getting worse and worse, with no hope of stopping the decline.

Herding cats
: If you have to try to co-ordinate a very difficult situation, where people want to do very different things, you are herding cats.

Here today, gone tomorrow
: Money, happiness and other desirable things are often here today, gone tomorrow, which means that they don't last for very long.

Hide nor hair
: When there's no trace of something or a person, you haven't seen hide nor hair of it or them.('Neither hide nor hair' is also used.)

Hiding to nothing
: If people are on a hiding to nothing, their schemes and plans have no chance of succeeding. 'Hiding to nowhere' is an alternative.

High and dry
: If you are left high and dry, you are left alone and given no help at all when you need it.

High and low
: If you search high and low, you look everywhere for something or someone.

High and mighty

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The high and mighty are the people with authority and power. If a person is high and mighty, they behave in a superior and condescending way.

High as a kite

If someone's as high as a kite, it means they have had too much to drink or are under the influence of drugs.

High on the hog

To live in great comfort with lots of money.

High-handed

If someone is high-handed, they behave arrogantly and pompously.

High-wire act

A high-wire act is a dangerous or risky strategy, plan, task, etc.

Highway robbery

Something that is ridiculously expensive, especially when you have no choice but to pay, is a highway robbery.

Himalayan blunder

A Himalayan blunder is a very serious mistake or error.

Hindsight is twenty-twenty

After something has gone wrong, it is easy to look back and make criticisms.

Hit a nerve

If something hits a nerve, it upsets someone or causes them pain, often when it is something they are trying to hide.

Hit and miss

Something that is hit and miss is unpredictable and may produce results or may fail.

Hit me with your best shot

If someone tells you to hit them with your best shot, they are telling you that no matter what you do it won't hurt them or make a difference to them.

Hit rock bottom

When someone hits rock bottom, they reach a point in life where things could not get any worse.

Hit rough weather

If you hit rough weather, you experience difficulties or problems.

Hit the airwaves

If someone hits the airwaves, they go on radio and TV to promote something or to tell their side of a story.

Hit the books

If you hit the books, you study or read hard.

Hit the bull's-eye

If someone hits the bull's-eye, they are exactly right about something or achieve the best result possible. "Bulls-eye" and "bullseye" are alternative spellings.

Hit the ceiling

If someone hits the ceiling, they lose their temper and become very angry.

Hit the fan

When it hits the fan, or, more rudely, the shit hits the fan, serious trouble starts.

Hit the ground running

If someone hits the ground running, they start a new job or position in a very dynamic manner.

Hit the hay

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When you hit the hay, you go to bed.

Hit the mark

If someone hits the mark, they are right about something.

Hit the nail on the head

If someone hits the nail on the head, they are exactly right about something.

Hit the road

When people hit the road, they leave a place to go somewhere else.

Hit the roof

If you lose your temper and get very angry, you hit the roof.

Hit the sack

When you hit the sack, you go to bed.

Hive of worker bees

A hive of worker bees is a group of people working actively and cooperatively. Example: The classroom was a hive of worker bees.

Hobson's choice

A Hobson's choice is something that appears to be a free choice, but is really no choice as there is no genuine alternative.

Hoist with your own petard

If you are hoist with your own petard, you get into trouble or caught in a trap that you had set for someone else.

Hold all the aces

If you hold all the aces, you have all the advantages and your opponents or rivals are in a weak position.

Hold the baby

(UK) If someone is responsible for something, they are holding the baby.

Hold the bag

(USA) If someone is responsible for something, they are holding the bag.

Hold the fort

If you hold the fort, you look after something or assume someone's responsibilities while they are away.

Hold the torch

If you hold the torch for someone, you have an unrequited or unspoken love.

Hold water

When you say that something does or does not 'hold water', it means that the point of view or argument put forward is or is not sound, strong or logical. For e.g., 'Saying we should increase our interest rates because everyone else is doing so will not hold water'.

Hold your horses

If someone tells you to hold your horses, you are doing something too fast and they would like you to slow down.

Hold your own

If you can hold your own, you can compete or perform equally with other people.

Hold your tongue

If you hold your tongue, you keep silent even though you want to speak.

Holier-than-thou

Someone who is holier-than-thou believes that they are morally superior to other people.

Hollow leg

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Someone who has a hollow leg eats what seems to be more than his stomach can hold.

Hollow victory

A hollow victory is where someone wins something in name, but are seen not to have gained anything by winning.

Holy smoke!

This is a way of expressing surprise: "Holy smoke! Look at all of those geese!"

Home and hearth

'Home and hearth' is an idiom evoking warmth and security.

Home is where you lay your hat

Wherever you are comfortable and at ease with yourself is your home, regardless where you were born or brought up.('Home is where you lay your head' and 'Home is where you hang your hat' are also used.)

Home stretch

The home stretch is the last part of something, like a journey, race or project.

Home sweet home

This is said when one is pleased to be back at one's own home.

Home, James

(UK) This is a cliched way of telling the driver of a vehicle to start driving. It is supposed to be an order to a chauffeur (a privately employed driver). The full phrase is 'Home, James, and don't spare the horses'.

Honest truth

If someone claims that something is the honest truth, they wish to sound extra-sincere about something.

Honor among thieves

If someone says there is honor among thieves, this means that even corrupt or bad people sometimes have a sense of honor or integrity, or justice, even if it is skewed. ('Honour among thieves' is the British English version.)

Honours are even

If honours are even, then a competition has ended with neither side emerging as a winner.

Hook, line, and sinker

If somebody accepts or believes something hook, line, and sinker, they accept it completely.

Hop, skip, and a jump

If a place is a hop, skip, and a jump from somewhere, it's only a short distance away.

Hope against hope

If you hope against hope, you hope for something even though there is little or no chance of your wish being fulfilled.

Hope in hell

If something hasn't got a hope in hell, it stands absolutely no chance of succeeding.

Hornets' nest

A hornets' nest is a violent situation or one with a lot of dispute. (If you create the problem, you 'stir up a hornets' nest'.)

Horns of a dilemma

If you are on the horns of a dilemma, you are faced with two equally unpleasant options and have to choose one.

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Horse of a different color

(USA) If something is a horse of a different color, it's a different matter or separate issue altogether.

Horse trading

Horse trading is an idiom used to describe negotiations, especially where these are difficult and involve a lot of compromise.

Horses for courses

Horses for courses means that what is suitable for one person or situation might be unsuitable for another.

Hostile takeover

If a company is bought out when it does not want to be, it is known as a hostile takeover.

Hot air

Language that is full of words but means little or nothing is hot air.

Hot as blue blazes

If something's as hot as blue blazes, it's extremely hot.

Hot as Hades

If something's as hot as Hades, it's extremely hot.

Hot button

(USA) A hot button is a topic or issue that people feel very strongly about.

Hot foot

If you hot foot it out of a place, you leave very quickly, often running.

Hot ticket

(USA) A hot ticket is something that is very much in demand at the moment.

Hot to trot

If someone is hot to trot, they are sexually aroused or eager to do something.

Hot under the collar

If you're hot under the collar, you're feeling angry or bothered.

Hot water

If you get into hot water, you get into trouble.

Hot-blooded

Someone who is hot-blooded is easily excitable or passionate.

Hot-headed

A hot-headed person gets angry very easily. (The noun 'hothead' can also be used.)

Hour of need

A time when someone really needs something, almost a last chance, is their hour of need.

House of cards

Something that is poorly thought out and can easily collapse or fail is a house of cards.

How come

If you want to show disbelief or surprise about an action, you can ask a question using 'how come'. How come he got the job? (You can't believe that they gave the job to somebody like him)

How do you like them apples

(USA) This idiomatic expression is used to express surprise or shock at something that has happened. It can also be used to boast about something you have done.

How long is a piece of string

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If someone has no idea of the answer to a question, they can ask 'How long is a piece of string?' as a way of indicating their ignorance.

How's tricks?

This is used as a way of asking people how they are and how things have been going in their life.

Hue and cry

Hue and cry is an expression that used to mean all the people who joined in chasing a criminal or villain. Nowadays, if you do something without hue and cry, you do it discreetly and without drawing attention.

Hung the moon

If you refer to someone as having hung the moon, you think they are extremely wonderful, or amazing, or good.

Hungry as a bear

If you are hungry as a bear, it means that you are really hungry.

Hunky Dory

If something is hunky dory, it is perfectly satisfactory, fine.

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~ I ~

I hereby give notice of my intention

Hereby is used sometimes in formal, official declarations and statements to give greater force to the speaker' or the writer's affirmation. People will say it sometimes to emphasise their sincerity and correctness.

I may be daft, but I'm not stupid

I might do or say silly things occasionally, but in this instance I know what I am doing (Usually used when someone questions your application of common-sense).

I should cocoa

(UK) This idiom comes from 'I should think so', but is normally used sarcastically to mean the opposite.

I'll cross that road when I come to it

I'll think about something just when it happens, not in advance.

I'll eat my hat

You can say this when you are absolutely sure that you are right to let the other person know that there is no chance of your being wrong.

I've got a bone to pick with you

If somebody says this, they mean that they have some complaint to make against the person they are addressing.

I've got your number

You have made a mistake and I am going to call you on it. You are in trouble (a threat). I have a disagreement with you. I understand your true nature.

Icing on the cake

This expression is used to refer to something good that happens on top of an already good thing or situation.

Idle hands are the devil's handiwork

When someone is not busy, or being productive, trouble is bound to follow.

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If at first you don't succeed try try again
: When you fail, try until you get it right!

If I had a nickel for every time
: (USA) When someone uses this expression, they mean that the specific thing happens a lot. It is an abbreviation of the statement 'If I had a nickel for every time that happened, I would be rich'

If it ain't broke, don't fix it
: Any attempt to improve on a system that already works is pointless and may even hurt it.

If Mohammed won't come to the mountain, the mountain must come to Mohammed
: If something cannot or will not happen the easy way, then sometimes it must be done the hard way.

If the cap fits, wear it
: This idiom means that if the description is correct, then it is describing the truth, often when someone is being criticised. ('If the shoe fits, wear it' is an alternative)

If wishes were horses, beggars would ride
: This means that wishing for something or wanting it is not the same as getting or having it.

If you are given lemons make lemonade
: Always try and make the best out of a bad situation. With some ingenuity you can make a bad situation useful.

If you can't stand the heat, get out of the kitchen
: Originally a Harry S. Truman quote, this means that if you can't take the pressure, then you should remove yourself from the situation.

If you fly with the crows, you get shot with the crows
: If you wish to be associated with a particular high risk and/or high profile situation and benefit from the rewards of that association, you have to accept the consequences if things go wrong - you cannot dissociate yourself.

If you lie down with dogs, you will get up with fleas
: This means that if you become involved with bad company, there will be negative consequences.

If you lie down with the Devil, you will wake up in hell
: This means that if you become involved with bad company, there will be negative consequences.

If you will
: 'If you will' is used as a way of making a concession in a sentence: He wasn't a very honest person, a liar if you will. Here, it is used a way of accepting that the reader or listener might think of the person as a liar, but without commit the writer or speaker to that position fully.

If you'll pardon my French
: (UK) This idiom is used as a way of apologising for swearing.

Ill at ease
: If someone is ill at ease, they are worried or uncomfortable.

Ill-gotten gains
: Ill-gotten gains are profits or benefits that are made either illegally or unfairly.

In a cleft stick
: If you are in a cleft stick, you are in a difficult situation, caught between choices.

In a fix

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If you are in a fix, you are in trouble.

In a flash

If something happens in a flash, it happens very quickly indeed.

In a fog

If you're in a fog, you are confused, dazed or unaware.

In a heartbeat

If something happens very quickly or immediately, it happens in a heartbeat.

In a jam

If you are in a jam, you are in some trouble. If you get out of a jam, you avoid trouble.

In a jiffy

If something happens in a jiffy, it happens very quickly.

In a nutshell

This idiom is used to introduce a concise summary.

In a pickle

If you are in a pickle, you are in some trouble or a mess.

In a rut

In a settled or established pattern, habit or course of action, especially a boring one.

In a tick

(UK) If someone will do something in a tick, they'll do it very soon or very quickly.

In a tight spot

If you're in a tight spot, you're in a difficult situation.

In all honesty

If you say something in all honesty, you are telling the complete truth. It can be used as a way of introducing a negative opinion whilst trying to be polite; in all honesty, I have to say that I wasn't very impressed.

In an instant

If something happens in an instant, it happens very rapidly.

In another's shoes

It is difficult to know what another person's life is really like, so we don't know what it is like to be in someone's shoes.

In apple-pie order

If something is in apple-pie order, it is very neat and organised.

In broad daylight

If a crime or problem happens in broad daylight, it happens during the day and should have been seen and stopped.

In cahoots

If people are in cahoots, they are conspiring together.

In cold blood

If something is done in cold blood, it is done ruthlessly, without any emotion.

In dire straits

If you're in dire straits, you're in serious trouble or difficulties.

In donkey's years

'I haven't seen her in donkey's years.' - This means for a very long time.

In dribs and drabs

If people arrive in dribs and drabs, they come in small groups at irregular intervals, instead of all arriving at the same time.

In droves

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When things happen in droves, a lot happen at the same time or very quickly.

In for a penny, in for a pound

If something is worth doing then it is a case of in for a penny, in for a pound, which means that when gambling or taking a chance, you might as well go the whole way and take all the risks, not just some.

In full swing

If things are in full swing, they have been going for a sufficient period of time to be going well and very actively.

In high gear

(USA) If something is in high gear, it is in a quick-paced mode. If someone is in high gear, they are feverishly on the fast track.

In high spirits

If someone is in high spirits, they are in a very good mood or feeling confident about something.

In his cups

If someone is in their cups, they are drunk.

In hot water

If you are in hot water, you are in serious trouble.

In light of

'In light of' is similar to 'due to'.

In like Flynn

Refers to Errol Flynn's popularity with women in the 40's. His ability to attract women was well known throughout the world. ('In like flint' is also used.)

In my bad books

If you are in someone's bad books, they are angry with you. Likewise, if you are in their good books, they are pleased with you.

In my book

This idiom means 'in my opinion'.

In my good books

If someone is in your good books, you are pleased with or think highly of them at the moment.

In one ear and out the other

If something goes in one ear and out the other, you forget it as soon as you've heard it because it was too complicated, boring etc.

In over your head

If someone is in over their head, they are out of the depth in something they are involved in, and may end up in a mess.

In perfect form

When something is as it ought to be. Or, when used cynically, it may refer to someone whose excesses are on display; a caricature.

In rude health

(UK) If someone's in rude health, they are very healthy and look it.

In so many words

This phrase may be used to mean 'approximately' or 'more or less'. I think it may have a sarcastic connotation in that the individual listening needed 'so many words' to get the point. It also may suggest the effort on the part of the speaker to explain an unpleasant truth or difficult concept.

In someone's pocket

If a person is in someone's pocket, they are dependent, especially financially, on them.

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In spades
: (UK) If you have something in spades, you have a lot of it.

In stitches
: If someone is in stitches, they are laughing uncontrollably.

In tandem
: If people do things in tandem, they do them at the same time.

In that vein
: If you do something in that (or this) vein, you do it in the same distinctive manner or style.

In the bag
: If something is in the bag, it is certain that you will get it or achieve it

In the ballpark
: This means that something is close to the adequate or required value.

In the black
: If your bank account is in credit, it is in the black.

In the cards
: If something is in the cards, it is bound to occur, it is going to happen, or it is inevitable.

In the catbird seat
: (USA) If someone is in the catbird seat, they are in an advantageous or superior position.

In the clear
: If someone is in the clear, they are no longer suspected of or charged with wrongdoing.

In the clink
: (UK) If someone is in the clink, they are in prison.

In the club
: (UK) If a woman's in the club, she's pregnant. 'In the pudding club' is an alternative form.

In the dock
: If someone is in the dock, they are on trial in court.

In the doghouse
: If someone is in the doghouse, they are in disgrace and very unpopular at the moment.

In the driver's seat
: If you are in the driver's seat, you are in charge of something or in control of a situation.

In the face of
: If people act in the face of something, they do it despite it or when threatened by it.

In the family way
: If a woman is in the family way, she is pregnant.

In the flesh
: If you meet or see someone in the flesh you actually meet or see them, rather than seeing them on TV or in other media.

In the gravy
: If you're in the gravy, you're rich and make money easily.

In the hole
: If someone is in the hole, they have a lot of problems, especially financial ones.

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In the hot seat
: If someone's in the hot seat, they are the target for a lot of unwelcome criticism and examination.

In the know
: If you are in the know, you have access to all the information about something, which other people don't have.

In the lap of luxury
: People in the lap of luxury are very wealthy and have have everything that money can buy.

In the long run
: This means 'over a long period of time', 'in the end' or 'in the final result'.

In the loop
: If you're in the loop, you are fully informed about what is happening in a certain area or activity.

In the lurch
: If you are left in the lurch, you are suddenly left in an embarrassing or tricky situation.

In the making
: When something is in the making, it means it is in the process of being made.

In the offing
: If something is in the offing, it is very likely to happen soon.

In the pink
: If you are in very good health, you are in the pink.

In the pipeline
: If something's in the pipeline, it hasn't arrived yet but its arrival is expected.

In the red
: If your bank account is overdrawn, it is in the red.

In the saddle
: If you're in the saddle, you are in control of a situation.

In the same boat
: If people are in the same boat, they are in the same predicament or trouble.

In the short run
: This refers to the immediate future.

In the soup
: If you're in the soup, you're in trouble.

In the swim
: If you are in the swim, you are up-to-date with and fully informed about something.

In the swing
: If things are in the swing, they are progressing well.

In the tall cotton
: A phrase that expresses good times or times of plenty and wealth as tall cotton means a good crop.

In the twinkling of an eye
: If something happens in the twinkling of an eye, it happens very quickly.

In the zone
: If you are in the zone, you are very focused on what you have to do.

In turn
: This means one after the other. Example: She spoke to each of the guests in turn.

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In two minds

If you are in two minds about something, you can't decide what to do.

In your blood

A trait or liking that is deeply ingrained in someone's personality and unlikely to change is in their blood. A similar idiom is 'in his DNA.'

In your element

If you are in your element, you feel happy and relaxed because you are doing something that you like doing and are good at. "You should have seen her when they asked her to sing; she was in her element."

In your face

If someone is in your face, they are direct and confrontational. (It is sometime written 'in yer face'colloquially)

In your sights

If you have someone or something in your sights, they are your target to beat.

Indian file

If people walk in Indian file, they walk in a line one behind the other.

Indian giver

An Indian giver gives something, then tries to take it back.

Indian summer

If there is a period of warmer weather in late autumn, it is an Indian summer.

Ins and outs

If you know the ins and outs of something, you know all the details.

Into each life some rain must fall

This means that bad or unfortunate things will happen to everyone at some time.

Into thin air

If something vanishes or disappears without trace, it vanishes into thin air; no-one knows where it has gone.

Iron fist

Someone who rules or controls something with an iron fist is in absolute control and tolerates no dissent. An iron fist in a velvet glove is used to describe someone who appears soft on the outside, but underneath is very hard. 'Mailed fist' is an alternative form.

Irons in the fire

A person who has a few irons in the fire has a number of things working to their advantage at the same time.

Is Saul also among the prophets?

It's a biblical idiom used when somebody known for something bad appears all of a sudden to be doing something very good.

It ain't over till the fat lady sings

This idiom means that until something has officially finished, the result is uncertain.

It cost an arm and a leg

If something costs an arm and a leg, it is very expensive indeed.

It cost the earth

If something costs the earth, it is very expensive indeed.

It never rains but it pours

'It never rains but it pours' means that when things go wrong, they go very wrong.

It takes a village to raise a child

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It takes many people to teach a child all that he or she should know.

It takes two to tango
: This idiom is used to suggest that when things go wrong, both sides are involved and neither side is completely innocent.

It's an ill wind that blows no good
: This is said when things have gone wrong; the idea being that when bad things happen, there can also be some positive results.

It's no use crying over spilt milk
: This idiom means that getting upset after something has gone wrong is pointless; it can't be changed so it should be accepted.

It's not the size of the dog in fight, it's the size of the fight in the dog
: Usually refering to a small dog attacking a larger animal, this means that fierceness is not necessarily a matter of physical size, but rather mental/psychological attitude.

It's not the size of the man in the fight, it's the size of the fight in the man
: This idiom means that determination is often more important than size, strength, or ability. ('It's not the size of the dog in the fight, it's the size of the fight in the dog.' is also used.)

It's your funeral
: The other person has made a decision that you think is bad. However, it is their choice; it is their funeral.

Itch to
: If you are itching to do something, you are very eager to do it.

Itchy feet
: One gets itchy feet when one has been in one place for a time and wants to travel.

Ivory tower
: People who live in ivory towers are detached from the world around them.

JJJJ

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Jane Doe is a name given to an unidentified female who may be party to legal proceedings, or to an unidentified person in hospital, or dead. John Doe is the male equivalent.

Jekyll and Hyde

Someone who has a Jekyll and Hyde personality has a pleasant and a very unpleasant side to the character.

Jersey justice

(UK) Jersey justice is very severe justice.

Jet set

Very wealthy people who travel around the world to attend parties or functions are the jet set.

Jet-black

To emphasise just how black something is, such as someone's hair, we can call it jet-black.

Job's comforter

Someone who says they want to comfort, but actually discomforts people is a Job's comforter. (Job's is pronounced 'jobes', not 'jobs')

Jobs for the boys

Where people give jobs, contracts, etc, to their friends and associates, these are jobs for the boys.

Jockey for position

If a number of people want the same opportunity and are struggling to emerge as the most likely candidate, they are jockeying for position.

Jog my memory

If you jog someone's memory, you say words that will help someone trying to remember a thought, event, word, phrase, experience, etc.

John Doe

John Doe is a name given to an unidentified male who may be party to legal proceedings, or to an unidentified person in hospital, or dead. Jane Doe is the female equivalent.

John Q Public

(USA) John Q Public is the typical, average person.

Johnny on the spot

A person who is always available; ready, willing, and able to do what needs to be done.('Johnny-on-the-spot' is also used.)

Johnny-come-lately

A Johnny-come-lately is someone who has recently joined something or arrived somewhere, especially when they want to make changes that are not welcome.

Joined at the hip

If people are joined at the hip, they are very closely connected and think the same way.

Judge, jury and executioner

If someone is said to be the judge, jury, and executioner, it means they are in charge of every decision made, and they have the power to be rid of whomever they choose.

Juggle frogs

If you are juggling frogs, you are trying to do something very difficult.

Jump down someone's throat

If you jump down someone's throat, you criticise or chastise them severely.

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Jump on the bandwagon
: If people jump on the bandwagon, they get involved in something that has recently become very popular.

Jump the gun
: If you jump the gun, you start doing something before the appropriate time.

Jump the shark
: Said of a salient point in a television show or other activity at which the popularity thereof begins to wane: The Flintstones jumped the shark when a man from outer space came to visit them. The expression derives from an episode of the television sitcom 'Happy Days' in which Fonzie, clad in leather jacket and on water skis, jumps over a shark. That episode was widely seen as the beginning of the end for the formerly popular series.

Jump through hoops
: If you are prepared to jump through hoops for someone, you are prepared to make great efforts and sacrifices for them.

Jump to a conclusion
: If someone jumps to a conclusion, they evaluate or judge something without a sufficient examination of the facts.

Jumping Judas!
: An expression of surprise or shock.

Jungle out there
: If someone says that it is a jungle out there, they mean that the situation is dangerous and there are no rules.

Jury's out
: If the jury's out on an issue, then there is no general agreement or consensus on it.

Just around the corner
: If something is just around the corner, then it is expected to happen very soon.

Just as the twig is bent, the tree’s inclined
: Things, especially education, that affect and influence us in our childhood shape the kind of adult we turn out to be. (There are various versions of this, like 'As the twig is bent, the tree's inclined' and 'As the twig is bent, so the tree inclines', 'As the twig is bent so is the tree inclined')

Just coming up to
: If the time is just coming up to nine o'clock, it means that it will be nine o'clock in a very few seconds. You'll hear them say it on the radio in the morning.

Just deserts
: If a bad or evil person gets their just deserts, they get the punishment or suffer the misfortune that it is felt they deserve.

Just for the heck of it
: When someone does something just for the heck of it, they do it without a good reason.

Just for the record
: If something is said to be just for the record, the person is saying it so that people know but does not necessarily agree with or support it.

Just in the nick of time
: If you do something in the nick of time, you just manage to do it just in time, with seconds to spare.

Just off the boat

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If someone is just off the boat, they are naive and inexperienced.

Just what the doctor ordered

If something's just what the doctor ordered, it is precisely what is needed.

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Kangaroo court

When people take the law into their own hands and form courts that are not legal, these are known as kangaroo court.

Keen as mustard

(UK) If someone is very enthusiastic, they are as keen as mustard.

Keep abreast

If you keep abreast of things, you stay informed about developments.

Keep at bay

If you keep someone or something at bay, you maintain a safe distance from them.

Keep body and soul together

If you earn enough to cover your basic expenses, but nothing more than that, you earn enough to keep body and soul together.

Keep in touch

If you keep in touch with someone, you keep communicating with them even though you may live far apart.

Keep it on the Q T

If you keep something on the Q T, you keep it quiet or secret.('Q-T' is also used.)

Keep it under your hat

If you keep something under your hat, you keep it secret.

Keep mum

If you keep mum about something, you keep quiet and don't tell anyone.

Keep posted

If you keep posted about something, you keep up-to-date with information and developments.

Keep someone at arm's length

If you keep someone or something at arm's length, you keep a safe distance away from them.

Keep someone on their toes

If you keep someone on their toes, you make sure that they concentrate on what they are supposed to do.

Keep the wolf at bay

If you keep the wolf at bay, you make enough money to avoid going hungry or falling heavily into debt.

Keep up with the Joneses

People who try to keep up with the Joneses are competitive about material possessions and always try to have the latest and best things.

Keep your chin up

(UK) This expression is used to tell someone to have confidence.

Keep your cool

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If you keep your cool, you don't get excessively excited or disturbed in a bad situation.

Keep your ear to the ground

If you keep your ear to the ground, you try to keep informed about something, especially if there are rumours or uncertainties.

Keep your eye on the ball

If you keep your eye on the ball, you stay alert and pay close attention to what is happening.

Keep your eye on the prize

This means that you should keep your focus on achieving a positive end result.

Keep your eyes peeled

If you keep your eyes peeled, you stay alert or watchful.

Keep your fingers crossed

If you are keeping your fingers crossed, you are hoping for a positive outcome.

Keep your hair on

Keep your hair on is advice telling someone to keep calm and not to over-react or get angry.

Keep your head

If you keep your head, you stay calm in times of difficulty.

Keep your head above water

If you are just managing to survive financially, you are keeping your head above water.

Keep your nose clean

If someone is trying to keep their Nose Clean, they are trying to stay out of trouble by not getting involved in any sort of wrong-doing.

Keep your nose to the grindstone

If you keep your nose to the grindstone, you work hard and seriously.

Keep your options open

If someone's keeping their options open, they aren't going to restrict themselves or rule out any possible course of action.

Keep your pecker up

If someone tells you to keep your pecker up, they are telling you not to let your problems get on top of you and to try to be optimistic.

Keep your powder dry

If you keep your powder dry, you act cautiously so as not to damage your chances.

Keep your shirt on!

This idiom is used to tell someone to calm down.

Keep your wig on!

(UK) This idiom is used to tell someone to calm down.

Kettle of fish

A pretty or fine kettle of fish is a difficult problem or situation.

Kick a habit

If you kick a habit, you stop doing it.

Kick away the ladder

If someone kicks away the ladder, they remove something that was supporting or helping someone.

Kick in the teeth

Bad news or a sudden disappointment are a kick in the teeth.

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Kick something into the long grass

If an issue or problem is kicked into the long grass, it is pushed aside and hidden in the hope that it will be forgotten or ignored.

Kick the ballistics

It means you realise the intensity of a situation. For example, there is too much unemployment now, so the prime minister must kick the ballistics and change his policy.

Kick the bucket

When someone kicks the bucket, they die.

Kick up your heels

(USA) If you kick up your heels, you go to parties or celebrate something.

Kick your heels

(UK) If you have to kick your heels, you are forced to wait for the result or outcome of something.

Kicked to touch

Touch is a zone of the playing field in Rugby. Kicked to touch means the ball was put safely out of play. Idiomatic usage usually means a person has deftly avoided an issue in argument.

Kid gloves

If someone is handled with kid gloves, they are given special treatment and handled with great care.

Kill the goose that lays the golden egg

If you kill the goose that lays the golden egg, you ruin something that is very profitable.

Kill two birds with one stone

When you kill two birds with one stone, you resolve two difficulties or matters with a single action.

Kindred spirit

A kindred spirit is someone who feels and thinks the way you do.

King of the castle

The king of the castle is the person who is in charge of something or in a very comfortable position compared to their companions.

King's ransom

If something costs or is worth a king's ransom, it costs or is worth a lot of money.

Kiss and tell

If people kiss and tell, they disclose private or confidential information.

Kiss of death

The kiss of death is an action that means failure or ruin for someone, a scheme, a plan, etc.

Kiss something goodbye

If someone tells you that you can kiss something goodbye, you have no chance of getting or having it.

Kissing cousin

A kissing cousin is someone you are related to, but not closely.

Kitchen-sink

(UK) Kitchen-sink drama deals with ordinary people's lives.

Kith and kin

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Your kith and kin are your family; your next of kin are close relations you nominate to deal with your affairs in the event of your death on a document, like a passport.

Knee-jerk reaction

A knee-jerk reaction is an instant, instinctive response to a situation.

Knickers in a twist

When your knickers are in a twist, you are angry and snappish over something trivial. 'Whenever he loses his car keys, he gets his knickers in a twist.'

Knight in shining armour

A knight in shining armour is someone who saves you when you are in great trouble or danger.

Knit your brows

If you knit your brows, you frown or look worried.

Knock 'em dead

'Knock 'em dead' is used as a way of wishing someone luck before they give a performance or have to appear before people, as in an interview, etc. ('em = them)

Knock on wood

This idiom is used to wish for good luck. ('Touch wood' is also used.)

Knock something on the head

If you knock something on the head, you stop it or stop doing it.

Knock the pins from under someone

If someone knocks the pins from under you, they let you down.

Knock your block off

To punch someone in the face Eg : The next time you do something like that I'm going to "knock your block off".

Knock your socks off

If something knocks your socks off, it amazes and surprises you, usually in a positive way.

Know a hawk from a handsaw

If someone knows a hawk from a handsaw, they are able to distinguish things and assess them.

Know full well

When you know full well, you are absolutely sure that you know.

Know the ropes

Someone who is experienced and knows how the system works know the ropes.

Know where all the bodies are buried

Someone who by virtue of holding a position of trust with an organization for a long period of time has come to know many of the secrets that others in more powerful positions would rather be kept secret knows where the bodies are buried. An implication is that the person knowing these secrets will use that knowledge to secure something of value for him- or herself.

Know which side one's bread is buttered on

If you know which side one's bread is buttered on, you know where your interests lie and will act accordingly to protect or further them.

Know which way the wind blows

This means that you should know how things are developing and be prepared for the future.

Know your onions

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If someone is very well-informed about something, they know their onions.

Know your place

A person who knows their place doesn't try to impose themselves on others.

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Labor of love

A labor of love is a project or task undertaking for the interest or pleasure in doing it rather than the reward, financial or otherwise.

Labour of love

A labour of love is a project or task undertaking for the interest or pleasure in doing it rather than the reward, financial or otherwise.

Lame duck

If something or someone is a lame duck, they are in trouble.

Land of nod

If someone has gone to the land of nod, they have fallen asleep or gone to bed.

Landslide victory

A landslide victory is a victory in an election by a very large margin.

Lap dog

A lap dog is a person who is eager to please another at the expense of his or her own needs in order to maintain a position of privilege or favor.

Lap of the gods

If something is in the lap of the gods, it is beyond our control and fate will decide the outcome.

Larger than life

If something is excessive or exaggerated, it is larger than life.

Last hurrah

If an elderly person does something special before they die, it is a last hurrah.

Last laugh

The person who has the last laugh ends up with the the advantage in a situation after some setbacks.

Last straw

The last straw is the final problem that makes someone lose their temper or the problem that finally brought about the collapse of something. It comes from an Arabic story, where a camel was loaded with straw until a single straw placed on the rest of the load broke its back.

Last-ditch

A last-ditch attempt is a desperate attempt that will probably fail anyway.

Laugh a minute

Someone who is a laugh a minute is very funny.

Laugh to see a pudding crawl

(UK) Someone who would laugh to see a pudding crawl is easily amused and will laugh at anything.

Laugh up your sleeve

If you laugh up your sleeve, you laugh at someone secretly.

Laughing stock

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If someone becomes a laughing stock they do something so stupid or wrong that no one can take them seriously and people scorn and laugh at them.

Laughter is the best medicine

Laughing is often helpful for healing, especially emotional healing.

Law unto yourself

If somebody's a law unto themselves, they do what they believe is right regardless of what is generally accepted as correct.

Lay down the law

If someone lays down the law, they tell people what to do and are authoritarian.

Lead someone up the garden path

If someone leads you up the garden path, they deceive you, or give you false information that causes you to waste your time. 'Lead someone down the garden path' is also used.

Lead with the chin

If someone leads with their chin, they speak or behave without fear of the consequences.

Lean and mean

An organisation that is lean and mean has no excess or unnecessary elements and is very competitive.

Learn the ropes

If you are learning the ropes, you are learning how to do something.

Leave no stone unturned

If you look everywhere to find something, or try everything to achieve something, you leave no stone unturned.

Leave well alone

If you leave something well alone, you keep a safe distance from it, either physically or metaphorically.

Left hand doesn't know what the right hand is doing

If the left hand doesn't know what the right hand is doing, then communication within a company, organisation, group, etc, is so bad that people don't know what the others are doing.

Left in the dark

If you are left in the dark about something, you aren't given the information that you should have.

Left to your own devices

If someone is left to their own devices, they are not controlled and can do what they want.

Left-handed compliment

A left-handed compliment is one that sounds like praise but has an insulting meaning. ('Backhanded compliment' is an alternative form.)

Legend in your own lunchtime

Somebody who becomes a legend in their own lifetime acquires fame, but often only to a select or specialist audience, while they are still alive.

Lend an ear

If you lend an ear, you listen to what someone has to say. ('Lend your ear' is an alternative form.)

Leopard can't change its spots

This idiom means that people cannot change basic aspects of their character, especially negative ones. ("A leopard doesn't change its spots" is also used.)

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Lesser of two evils
: Something that is the lesser of two evils, is an unpleasant option, but not as bad as the other.

Let alone
: This is used to emphasise how extreme something could be: 'We hadn't got the money to phone home, let alone stay in a hotel.' This emphasises the utter impossibility of staying in a hotel.

Let bygones be bygones
: If people decide to let bygones be bygones, they decide to forget old problems or grievances they have with each other.

Let sleeping dogs lie
: If someone is told to let sleeping dogs lie, it means that they shouldn't disturb a situation as it would result in trouble or complications.

Let the best be the enemy of the good
: If the desire for an unattainable perfection stops someone from choosing good possibilities, they let the best be the enemy of the good.

Let the cat out of the bag
: If you accidentally reveal a secret, you let the cat out of the bag.

Let the chips fall where they may
: This means that we shouldn't try to control events, because destiny controls them.

Let the devil take the hindmost
: This idiom means that you should think of yourself and not be concerned about other people; look after yourself and let the devil take the hindmost.

Let the genie out of the bottle
: If people let the genie out of the bottle, they let something bad happen that cannot be put right or controlled.

Let the grass grow round your feet
: If you let the grass grow round your feet, you delay doing things instead of taking action.

Let your guard down
: If you let your guard down, you relax and stop looking out for danger.

Let your hair down
: If someone lets their hair down, they relax and stop feeling inhibited or shy.

Let's call it a day
: This is used as a way of suggesting that it is time to stop working on something.

Letter of the law
: If people interpret laws and regulations strictly, ignoring the ideas behind them, they follow the letter of the law.

Level playing field
: If there's a level playing field everybody is treated equally.

Lie like a rug
: If someone lies like a rug, they lie to the point where it becomes obvious that they're lying.

Lie low
: If someone lies low, they try not to be found or caught.

Lie through your teeth
: Someone who is always lying, regardless of what people know, lies through their teeth.

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Life and limb

When people risk life and limb, they could be killed or suffer serious injuries.

Life is just a bowl of cherries

This idiom means that life is simple and pleasant.

Light at the end of the tunnel

If you can see light at the end of the tunnel, then you can see some signs of hope in the future, though things are difficult at the moment.

Light bulb moment

A light bulb moment is when you have a sudden realisation about something, like the light bulbs used to indicate an idea in cartoons.

Light on your feet

If someone is light on their feet, they can move quickly and are agile.

Light years ahead

If you are light years ahead of others, you are a long way in front of them in terms of development, success, etc.

Lightning rod

Someone or something that attracts a lot of negative comment, often diverting attention from other problems, is a lightning rod.

Like a bat out of hell

This expression means extremely quickly.

Like a beached whale

Once a whale is on a beach, it cannot get back into the easily, so if you are completely stuck somewhere and can't get away, you are stranded like a beached whale.

Like a bear with a sore head

(UK) If someone's like a bear with a sore head, they complain a lot and are unhappy about something.

Like a bull at a gate

If you tackle a job very quickly, without any real thought about what you are doing, you are going at it like a bull at a gate.

Like a cat on hot bricks

If someone is like a cat on hot bricks, they are very nervous or excited.

Like a cat that got the cream

If someone looks very pleased with themselves and happy, they look like a cat that got the cream.

Like a duck to water

If someone has a natural talent for something and enjoys it, they take to it like a duck to water.

Like a fish needs a bicycle

If someone needs something like a Fish Needs a Bicycle, they do not need it at all, originally a feminist slogan: A woman needs a man like a fish needs a bicycle.

Like a fish out of water

If someone feels like a fish out of water, they are very uncomfortable in the situation they are in.

Like a hawk

If you watch something or someone like a hawk, you observe very closely and carefully.

Like a headless chicken

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If someone rushes about like a headless chicken, they move very fast all over the place, usually without thinking.

Like a kid in a candy store

If someone is like a kid in a candy store, they are very excited about something.

Like a moth to a flame

Something that is like a moth to a flame is attracted to something that is deadly or dangerous.

Like a rat deserting a sinking ship

If people leave a company because they know that it's about to have serious problems, or turn their back on a person about to be in a similar situation, they are said to be like rats deserting a sinking ship.

Like Chinese arithmetic

If something is complicated and hard to understand, it's like Chinese arithmetic.

Like clockwork

If something happens like clockwork, it happens at very regular times or intervals.

Like father, like son

This idiom is used when different generations of a family behave in the same way or have the same talents of defects.

Like giving a donkey strawberries

(UK) If something is like giving a donkey strawberries, people fail to appreciate its value.

Like it or lump it

When people say this, they mean that the person will have to accept the situation because it isn't going to change.

Like lambs to the slaughter

If somebody does something unpleasant without any resistance, they go like lambs to the slaughter.

Like no one's business

If I say my children are growing like no one's business, it means they're growing very quickly. See also 'Like the clappers' and 'Like there's no tomorrow'.

Like peas in a pod

If people or things are like peas in a pod, they look identical.

Like pulling teeth

If something if like pulling teeth, it is very difficult, especially if trying to extract information or to get a straight answer from someone.

Like taking candy from a baby

(USA) If something is like taking candy from a baby, it is very easy to do.

Like the back of your hand

If you know something like the back of your hand, you know it very well indeed.

Like the clappers

If something is going like the clappers, it is going very fast.

Like there's no tomorrow

If you do something like there's no tomorrow, you do it fast or energetically.

Like two peas in a pod

Things that are like two peas in a pod are very similar or identical,

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Like watching sausage getting made

If something is like watching sausages getting made, unpleasant truths about it emerge that make it much less appealing. The idea is that if people watched sausages getting made, they would probably be less fond of them.

Like white on rice

(USA) If you do something like white on rice, you do it very closely: When Bob found out I had front row tickets for the concert, he stuck to me like white on rice.

Like wildfire

If something happens or spreads like wildfire, it happens very quickly and intensely.

Lily-livered

Someone who is lily-livered is a coward.

Lines of communication

Lines of communication are the routes used to communicate by people or groups who are in conflict; a government might open lines of communication with terrorists if it wished to negotiate with them.

Lion's share

The lion's share of something is the biggest or best part.

Lip service

When people pay lip service to something, they express their respect, but they don't act on their words, so the respect is hollow and empty.

Little pitchers have big ears

(USA) This means that children hear more and understand the world around them better than many adults realize.

Little strokes fell great oaks

Meaning: even though something may seem impossible, if you break it up into small parts and take one step at a time, you will succeed.

Live high off the hog

If you are living high off the hog, you are living lavishly.

Live wire

A person who is very active, both mentally and physically, is a live wire.

Lo and behold

This phrase is used to express surprise.

Loan shark

A loan shark lends money at very high rates of interest.

Lock and load

This is a military term meaning "be ready and prepared".

Lock horns

When people lock horns, they argue or fight about something.

Lock the stable door after the horse has bolted

If someone takes action too late, they do this; there is no reason to lock an empty stable.

Lock, stock and barrel

This is an expressions that means 'everything'; if someone buys a company lock, stock and barrel, they buy absolutely everything to do with the company.

Long face

Someone with a long face is sad or depressed about something.

Long in the tooth

If someone is long in the tooth, they are a bit too old to do something.

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Long shot
: If something is a long shot, there is only a very small chance of success.

Long time no hear
: The speaker could say this when they have not heard from a person, either through phone calls or emails for a long time.

Long time no see
: 'Long time no see' means that the speaker has not seen that person for a long time.

Look after number 1
: You are number one, so this idiom means that you should think about yourself first, rather than worrying about other people.

Look after the pennies and the pounds will look after themselves
: (UK) If you look after the pennies, the pounds will look after themselves, meaning that if someone takes care not to waste small amounts of money, they will accumulate capital. ('Look after the pence and the pounds will look after themselves' is an alternative form of this idiom.)

Look before you leap
: This idiom means that you should think carefully about the possible results or consequences before doing something.

Look on the bright side
: If you look on the bright side, you try to see things in an optimistic way, especially when something has gone wrong.

Look out for number one
: If you look out for number one, you take care of yourself and your interests, rather than those of other people.

Look what the cat dragged in
: This idiom is used when someone arrives somewhere looking a mess or flustered and bothered.

Loose cannon
: A person who is very difficult to control and unpredictable is a loose cannon.

Loose lips sink ships
: To have loose lips means to have a big mouth, susceptible to talking about everything and everyone. Sinking ships refers to anything from small acquaintances to long and hearty relationships (with friends or a significant other). So when one says loose lips sink ships, one is basically saying if you can't shut up you are going to end hurting people, usually psychologically or emotionally.Loose lips sink ships comes from World War I and/or WWII, when sailors on leave from their ships might talk about what ship they sailed on or where it had come from, or where it was going. If they talked too much (had 'loose lips') they might accidentally provide the enemy with anecdotal information that might later cause their ship to be tracked, and bombed and sunk, hence 'Loose lips sink ships.' Later, it came to mean any excessive talk might sabotage a project.

Lord love a duck
: An exclamation used when nothing else will fit. Often fitting when one is stunned or dismayed.

Lord willing and the creek don't rise
: Pertains to the ability to accomplish a task or meet an obligation, barring unforseen complications. Example: "I will be at work tomorrow, Lord willing and the creek don't rise."

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Lose face
: To lose one's reputation or standing is to lose face

Lose the plot
: If someone loses the plot, they have stopped being rational about something.

Lose your bottle
: (UK) If someone loses their bottle, they lose the courage to do something.

Lose your lunch
: (UK) If you lose your lunch, you vomit.

Lose your marbles
: If someone has lost their marbles, they've gone mad.

Lose your shirt
: If someone loses their shirt, they lose all their money through a bad investment, gambling, etc.

Love is blind
: If you love someone, it doesn't matter what they look like. You will also overlook faults.

Low-hanging fruit
: Low-hanging fruit are things that are easily achieved.

Lower than a snake's belly
: Someone or something that is lower than a snake's belly is of a very low moral standing.

Lower than a snake's belly in a wagon rut
: (USA) If someone or something is lower than a snake's belly in a wagon rut, they are of low moral standing because a snake's belly is low and if the snake is in a wagon rut, it is really low.

Lower the bar
: If people change the standards required to make things easier, they lower the bar.

Lower your sights
: If you lower your sights, you accept something that is less than you were hoping for.

Luck of the draw
: To have the 'Luck of the draw' is to win something in a competition where the winner is chosen purely by chance.

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Mad as a badger
: If someone is as mad as a badger, they are crazy.

Mad as a bag of hammers
: Someone who is as mad as a bag of hammers is crazy or stupid. ('Daft as a bag of hammers' is also used.)

Mad as a cut snake
: (USA) One who is mad as a cut snake has lost all sense of reason, is crazy, out of control.

Mad as a hornet
: (USA) If someone is as mad as a hornet, they are very angry indeed.

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Mad as a March hare
: Someone who is excitable and unpredictable is as mad as a March hare.

Made in the shade
: One has an easy time in life or in a given situation. Finding things working to one's benefit.

Made of money
: If you are made of money, you have a lot of money.

Mailed fist
: Someone who rules or controls something with a mailed fist is in absolute control and tolerates no dissent. A mailed fist in a velvet glove is used to describe someone who appears soft on the outside, but underneath is very hard. 'Iron fist' is an alternative form.

Major league
: Something major league is very important.

Make a better fist
: If someone makes a better fist of doing something, they do a better job.

Make a clean breast
: If someone makes a clean breast, they confess in full to something they have done.

Make a killing
: If you make a killing, you do something that makes you a lot of money.

Make a meal
: If someone makes a meal of something, they spend too long doing it or make it look more difficult than it really is.

Make a mint
: If someone is making a mint, they are making a lot of money.

Make a monkey of someone
: If you make a monkey of someone, you make them look foolish.

Make a mountain out of a molehill
: If somebody makes a mountain out of a molehill, they exaggerate the importance or seriousness of a problem.

Make a pig's ear
: If you make a pig's ear of something, you make a mess of it.

Make a pitch
: If you make a pitch for something, you make a bid, offer or other attempt to get it.

Make a request
: If you request something, or make a request, you are asking for something you want or need.

Make a song and dance
: (UK) If someone makes a song and dance, they make an unecessary fuss about something unimportant.

Make a virtue out of necessity
: If you make a virtue out of necessity, you make the best of a difficult or unsatisfactory situation.

Make an enquiry
: If you make an enquiry, you ask for general information about something.

Make bets in a burning house
: (USA) If people are making bets in a burning house, they are engaged in futile activity while serious problems around them are getting worse.

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Make ends meet
: If somebody finds it hard to make ends meet, they have problems living on the money they earn.

Make hay
: If you make hay, or may hay while the sun shines, you take advantage of an opportunity as soon as it arises and do not waste time.

Make headway
: If you make headway, you make progress.

Make money hand over fist
: If you make money hand over fist, you make a lot of money without any difficulty.

Make my day
: If something makes your day, it satisfies you or makes you happy.

Make no bones about it
: If somebody make no bones about a scandal in their past, they are open and honest about it and show no shame or embarrassment.

Make or break
: A make or break decision, stage, etc, is a crucial one that will determine the success or failure of the whole venture.

Make out like a bandit
: (USA) If someone is extremely successful in a venture, they make out like a bandit.

Make waves
: If someone makes waves, they cause a lot of trouble.

Make your blood boil
: If something makes your blood boil, it makes you very angry.

Make your flesh crawl
: If something makes your flesh crawl, it really scares or revolts you. ('Make your flesh creep' is an alternative. 'Make your skin crawl' is also used.)

Make your hair stand on end
: If something makes your hair stand on end, it terrifies you.

Make your toes curl
: If something makes your toes curl, it makes you feel very uncomfortable, shocked or embarrassed.

Make yourself scarce
: If someone makes themselves scarce, they go away from a place, especially to avoid trouble or so that they can't be found.

Man Friday
: From 'Robinson Crusoe', a 'Man Friday' refers to an assistant or companion, usually a capable one. The common feminine equivalent is 'Girl Friday'. (Also, 'right-hand man'.)

Man in the street
: The man in the street is an idiom to describe ordinary people, especially when talking about their opinions and ideas.

Man of his word
: A man of his word is a person who does what he says and keeps his promises.

Man of letters
: A man of letters is someone who is an expert in the arts and literature, and often a writer too.

Man of means

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A man, or woman, of means is wealthy.

Man of parts

A man of parts is a person who is talented in a number of different areas or ways.

Man of straw

A weak person that can easily be beaten of changed is a man of straw.

Man of the cloth

A man of the cloth is a priest.

Man on the Clapham omnibus

(UK) The man on the Clapham omnibus is the ordinary person in the street.

Man proposes, God disposes

Your fate lies in the hands of God.

Man upstairs

When people refer to the man upstairs, they are referring to God.

Man's best friend

This is an idiomatic term for dogs.

Man's man

A man's man is a man who does things enjoyed by men and is respected by other men.

Many a slip twixt cup and lip

There's many a slip twixt cup and lip means that many things can go wrong before something is achieved.

Many hands make light work

This idiom means that when everyone gets involved in something, the work gets done quickly.

Many happy returns

This expression is used to wish someone a happy birthday.

Many moons ago

A very long time ago.

March to the beat of your own drum

If people march to the beat of their own drum, they do things the way they want without taking other people into consideration.

Mark my words

Mark my words is an expression used to lend an air of seriousness to what the speaker is about to say when talking about the future. You often hear drunks say it before they deliver some particularly spurious nonsense.

Mark someone's card

If you mark someone's card, you correct them in a forceful and prompt manner when they say something wrong.

Marked man

A marked man is a person who is being targeted by people who want to do them harm or cause them trouble.

Matter of life and death

If something is a matter of life and death, it is extremely important.

Mealy-mouthed

A mealy-mouthed person doesn't say what they mean clearly.

Meat and drink

If something is meat and drink to you, you enjoy it and are naturally good at it, though many find it difficult.

Meat and potatoes

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The meat and potatoes is the most important part of something. A meat and potatoes person is someone who prefers plain things to fancy ones.

Meet someone halfway

If you meet someone halfway, you accept some of their ideas and make concessions.

Meet your expectations

If something doesn't meet your expectations, it means that it wasn't as good as you had thought it was going to be; a disappointment.

Meet your Maker

If someone has gone to meet their Maker, they have died.

Meet your match

If you meet your match, you meet a person who is at least as good if not better than you are at something.

Megaphone diplomacy

If negotiations between countries or parties are held through press releases and announcements, this is megaphone diplomacy, aiming to force the other party into adopting a desired position.

Melt your heart

If something melts your heart, it affects you emotionally and you cannot control the feeling.

Melting pot

A melting pot is a place where people from many ethnicities and nationalities live together.

Memory like a sieve

If somebody can't retain things for long in his or her memory and quickly forgets, he or she has a memory like a sieve. A sieve has lots of tiny holes in it to let liquids out while keeping the solids inside.

Memory like an elephant

'An elephant never forgets' is a saying, so if a person has a memory like an elephant, he or she has a very good memory indeed.

Mend fences

When people mend fences, they try to improve or restore relations that have been damaged by disputes or arguments.

Mess with a bull, you get the horns

If you do something stupid or dangerous, you can get hurt.

Method in his madness

If there's method in someone's madness, they do things in a strange and unorthodox way, but manage to get results.

Mexican standoff

When there is a deadlock in strategy and neither side can do anything that will ensure victory, it's a Mexican standoff.

Mickey Mouse

If something is Mickey Mouse, it is intellectually trivial or not of a very high standard.

Midas touch

If someone has the Midas touch, they make a lot of money out of any scheme they try.

Middle of nowhere

If someone says that he/she is in the middle of nowhere, he/she means that he/she is not sure where he/she is.

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Might and main

This means with all your effort and strength. As he failed in the previous exam,the student tried might and main to pass the next one.

Mighty oaks from little acorns grow

Big or great things start very small.

Millstone round your neck

A millstone around your neck is a problem that prevents you from doing what you want to do.

Mince words

If people mince words, or mince their words, they don't say what they really mean clearly.

Mind over matter

This idiom is used when someone uses their willpower to rise above adversity.

Mind the gap

Mind the gap is an instruction used on the Underground in the UK to warn passengers to be careful when leaving the tube or train as there is quite a distance between the train and the platform.

Mind your own beeswax

(USA) This idiom means that people should mind their own business and not interfere in other people's affairs.

Mind Your P's and Q's

If you are careful about the way you behave and are polite, you mind Your P's and Q's.

Mind your P's and Q's

This is used as a way of telling someone to be polite and behave well.

Mint condition

If something is in mint condition, it is in perfect condition.

Misery guts

A misery guts is a person who's always unhappy and tries to make others feel negative.

Miss is as good as a mile

A miss is as good as a mile means that if you fail, even by the smallest margin, it is still a failure.

Miss the boat

If you miss the boat, you are too late to take advantage of an opportunity.

Mom and pop

(USA) A mom and pop business is a small business, especially if it is run by members of a family. It can used in a wider sense to mean that something is small scale.

Monday morning quarterback

(USA) A Monday morning quarterback is someone who, with the benefit of hindsight, knows what should have been done in a situation.

Money burns a hole in your pocket

If someone has money burning a hole in their pocket, they are eager to spend it, normally in a wasteful manner.

Money doesn`t grow on trees

This means that you have to work to earn money; it doesn't come easily or without effort.

Money for jam

If something's money for jam, it's a very easy way of making money.

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Money for old rope
: (UK) If something's money for old rope, it's a very easy way of making money.

Money laundering
: If people launder money, they get money made illegally into the mainstream so that it is believed to be legitimate and clean.

Money makes many things
: This means that money is important.

Money talks
: This means that people can convey many messages with money, and many things can be discovered about people by observing the way they use their money.

Money to burn
: If someone is very rich, they have money to burn.

Monkey business
: If children get up to monkey business, they are behaving naughtily or mischievously. This is the same as 'monkeying around'.

Monkey see, monkey do
: This idiom means that children will learn their behaviour by copying what they see happening around them.

Moot point
: If something's a moot point, there's some disagreement about it: a debatable point. In the U.S., this expression usually means that there is no point in debating something, because it just doesn't matter. An example: If you are arguing over whether to go the beach or to the park, but you find out the car won't start and you can't go anywhere, then the destination is said to be a moot point.

Moral fibre
: Moral fibre is the inner strength to do what you believe to be right in difficult situations Example: He lacked the moral fibre to be leader (In American English the correct spelling is 'fiber'.)

Moral high ground
: If people have/take/claim/seize, etc, the moral high ground, they claim that their arguments, beliefs, etc, are morally superior to those being put forward by other people.

More front than Brighton
: (UK) If you have more front than Brighton, you are very self-confident, possibly excessively so.

More haste, less speed
: The faster you try to do something, the more likely you are to make mistakes that make you take longer than it would had you planned it.

More heat than light
: If a discussion generates more heat than light, it doesn't provide answers, but does make people angry.

More holes than Swiss cheese
: If something has more holes than a Swiss cheese, it is incomplete,and lacks many parts.

More than meets the eye
: If there is more than meets the eye to something, it is more complex or difficult than it appears.

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More than one string to their bow

A person who has more than one string to their bow has different talents or skills to fall back on.

More than one way to skin a cat

When people say that there is more than one way to skin a cat, they mean that there are different ways of achieving the same thing.

More than you can shake a stick at

If you have more of something than you can shake a stick at, then you have a lot.

Mountain to climb

If you have a mountain to climb, you have to work hard or make a lot of progress to achieve something.

Move heaven and earth

This expression indicates a person's determined intention of getting a work done in spite of all odds he may face. He will use all and every means to accomplish the target. Example: He moved heaven and earth to get his literary work recognised by the committee of experts.

Move mountains

If you would move mountains to do something, you would make any effort to achieve your aim. When people say that faith can move mountains, they mean that it can achieve a lot.

Move the goalposts

When people move the goalposts, they change the standards required for something to their advantage.

Mover and shaker

A person who is a mover and shaker is a highly respected, key figure in their particular area with a lot of influence and importance.

Much ado about nothing

If there's a lot of fuss about something trivial, there's much ado about nothing.

Muck or nettles

'Muck or nettles' means 'all or nothing'.

Mud in the fire

The things that cannot be changed in the past that we usually forget about are mud in the fire.

Mud in your eye

This is a way of saying 'cheers' when you are about to drink something, normally alcohol.

Mud-slinging

If someone is mud-slinging, they are insulting someone and trying to damage that person's reputation.

Muddy the waters

If somebody muddies the waters, he or she makes the situation more complex or less clear.

Mum's the word

When people use this idiom, they mean that you should keep quiet about something and not tell other people.

Mummy's boy

A man who is still very dependent on his mother is a mummy's boy.

Murder will out

This idiom means that bad deeds can't be kept secret forever.

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Murky waters
: Where people are behaving in morally and ethically questionable ways, they are in murky waters.

Music to my ears
: If something someone says is music to your ears, it is exactly what you had wanted to hear.

Mutton dressed as lamb
: Mutton dressed as lamb is term for middle-aged or elderly people trying to look younger.

My dogs are barking
: (USA) When someone says this, they mean that their feet are hurting.

My eye
: This idiom is added to an adjective to show that you disagree with it: 'He's shy.' 'Shy my eye- he's just planning something secret.'

My foot!
: This idiom is used to show that you do not believe what someone has just said.

My hands are full
: If your hands are full, you have so much to do that you cannot take on any more work, responsibilities and so on.

My hands are tied
: If your hands are tied, you are unable to act for some reason.

My heart bleeds
: If your heart bleeds for someone, you feel genuine sympathy and sadness for them.

My heart goes out to someone
: If your heart goes out to someone, you feel genuine sympathy for them.

My way or the highway
: This idiom is used to say that if people don't do what you say, they will have to leave or quit the project, etc.

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~ N ~

Nail in the coffin
: A nail in someone or something's coffin is a problem or event that is a clear step towards an inevitable failure.

Nail-biter
: If a game, election, contest, etc, is a nail-biter, it is exciting because the competitors are so close that it is impossible to predict the result.

Nature abhors a vacuum
: This idiom is used to express the idea that empty or unfilled spaces are unnatural as they go against the laws of nature and physics.

Nature of the beast
: The basic characteristics of something is the nature of the beast; often used when there's an aspect of something that cannot be changed or that is unpleasant or difficult.

Neck and neck

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If two competitors or candidates, etc, are neck and neck, then they are very close and neither is clearly winning.

Neck of the woods

If someone talks about their neck of the woods, they mean the area where they live.

Need no introduction

Someone who is very famous and known to everyone needs no introduction.

Needle in a haystack

If trying to find something is like looking for a needle in a haystack, it means that it is very difficult, if not impossible to find among everything around it.

Neither fish nor fowl

Something or someone that is neither fish nor fowl doesn't really fit into any one group.

Neither here nor there

If something is neither here nor there, it is of very little importance.

Neither use nor ornament

Something that serves no purpose and is not aesthetically pleasing is neither use nor ornament.

Nerves of steel

If someone has nerves of steel, they don't get frightened when other people do.

Nervous Nellie

Someone excessively worried or apprehensive is a nervous Nellie (or Nelly).

Nest egg

If you have some money saved for the future, it is a nest egg.

Never a rose without the prick

This means that good things always have something bad as well; like the thorns on the stem of a rose.

Never darken my door again

This is a way of telling someone never to visit you again.

New blood

If something needs new blood, it has become stale and needs new ideas or people to invigorate it.

New brush sweeps clean

'A new brush sweeps clean' means that someone with a new perspective can make great changes. However, the full version is 'a new brush sweeps clean, but an old brush knows the corners', which warns that experience is also a valuable thing. Sometimes 'broom' is used instead of 'brush'.

New kid on the block

A new kid on the block is a person who has recently joined a company, organisation, team, etc, and does not know how things work yet.

New lease of life

If someone finds new enthusiasm and energy for something, they have a new lease of life.

New man

(UK) A New man is a man who believes in complete equality of the sexes and shares domestic work equally.

New sheriff in town

This is used when a new authority figure takes charge.

New York minute

(USA) If something happens in a New York minute, it happens very fast.

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Newfangled
: People who don't like new methods, technologies, etc, describe them as newfangled, which means new but not as good or nice as the old ones.

Nice as pie
: If a person is nice as pie, they are surprisingly very kind and friendly. "After our argument, she was nice as pie!"

Nick of time
: If you do something in the nick of time, you do it at the very last minute or second.

Nickel tour
: (USA) If someone gives you a nickel tour, they show you around a place. ('Fifty-cent tour' is also used.)

Night owl
: A night owl is someone who goes to bed very late.

Ninth circle of hell
: In Dante's Inferno, the ninth circle of hell is the centre where the worst punishments are found, so it is used idiomatically for something that couldn't get worse.

Nip and tuck
: A close contest where neither opponent seems to be gaining the advantage.

Nip at the bit
: If someone is nipping at the bit, they are anxious to get something done and don't want to wait.

Nip it in the bud
: If you nip something in the bud, you deal with a problem when it is still small, before it can grow into something serious.

Nitty gritty
: If people get down to the nitty gritty, they concentrate on the most important and serious issues.

No bed of roses
: If something isn't a bed of roses, it is difficult.

No can do
: No can do means that the speaker can't do whatever it is that has been asked of him or her.

No go
: Something that will not work. 'A square peg in a round hole is a no go.'

No good deed goes unpunished
: This means that life is unfair and people can do or try to do good things and still end up in a lot of trouble.

No great shakes
: If someone is no great shakes at something, they are not very good at it.

No harm, no foul
: There's no problem when no harm or damage is done, such as the time my sister-in-law stole the name we'd chosen for a boy and we both ended up having girls.

No holds barred
: If there are no holds barred, there are no rules of conduct; you can do anything.

No ifs or buts

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Ifs and Buts is a term used to describe the reasons people give for not wanting to do something. To show that you don't wish to accept any excuses, you can tell somebody that you wish to hear no ifs or buts Here IF & BUT have become nouns

No laughing matter

Something that is no laughing matter is very serious.

No love lost

If there is no love lost between two people they have a strong enmity towards or hate for the other and make no effort to conceal it.

No pain, no gain

Achievements require some sort of sacrifice.

No quarter

This means without mercy. We can say no quarter given or asked.

No question

This idiom means that something is certain or definite.

No questions asked

If something is to be done and no questions asked, then it doesn't matter what methods are used or what rules are broken to ensure that it gets done.

No skin off my nose

If something's no skin off your nose, it doesn't affect or bother you at all.

No smoke without fire

This idiom means that when people suspect something, there is normally a good reason for the suspicion, even if there is no concrete evidence. ('Where's there's smoke, there's fire' is also used.)

No spine

If someone has no spine, they lack courage or are cowardly.

No spring chicken

If someone is no spring chicken, they are not young.

No strings attached

If something has no strings attached, there are no obligations or requirements involved.

No time for

If you have no time for an activity, you have absolutely no desire to spend or waste any time doing it. You can have no time for people, too.

No time like the present

If people say that there's no time like the present , they believe that it is far better to do something now than to leave it for later, in which case it might never get done.

No time to lose

If there's no time to lose, then it's time to get started otherwise it won't be finished on time.

No two ways about it

If there are no two ways about something, there is no other possible interpretation.

No use to man or beast

If something or someone is no use to man or beast, they it or they are utterly useless.

Nod's as good as a wink

(UK) 'A nod's as good as a wink' is a way of saying you have understood something that someone has said, even though it was not said directly. The

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full phrase (sometimes used in the UK) is 'a nod's as good as a wink to a blind horse'.

Noddy work

(UK) Unimportant or very simple tasks are noddy work.

None so blind as those who will not see

This idiom is used when people refuse to accept facts presented to them. ('None so deaf as those who will not hear' is an alternative.)

Nose in the air

If someone has their nose in the air, they behave in a way that is meant to show that they are superior to others.

Nosy parker

(UK) A nosy parker is someone who is excessively interested in other people's lives. ('Nosey parker' is an alternative spelling.)

Not a snowball's chance in hell

There is absolutely no possibility of something hapening if there's not a snowball's chance in hell.

Not all there

If someone isn't all there, they are a little bit stupid or crazy.

Not bat an eye

If someone doesn't bat an eye, they do not react when other people normally would.

Not born yesterday

When someone says that they weren't born yesterday, they mean that they are not naive or easily fooled.

Not cricket

(UK) If something is not cricket, it is unfair.

Not enough room to swing a cat

If a room is very small, you can say that there isn't enough room to swing a cat in it.

Not give a fig

If you don't give a fig about something, you don't care about it at all, especially used to express how little one cares about another's opinions or actions.

Not give a monkey's

(UK) If you couldn't give a monkey's about something, you don't care at all about it.

Not have the heart

If you don't have the heart to do something, you don't have the strength or courage to do something. (Usually used in the negative)

Not have two pennies to rub together

If someone hasn't got two pennies to rub together, they are very poor indeed.

Not hurt a fly

Somebody who would not hurt a fly is not aggressive.

Not know beans about

(USA) If someone doesn't know beans about something, they know nothing about it.

Not know you are born

This indicates that the person described is unaware of his or her good fortune or is unaware of how difficult day to day life was before he/she was born. Typical usage: 'Kids today don't know they are born'.

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Not much cop
: Describing a film or something as not much cop is a way of saying that you didn't think much of it.

Not my cup of tea
: If something is not your cup of tea, you don't like it very much.

Not on my watch
: Someone distancing themselves from a situation could say that it is not on their watch.

Not our bag
: If something is not your bag, it is not really suitable for your needs or you don't like it much.

Not the only pebble on the beach
: If something is not the only pebble on the beach, there are other possibilities or alternatives.

Not to be sneezed at
: If something is not to be sneezed at, it should be taken seriously.

Not wash
: If a story or explanation will not wash, it is not credible.

Not worth a red cent
: (USA) If something is not worth a red cent, it has no value.

Not worth a tinker's dam
: This means that something is worthless and dates back to when someone would travel around the countryside repairing things such as a kitchen pot with a hole in it. He was called a 'tinker'. His dam was used to stop the flow of soldering material being used to close the hole. Of course his 'trade' is passé, thus his dam is worth nothing.

Notch on your belt
: A success or achievement that might help you in the future is a notch on your belt.

Nothing to crow about
: If something's nothing to crow about, it's not particularly good or special.

Nothing to write home about
: Something that is not special or good is nothing to write home about.

Nothing ventured, nothing gained
: You can't win if you don't join in the game; if you don't participate in something, you will not achieve anything.

Now and then
: This idiom means 'occasionally'.

Null and void
: If something's null and void, it is invalid or is no longer applicable.

Number cruncher
: A number cruncher is an accountant or someone who is very good at dealing with numbers and calculations.

Nuts and bolts
: The nuts and bolts are the most essential components of something.

Nutty as a fruitcake
: Someone who's nutty as a fruitcake is irrational or crazy. (This can be shortened to 'a fruitcake'.)

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Object lesson
: An object lesson serves as a warning to others. (In some varieties of English 'abject lesson' is used.)

Odds and ends
: Odds and ends are small, remnant articles and things- the same as 'bits and bobs'.

Off colour
: If someone looks off colour/color, they look ill.

Off the beaten track
: Somewhere that's off the beaten track is in a remote location.

Off the chart
: If something goes off the chart, it far exceeds the normal standards, good or bad, for something.

Off the cuff
: If you do something off the cuff, you do it without any preparation.

Off the grid
: Someone who is off the grid lives outside society and chooses not to follow its rules and conventions.

Off the hook
: If someone is off the hook, they have avoided punishment or criticism for something they have done.

Off the mark
: If something is off the mark, it is inaccurate or incorrect.

Off the rails
: If someone has gone off the rails, they have lost track of reality.

Off the record
: Something off the record is said in confidence because the speaker doesn't want it attributed to them, especially when talking to the media.

Off the scale
: If something goes off the scale, it far exceeds the normal standards, good or bad, for something.

Off the shelf
: If a product is off the shelf, it can be used straightaway without any setting-up.

Off the top of your head
: If you say something off the top of your head, you don't think about it beforehand.

Off the track
: If something puts or throws you off your track, it distracts you or keeps you from achieving what you want.

Off the wall
: Something that is off the wall is unconventional.

Off your chump
: (UK) If someone is off their chump, they are crazy or irrational.

Off your rocker
: (UK) Someone who is off their rocker is crazy.

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Off-hand

Off-hand means without preparation. People say that they don't know the answer off-hand, meaning that they don't know it at that time.

Oh, my goodness!

An expression of surprise.

Old chestnut

An old chestnut is something that has been repeated so many times that it has lost its impact.

Old flames die hard

It's very difficult to forget old things, especially the first love.

Old friends and old wine are best

This idiom means that the things and people that we know well are better than the unfamiliar.

Old hat

If something's old hat, it seems rather old fashioned and dated.

Old wive's tale

A proverb or piece of advice that is commonly accepted as truth and is handed down the generations, but is normally false.

Oldest trick in the book

The oldest trick in the book is a well-known way of deceiving someone, though still effective.

Olive branch

If you hold out or offer an olive branch, you make a gesture to indicate that you want peace.

On a fishing expedition

If someone is on a fishing expedition, they are trying to get information, often using incorrect or improper ways to find things out.

On a roll

If you're on a roll, you're moving from success to success.

On a silver platter

If you hand or give something on a silver platter to someone, you let them have it too easily.

On all fours

If someone is on all fours, they crawl.

On Carey Street

(UK) If someone is on Carey Street, they are heavily in debt or have gone bankrupt.

On good terms

If people are on good terms, they have a good relationship.

On hold

If something is on hold, no action is being taken.

On ice

If plans are put on ice, they are delayed and no action will be taken for the foreseeable future.

On pins and needles

If you are on pins and needles, you are very worried about something.

On tenterhooks

This means that she is waiting impatiently and excitedly for something.

On the ball

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If someone's on the ball, they are well-informed and know what's going on in their area of responsibility or interest.

On the blink

(UK) Is a machine is on the blink, it isn't working properly or is out of order.

On the blower

(UK) If someone is on the blower, they are on the phone.

On the carpet

When you are called to the bosses office (since supposedly, they are the only ones who have carpet) and its definitely not for a good reason, i.e., you are in trouble, something has not gone according to plan and either maybe you are responsible and/or have some explaining to do.

On the case

If someone is on the case, they are dealing with a problem.

On the cheap

If you do something on the cheap, you spend as little as possible to do it.

On the dot

If someone says that they're leaving at seven on the dot, don't be late; they mean at exactly seven o'clock.

On the factory floor

On the factory floor means the place where things are actually produced.

On the fiddle

(UK) Someone who is stealing money from work is on the fiddle, especially if they are doing it by fraud.

On the flip side

On the reverse or the other side

On the fly

If you do things on the fly, you do things without preparation, responding to events as they happen.

On the game

(UK) A person who is on the game works as a prostitute.

On the ground

Events on the ground are where things are actually happening, not at a distance.

On the hoof

If you decide something on the hoof, you do it without planning, responding to events as they happen.

On the house

If you get something for free that would normally have to be bought, especially in a bar or restaurant, it is on the house.

On the lam

If someone is on the lam, they are hiding from the police or authorities, especially to avoid arrest or prison.

On the level

If someone is honest and trustworthy, they are on the level.

On the line

If somebody's job is on the line, they stand a very good chance of losing it.

On the make

If someone is on the make, they are trying to make a lot of money, usually illegally.

On the map

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If a place becomes widely known, it is put on the map. A place that remains unknown is off the map.

On the never-never

(UK) If you buy something on the never-never, you buy it on long-term credit.

On the nod

(UK) If something is accepted by parliament or a committee majority, it is on the nod.

On the nod

(UK) Someone who's on the nod is either asleep or falling asleep, especially when the shouldn't or are are in a position unusual for sleep, like sitting or standing.

On the nod

(UK) When a horse runs, its head moves backwards and forwards alternately - in horse racing, if 2 horses cross the line together the one whose head happens to be going forward often wins and is said to win 'on the nod'.

On the nose

This means right on time.

On the rebound

If someone is on the rebound, their relationship has recently ended and they are emotionally unstable.

On the right foot

If you start something or set off on the right foot, you get off to a good start.

On the ropes

When something or someone is on the ropes, it or they are doing badly and likely to fail.

On the run

If someone is on the run, they are avoiding arrest and hiding from the police.

On the same page

If people are on the same page, they have the same information and are thinking the same way.

On the same wavelength

If people are on the same wavelength, they have the same ideas and opinions about something.

On the shelf

If something like a project is on the shelf, nothing is being done about it at the moment.

On the skids

When things or people are on the skids, they are in serious decline and trouble.

On the sly

If someone does something on the sly, they do it furtively or secretly.

On the stump

When politicians are campaigning for support and votes, they are on the stump.

On the take

(UK) Someone who is stealing from work is on the take.

On the tip of your tongue

If a word is on the tip of your tongue, you know you know the word, but you just can't quite remember it at the moment.

On the trot

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(UK) This idiom means 'consecutively'; I'd saw them three days on the trot, which means that I saw them on three consecutive days.

On the up and up

If you are on the up and up, you are making very good progress in life and doing well.

On the wagon

If someone is on the wagon, they have stopped drinking alcohol.

On the wallaby track

(AU) In Australian English, if you're on the wallaby track, you are unemployed.

On top of the world

If you are on top of the world, everything is going well for you.

On your high horse

When someone is on their high horse, they are being inflexible, arrogant and will not make any compromises.

On your last legs

If someone's on their last legs, they're close to dying.

On your soapbox

If someone is up on their soapbox about something, they are very overtly and verbally passionate about the topic.

On your tod

If you are on your tod, you are alone.

On your toes

Someone on his or her toes is alert and ready to go.

Once bitten, twice shy

If somebody is said to be once bitten twice shy, it means that someone who has been hurt or who has had something go wrong will be far more careful the next time.

Once in a blue moon

If something happens once in a blue moon, it happens very rarely indeed.

One bad apple

The full form of this proverb is 'one bad apple spoils the barrel', meaning that a bad person, policy, etc, can ruin everything around it.

One fell swoop

If something is done at one fell swoop, it is done in a single period of activity, usually swiftly and ruthlessly.

One for the road

A last drink before leaving a pub or bar is one for the road.

One good turn deserves another

This means that when people do something good, something good will happen to them.

One hand washes the other

This idiom means that we need other people to get on as cooperation benefits us all.

One man's loss is another man's gain

This means thato ne person's setback benefits someone else.

One man's meat is another man's poison

This idiom means that one person can like something very much, but another can hate it.

One man's trash is another man's treasure

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What is useless to one person might be valuable to another.

One over the eight

(UK) Someone who is one over the eight is drunk.

One swallow does not make a summer

This means that one good or positive event does not mean that everything is all right.

One-man band

If one person does all the work or has all the responsibility somewhere, then they are a one-man band.

One-off

A one-off event only happens once and will not be repeated.

One-trick pony

A one-trick pony is someone who does one thing well, but has limited skills in other areas.

Oops a daisy

An expression used to indicate surprise.

Open all hours

If a shop or suchlike is open all hours, it only closes, if at all, terribly late.

Open book

If a person is an open book, it is easy to know what they think or how they feel about things.

Open old sores

When a sore is almost healed, and if a person rips or tears it open, it is way of preventing the healing process and further aggravating the pain. This phrase, metaphorically suggests, to revive or reopen a quarrel or enmity which was almost forgotten.

Open old wounds

If you open old wounds, you revive a quarrel or problem that caused a lot of trouble in the past.

Opening a can of worms

If you open a can of worms, you do something that will cause a lot of problems and is, on balance, probably going to cause more trouble than it's worth.

Opportunity knocks but once

This idiom means that you only get one chance to achieve what you really want to do.

Other fish to fry

If you have other fish to fry, it doesn't matter if one opportunity fails to materialise as you have plenty of others.

Other side of the coin

The other side of the coin is a different, usually opposing, view of a situation. ('Flip side of the coin' is an alternative.)

Out and about

If someone is out and about, they have left their home and are getting things done that they need to do.

Out in the sticks

(UK) If someone lives out in the sticks, they live out in the country, a long way from any metropolitan area.

Out like a light

If you are out like a light, you fall fast asleep.

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Out of hand
: If something gets out of hand, it gets out of control.

Out of my league
: If someone or something is out of your league, you aren't good enough or rich enough, etc, for it or them.

Out of pocket
: If you are out of pocket on a deal, you have lost money.

Out of sight, out of mind
: Out of sight, out of mind is used to suggest that someone will not think or worry about something if it isn't directly visible or available to them.

Out of sorts
: If you are feeling a bit upset and depressed, you are out of sorts.

Out of the blue
: If something happens out of the blue, it happens suddenly and unexpectedly.

Out of the box
: Thinking out of the box is thinking in a creative way. However, it can also be used for a ready-made product that requires no specialist knowledge to set it up.

Out of the frying pan, into the fire
: If you get out of one problem, but find yourself in a worse situation, you are out of the frying pan, into the fire.

Out of the gate running
: If someone comes out of the gate running, they start something at a fast pace, without any build-up.

Out of the left field
: (USA) If something comes out of the left field, it is beside the point and has nothing to do with the matter being discussed.

Out of the mouths of babes
: People say this when children unexpectedly say something very intelligent or wise.

Out of the woods
: If you are out of the woods, you have emerged safely from a dangerous situation, though the idiom is often used in the negative.

Out of this world
: If something is out of this world, it is fantastic.

Out of your hair
: If you get someone out of your hair, you get them to stop bothering or annoying you. ('Stay/keep/get out of my hair!' can be used as imperatives)

Out of your mind
: If someone is out of the mind, they are so emotional about something that they are no longer rational.

Out of your own pocket
: If someone does something out of their own pocket, they pay all the expenses involved.

Out on a limb
: If somebody's out on a limb, they are in a very exposed position and could get into difficulties.

Out to lunch
: If someone's out to lunch, they are crazy or out of touch.

Out-and-out

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This means complete or total; an out-and-out lie is completey false.

Over a barrel

If someone has you over a barrel, they have you in a position where you have no choice but to accept what they want.

Over and over

If something happens over and over, it happens repeatedly.

Over my dead body

If you say that something will happen over your dead body, you will not let it happen.

Over the counter

Medicines and drugs that can be sold without a doctor's prescription are sold over the counter.

Over the hill

If someone is over the hill they have reached an age at which they can longer perform as well as they used to.

Over the moon

If you are over the moon about something, you are overjoyed.

Over the top

If something is over the top, it is excessive or unnecessary. It refers to the moment a soldier leaves the trenches.

Over your head

If something is over your head, or goes over your head, it is too complex or difficult for you to understand.

Over-egg the pudding

(UK) If you over-egg the pudding, you spoil something by trying to improve it excessively. It is also used nowadays with the meaning of making something look bigger or more important than it really is. ('Over-egg' alone is often used in this sense.)

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Packed like sardines

If a place is extremely crowded, people are packed like sardines, or packed in like sardines.

Paddle your own canoe

(USA) If you paddle your own canoe, you do things for yourself without outside help.

Pain in the neck

If someone is very annoying and always disturbing you, they are a pain in the neck. Pain in the butt, or pain in the ass (USA), and Pain in the arse (UK) are less polite alternative forms.

Paint the town red

If you go out for a night out with lots of fun and drinking, you paint the town red.

Paint yourself into a corner

(USA) If someone paints themselves into a corner, they get themselves into a mess.

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Painted Jezebel
: A painted Jezebel is a scheming woman.

Pandora's box
: If you open a Pandora's box, something you do causes all sorts of trouble that you hadn't anticipated.

Paper over the cracks
: If you paper over the cracks, you try to make something look or work better but only deal with superficial issues, not the real underlying problems.

Paper tiger
: A paper tiger is a person, country, institution, etc, that looks powerful, but is actually weak.

Par for the course
: If something is par for the course, it is what you expected it would be. If it is above par, it is better, and if it is below par, it is worse.

Parrot fashion
: If you learn something parrot fashion, you learn it word for word. A parrot is a bird from South America that can talk.

Part and parcel
: If something is part and parcel of your job, say, it is an essential and unavoidable part that has to be accepted.

Pass muster
: If something passes muster, it meets the required standard.

Pass the buck
: If you pass the buck, you avoid taking responsibility by saying that someone else is responsible.

Pass the hat
: If you pass the hat, you ask a people in a group to give money.

Pass the time of day
: If you pass the time of day with somebody, you stop and say hello, enquire how they are and other such acts of social politeness.

Pastoral care
: This is used in education to describe the aspect of care offered to pupils that cover things besides learning.

Patience of Job
: If something requires the patience of Job, it requires great patience.

Pay on the nail
: If you pay on the nail, you pay promptly in cash.

Pay the piper
: When you pay the piper, you have to accept the consequences of something that you have done wrong or badly.

Pay through the nose
: If you pay through the nose for something, you pay a very high price for it.

Pay your dues
: If you have paid your dues, you have had your own struggles and earned your place or position.

Pecking order
: The pecking order is the order of importance or rank.

Peeping Tom
: A peeping Tom is someone who tries to look through other people's windows without being seen in order to spy on people in their homes.

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Pen is mightier than the sword
: The idiom 'the pen is mightier than the sword' means that words and communication are more powerful than wars and fighting.

Penny ante
: (USA) Something that is very unimportant is penny ante.

Penny pincher
: A penny pincher is a mean person or who is very frugal.

Penny wise, pound foolish
: Someone who is penny wise, pound foolish can be very careful or mean with small amounts of money, yet wasteful and extravagant with large sums.

People who live in glass houses should not throw stones
: People should not criticize other people for faults that they have themselves.

Pep talk
: When someone gives you a pep talk it is to build you up to help you accomplish something. In sports a coach might give a player a pep talk before the game to bolster his confidence. At work the boss might give you a pep talk to get you to do a better job.

Perfidious Albion
: England is known to some as perfidious Albion, implying that it is not trustworthy in its dealings with foreigners.

Perish the thought
: Perish the thought is an expression meaning that you really hope something will not happen.

Pet peeve
: A pet peeve is something that irritates an individual greatly.

Photo finish
: A photo finish is when two contestants (usually in a race) finish at almost exactly the same time, making it difficult to determine the winner. (The saying stems from the practice of taking a photograph when the winners cross the finish line to determine who was ahead at the time.)

Pick up the tab
: A person who pays for everyone picks up the tab.

Pick-up game
: (USA) A pick-up game is something unplanned where people respond to events as they happen.

Picture perfect
: When something is exactly as it should be it is said to be picture perfect.

Pie in the sky
: If an idea or scheme is pie in the sky, it is utterly impractical.

Piece of cake
: If something is a piece of cake, it is really easy.

Pieces of the same cake
: Pieces of the same cake are things that have the same characteristics or qualities.

Pig in a poke
: If someone buys a pig in a poke, they buy something without checking the condition it was in, usually finding out later that it was defective.

Pigs might fly
: If you think something will never happen or succeed, you can say that 'pigs might fly' (or 'pigs can fly' and 'pigs will fly'- the idiom is used in many forms)

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Pin down with a label

If you pin someone down with a label, you characterise them, often meant negatively as the label is restrictive.

Pin money

(UK) If you work for pin money, you work not because you need to but because it gives you money for extra little luxuries and treats.

Pinch of salt

If what someone says should be taken with a pinch of salt, then they exaggerate and distort things, so what they say shouldn't be believed unquestioningly. ('with a grain of salt' is an alternative.)

Pink pound

(UK) In the UK, the pink pound is an idiom for the economic power of gay people.

Pink slip

If someone receives a pink slip, they receive a letter telling them they have lost their job.

Pipe dream

A pipe dream is an unrealistic, impractical idea or scheme.

Piping hot

If food is piping hot, it is very hot indeed.

Place in the sun

If you have your place in the sun, you find wealth, happiness or whatever you are looking for in life.

Plain as a pikestaff

(UK) If something is as plain as a pikestaff, it is very clear.

Plain as the nose on your face

If something is as plain as the nose on your face, it is very clear and obvious.

Plain Jane

A plain Jane is a woman who isn't particularly attractive.

Plain sailing

If something is relatively easy and there are no problems doing it, it is plain sailing.

Plan B

Plan is an alternate or fall-back position or method when the initial attempt or plan goes wrong.

Plastic smile

When someone is wearing a plastic smile, they are appear to be happier with a situation or events than they actually are. This is actually a description of the forced smile you might see in many photographs.

Play by ear

If you play by ear, you deal with something in an impromptu manner, without guidelines or rules. It refers to playing music without using written notation.

Play fast and loose

If people play fast and loose, they behave in an irresponsible way and don't respect rules, etc.

Play for keeps

If you are playing for keeps, you take things very seriously and the outcome is very important to you; it is not a mere game.

Play for time

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If you play for time, you delay something because because you are not ready or need more time to thing about it. Eg. I knew I had to play for time until the police arrived.

Play hard to get

If someone plays hard to get, they pretend not to be interewsted or attracted by someone, usually to make the other person increase their efforts.

Play hardball

If someone plays hardball, they are very aggressive in trying to achieve their aim.

Play havoc

Playing havoc with something is creating disorder and confusion; computer viruses can play havoc with your programs.

Play hooky

If people play hooky, they don't attend school when they should and don't have a valid reason for their absence.

Play into someone's hands

If you play into someone's hands, you do what they were expecting you to do and take advantage of this.

Play it by ear

If you play it by ear, you don't have a plan of action, but decide what to do as events take shape.

Play out of your skin

If someone plays out of their skin, they give an outstanding performance.

Play possum

To pretend to be dead or sleeping. His younger sister jumped on him because she knew he was just playing possum.

Play second fiddle

If you play second fiddle, you take a subordinate role behind someone more important.

Play the field

Someone who plays the field has sexual relationships with many people.

Play the fool

If someone plays the fool, they behave in a silly way to make people laugh. ('Act the fool' is and alternative form.)

Play with fire

If people take foolish risks, they are playing with fire.

Playing to the gallery

If someone plays to the gallery, they say or do things that will make them popular at the expense of more important issues.

Please revert

(India) Please respond to me if the solution provided is incorrect or insufficient.

Pleased as punch

When someone is pleased as punch, they are very satisfied about something

Poacher turned gamekeeper

Someone who gets a legitimate job which is the opposite of their previous one. E.G a computer hacker who then helps to catch other hackers or an ex-bank robber who then advises banks on security.

Poetry in motion

Something that is poetry in motion is beautiful to watch.

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Point the finger
: When you point the finger at someone, you are accusing and blaming them for something.

Pointy-heads
: Pointy-heads are supposed intellectuals or experts, but who don't really know that much.

Poison pill
: A poison pill is a strategy designed to prevent a company from being take over.

Poker face
: Someone with a poker face doesn't show any emotion or reaction so that people don't know what they are feeling.

Polish the apples
: (USA) Someone who polishes the apples with someone, tries to get into that person's favor.

Polishing peanuts
: To work very hard at something for little or no return. In other words, wasting time on work which will not yield reasonable value.

Politically correct
: Things or people that are politically correct use language that will not cause offence.

Poor as a church mouse
: If soemone is as poor as a church mouse, they are very poor indeed.

Pop the question
: When someone pops the question, they ask someone to marry them.

Pop your clogs
: When someone pops their clogs, they die.

Pork barrel
: Pork barrel politics involves investing money in an area to get political support rather than using the money for the common good.

Pot calling the kettle black
: If someone hypocritically criticises a person for something that they themselves do, then it is a case of the pot calling the kettle black.

Pot-luck
: If you take pot-luck, you take whatever happens to be available at the time.

Pound of flesh
: If someone wants their pound of flesh, the force someone to pay or give back something owed, even though they don't need it and it will cause the other person a lot of difficulty.

Pour oil on troubled waters
: If someone pours oil on troubled waters, they try to calm things down.

Powder your nose
: If somebody goes to powder your nose, it is a euphemism for going to the lavatory (toilet).

Powers that be
: The powers that be are the people who are in charge of something.

Practical joke
: A practical joke is a trick played on someone that is meant to be funny for people watching, though normally embarrassing for the person being tricked.

Practise what you preach

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If you practise what you preach, you do what you say other people should do.(In American English, the verb is 'practice')

Preaching to the choir

If someone preaches to the choir, they talking about a subject or issue with which their audience already agrees. ('Preaching to the converted' is an alternative form.)

Presence of mind

If someone behaves calmly and rationally in difficult circumstances, they show presence of mind.

Press the flesh

When people, especially politicians, press the flesh, they meet members of the public and shake their hands, usually when trying to get support.

Pressed for time

If you are pressed for time, you are in a hurry or working against a very tight schedule.

Prick up your ears

If you prick up your ears, you listen very carefully. ('Pick up your ears' is also used.)

Prim and proper

Someone who is prim and proper always behaves in the correct way and never breaks the rules of etiquette.

Primrose path

The primrose path is an easy and pleasurable lifestyle, but one that ends in unpleasantness and problems.

Prince charming

A prince charming is the perfect man in a woman's life.

Problem is thirty

If a problem is 30, the problem is the person who sits 30 cm from the computer screen. It is used to describe people that lack technical knowledge and can be used when you insult someone who's having computer problems.

Proclaim it from the rooftops

If something is proclaimed from the rooftops, it is made as widely known and as public as possible.

Prodigal son

A prodigal son is a young man who wastes a lot on money on a lavish lifestyle. If the prodigal son returns, they return to a better way of living.

Proof of the pudding is in the eating

This means that something can only be judged when it is tested or by its results. (It is often shortened to 'Proof of the pudding'.)

Pros and cons

Pros and cons are arguments for or against a particular issue. Pros are arguments which aim to promote the issue, while cons suggest points against it. The term has been in use since the 16th century and is a shortening of a Latin phrase, pro et contra, which means “for and against.” Considering the pros and cons of an issue is a very useful way to weigh the issue thoughtfully and reach an informed decision.

Proud as a peacock

Someone who is as proud as a peacock is excessively proud.

Pull a rabbit out of your hat

If you pull a rabbit out of a hat, you do something that no one was expecting.

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Pull in the reins

When you pull in the reins, you slow down or stop something that has been a bit out of control.

Pull no punches

If you pull no punches, you hold nothing back.

Pull numbers out of your ass

(USA) If sopmeone pulls numbers out of their ass, they give unreliable or unsubstantiated figures to back their argument.

Pull out all the stops

If you pull out all the stops, you do everything you possibly can to achieve the result you want.

Pull out of the fire

(USA) If you pull something out of the fire, you save or rescue it.

Pull rank

A person of higher position or in authority pulls rank, he or she exercises his/her authority, generally ending any discussion and ignoring other people's views.

Pull someone's leg

If you pull someone's leg, you tease them, but not maliciously.

Pull strings

If you pull strings, you use contacts you have got to help you get what you want.

Pull the fat from the fire

If you pull the fat from the fire, you help someone in a difficult situation.

Pull the other one, it's got brass bells on

This idiom is way of telling somebody that you don't believe them. The word 'brass' is optional.

Pull the trigger

The person who pulls the trigger is the one who does the action that closes or finishes something.

Pull the wool over someone's eyes

If you pull the wool over someone's eyes, you deceive or cheat them.

Pull up your socks

If you aren't satisfied with someone and want them to do better, you can tell them to pull up their socks.

Pull your chain

(USA) If someone pulls your chain, they take advantage of you in an unfair way or do something to annoy you.

Pull your finger out!

(UK) If someone tells you to do this, they want you to hurry up. ('Get your finger out' is also used.)

Pull your punches

If you pull your punches, you do not use all the power or authority at your disposal.

Pull your weight

If someone is not pulling their weight, they aren't making enough effort, especially in group work.

Pull yourself up by your bootstraps

If you pull yourself up by your bootstraps, you make the effort to improve things for yourself.

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Punching bag
: A punching bag (or punch bag) is a person who gets a lot of unfair criticism.

Pup's chance
: A pup's chance is no chance.

Puppy love
: Puppy love is love between two very young people.

Push comes to shove
: If or when push comes to shove, the situation has become some bad that you are forced to do something: If push comes to shove, we'll just have to use our savings.

Push the envelope
: This means to go to the limits, to do something to the maximum possible.

Pushing up the daisies
: If someone is said to be pushing up the daisies, they are dead.

Put a bug in your ear
: If you put a bug in someone's ear, you give him or her a reminder or suggestion relating to a future event.

Put a cork in it!
: This is a way of telling someone to be quiet.

Put a sock in it
: If someone tells you to put a sock in it, they are telling you to shut up.

Put all your eggs in one basket
: If you put all your eggs in one basket, you risk everything on a single opportunity which, like eggs breaking, could go wrong.

Put it on the cuff
: If you put something on the cuff, you will take it now and pay for it later.

Put lipstick on a pig
: If people put lipstick on a pig, they make superficial or cosmetic changes, hoping that it will make the product more attractive.

Put more green into something
: (USA) To put more green into something is to spend more or to increase investment in it.

Put on airs
: If someone puts on airs, they pretend to be grander and more important than they really are.

Put or get someone's back up
: If you put or get someone's back up, you annoy them.

Put some dirt on it
: This means that when you get hurt, you should rub it off or shake it off and you'll be ok.

Put some mustard on it!
: (USA) I think its used to encourage someone to throw a ball like a baseball hard or fast.

Put somebody's nose out of joint
: If you put someone's nose out of joint, you irritate them or make them angry with you.

Put someone on a pedestal
: If you put someone on a pedestal, you admire them greatly, idolise them.

Put someone out to pasture

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If someone is put out to pasture, they are forced to resign or give up some responsibilities.

Put that in your pipe and smoke it

This is used as an unsympathetic way of telling someone to accept what you have just said.

Put the carriage before the horse

If you put the carriage before the horse, you try to do things in the wrong order.

Put the kybosh on

To put an end to something.

Put the pedal to the metal

If you put the pedal to the metal, you go faster.

Put to the sword

If someone is put to the sword, he or she is killed or executed.

Put two and two together

If someone puts two and two together, they reach a correct conclusion from the evidence.

Put up or shut up

'Put up or shut up' means you do something you are talking about or not to talk about it any more.

Put you in mind

If something suggests something to you, it puts you in mind of that thing.

Put you in the picture

If you put someone in the picture, you tell them the information they need to know about something.

Put your best foot forward

If you ut your best foot forward, you try your best to do something.

Put your cards on the table

If you put your cards on the table, you make your thoughts or ideas perfectly clear.

Put your foot down

When someone puts their foot down, they make a firm stand and establish their authority on an issue.

Put your foot in it

If you put your foot in it, you do or say something embarrassing and tactless or get yourself into trouble.

Put your foot in your mouth

If you put your foot in your mouth, you say something stupid or embarrassing.

Put your hand on your heart

If you can out your hand on your heart, then you can say something knowing it to be true.

Put your heads together

If people put their head together, they exchange ideas about something.

Put your money where your mouth is

If someone puts their money where their mouth is, they back up their words with action.

Put your shoulder to the wheel

When you put your shoulder to the wheel, you contribute to an effort.

Put your thumb on the scales

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If you put your thumb on the scales, you try to influence the result of something in your favour.

Put yourself in someone's shoes

If you put yourself in someone's shoes, you imagine what it is like to be in their position.

Putting the cart before the horse

When you put the cart before the horse, you are doing something the wrong way round.

Pyrrhic victory

A Pyrrhic victory is one that causes the victor to suffer so much to achieve it that it isn't worth winning.

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~ Q ~

Quarrel with bread and butter

Bread and butter, here, indicate the means of one's living. (That is why we say 'he is the bread winner of the family'). If a sub-ordinate in an organisation is quarrelsome or if he is not patient enough to bear the reprimand he deserves, gets angry and retorts or provokes the higher-up, the top man dismisses him from the job. So, he loses the job that gave him bread and butter. Hence we say, he quarrelled with bread and butter (manager or the top man) and lost his job.

Quart into a pint pot

(UK) If you try to put or get a quart into a pint pot, you try to put too much in a small space. (1 quart = 2 pints)

Queen bee

The queen bee is a woman who holds the most important position in a place.

Queen of Hearts

A woman who is pre-eminent in her area is a Queen of Hearts.

Queer fish

(UK) A strange person is a queer fish.

Queer Street

If someone is in a lot of trouble, especially financial, they are in Queer Street.

Queer your pitch

If someone queers your pitch, they interfere in your affairs and spoil things.

Question of time

If something's a question of time, it's certain to happen, though we don't know exactly when.

Queue jumping

Someone who goes to the front of a queue instead of waiting is jumping the queue.

Quick as a flash

If something happens quick as a flash, it happens very fast indeed.

Quick buck

If you make some money easily, you make a quick buck.

Quick fix

A quick fix is an easy solution, especially one that will not last.

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Quick off the mark
: If someone is quick off the mark, they are very quick to use, start or do something new.

Quick on the trigger
: Someone who is quick on the trigger acts or responds quickly.

Quids in
: (UK) If somebody is quids in, they stand to make a lot of money from something.

Quiet as a cat
: If somebody is as quiet as a cat they make as little noise as possible and try to be unnoticeable.

Quiet as a mouse
: If someone's as quiet as a mouse, they make absolutely no noise.

Quiet before the Storm
: When you know that something is about to go horribly wrong, but hasn't just yet, then you are in the quiet before the storm.

Quitters never win; winners never quit
: If you quit you will never get what you want, but if you keep trying you will find a way to get what you want. ('Quitters never win, winners never quit, but those who never win and never quit are idiots' is a variation accredited to Larry Kersten)

RRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRR

~ S ~

Sacred cow
: Something that is a sacred cow is held in such respect that it cannot be criticised or attacked.

Safe and sound
: If you arrive safe and sound, then nothing has harmed you on your way.

Safe as houses
: Something that is as safe as houses is very secure or certain.

Safe bet
: A proposition that is a safe bet doesn't have any risks attached.

Safe pair of hands
: A person who can be trusted to do something without causing any trouble is a safe pair of hands.

Safety in numbers
: If a lot of people do something risky at the same time, the risk is reduced because there is safety in numbers.

Saigon moment
: (USA) A Saigon moment is when people realise that something has gone wrong and that they will lose or fail.

Sail close to the wind
: If you sail close to the wind, you take risks to do something, going close to the limit of what is allowed or acceptable.

Sail under false colours

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Someone who sails under false colours (colors) is hypocritical or pretends to be something they aren't in order to deceive people.

Salad days

Your salad days are an especially happy period of your life.

Salt in a wound

If you rub salt in a wound, you make someone feel bad about something that is already a painful experience. 'Pour salt on a wound' is an alternative form of the idiom.

Salt of the earth

People who are salt of the earth are decent, dependable and unpretentious.

Salty dog

A salty dog is an experienced sailor.

Same old, same old

When nothing changes, it's the same old, same old.

Save face

If someone saves face, they manage to protect their reputation.

Save someone's bacon

If something saves your bacon, it saves your life or rescues you from a desperate situation. People can also save your bacon.

Save your skin

If someone saves their skin, they manage to avoid getting into serious trouble.

Saved by the bell

If you are saved by the bell, you are rescued from a danger or a tricky situation just in time.

Saving grace

If someone has some character defects, but has a characteristic that compensate for their failings and shortcomings, this is their saving grace.

Say uncle

(USA) If you say uncle, you admit defeat. ('Cry uncle' is an alternative form.)

Say when

People say this when pouring a drink as a way of telling you to tell them when there's enough in your glass.

Say-so

If you do something on someone else's say-so, you do it on the authority, advice or recommendation.

Saying is one thing; doing is another

It's harder to do something than it is to say that you will do it.

Scales fall from your eyes

When the scales fall from your eyes, you suddenly realise the truth about something.

Scare the daylights out of someone

If you scare the daylights out of someone, you terrify them. (This can be made even stronger by saying 'the living daylights'.)

Scarlet woman

This idiom is used as a pejorative term for a sexually promiscuous woman, especially an adulteress.

Scattered to the four winds

If something's scattered to the four winds, it goes out in all directions.

Scent blood

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If you can scent blood, you feel that a rival is having difficulties and you are going to beat them.

Schoolyard pick

When people take it in turns to choose a member of a team, it is a schoolyard pick.

Scot free

If someone escapes scot free, they avoid payment or punishment. 'Scot' is an old word for a tax, so it originally referred to avoiding taxes, though now has a wider sense of not being punished for someone that you have done.

Scotch Mist

The phrase 'Scotch mist' is used humorously to refer to something that is hard to find or doesn't exist - something imagined.

Scraping the barrel

When all the best people, things or ideas and so on are used up and people try to make do with what they have left, they are scraping the barrel.

Scream blue murder

If someone shouts very loudly in anger, or fear, they scream blue murder.

Screw loose

If someone has a screw loose, they are crazy.

Screwed if you do, screwed if you don't

This means that no matter what you decide or do in a situation, there will be negative consequences.

Sea legs

If you are getting your sea legs, it takes you a while to get used to something new.

Seamy side

The seamy side of something is the unpleasant or sordid aspect it has.

Searching question

A searching question goes straight to the heart of the subject matter, possibly requiring an answer with a degree of honesty that the other person finds uncomfortable.

Second thoughts

If some has second thoughts, they start to think that an idea, etc, is not as good as it sounded at first and are starting to have doubts.

Second wind

If you overcome tiredness and find new energy and enthusiasm, you have second wind.

See eye to eye

If people see eye to eye, they agree about everything.

See red

If someone sees red, they become very angry about something.

See the elephant

If you see the elephant, you experience much more than you wish to; it is often used when a soldier goes into a warzone for the first time.

See the light

When someone sees the light, they realise the truth.

See which way the cat jumps

(AU) If you see which way the cat jumps, you postpone making a decision or acting until you have seen how things are developing.

See you anon

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(UK) If somebody says this when leaving, they expect to see you again soon.

See you later

A casual way of saying to friends I'll see you again, sometime, (without a definite date or time having been set) - this is often abbreviated to 'Later' or 'Laters' as an alternative way of saying goodbye.

See you on the big drum

A good night phrase to children.

Seed money

Seed money is money that is used to start a small business.

Seeing is believing

This idiom means that people can only really believe what they experience personally.

Seen better days

If something's seen better days, it has aged badly and visibly compared to when it was new. The phrase can also be used to describe people.

Sell down the river

If you sell someone down the river, you betray their trust.

Sell like hot cakes

If a product is selling very well, it is selling like hot cakes.

Sell like hotcakes

If something is selling like hotcakes, it is very popular and selling very well.

Sell your birthright for a mess of pottage

If a person sells their birthright for a mess of pottage, they accept some trivial financial or other gain, but lose something much more important. 'Sell your soul for a mess of pottage' is an alternative form.

Sell your soul

If someone sells their soul, their betray the most precious beliefs.

Send someone packing

If you send someone packing, you send them away, normally when they want something from you.

Send someone to Coventry

(UK) If you send someone to Coventry, you refuse to talk to them or co-operate with them.

Separate the sheep from the goats

If you separate the sheep from the goats, you sort out the good from the bad.

Separate the wheat from the chaff

When you separate the wheat from the chaff, you select what is useful or valuable and reject what is useless or worthless.

Serve time

When someone is serving time, they are in prison.

Serve your country

When someone is serving their country, they have enrolled in the military.

Set in stone

If something is set in stone, it cannot be changed or altered.

Set the Thames on fire

If you do something remarkable, you set the Thames on fire, though this expression is used in the negative; someone who is dull or undistiguished will never set the Thames on fire.

Set the wheels in motion

When you set the wheels in motion, you get something started.

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Set your sights on
: If you set your sights on someone or something, it is your ambition to beat them or to achieve that goal.

Seven sheets to the wind
: If someone is seven sheets to the wind, they are very drunk.

Seventh heaven
: If you are in seventh heaven, you are extremely happy.

Shades of meaning
: Shades of meaning is a phrase used to describe the small, subtle differences in meaning between similar words or phrases; 'kid' and 'youth' both refer to young people, but carry differing views and ideas about young people.

Shaggy dog story
: A shaggy dog story is a joke which is a long story with a silly end.

Shake a leg
: If you shake a leg, you are out of bed and active. It can be used to tell someone to hurry up.

Shanks's pony
: (UK) If you go somewhere by Shanks's pony, you walk there.

Shape up or ship out
: If someone has to shape up or ship out, they have to improve or leave their job, organisation, etc.

Sharp as a tack
: (USA) If someone is as sharp as a tack, they are very clever indeed.

Sharp cookie
: Someone who isn't easily deceived or fooled is a sharp cookie.

Sharpen your pencil
: (USA) If someone says this when negotiating, they want the other person to make a better offer, a lower price.

She'll be apples
: (AU) A very popular old Australian saying meaning everything will be all right, often used when there is some doubt.

Shed light
: If you shed light on something, you make it clearer and easier to understand.

Shifting sands
: If the sands are shifting, circumstances are changing.

Shilly-shally
: If people shilly-shally, they can't make up their minds about something and put off the decision.

Ship came in
: If your ship has come in, something very good has happened to you.

Shipshape and Bristol fashion
: If things are shipshape and Bristol fashion, they are in perfect working order.

Shoe is on the other foot
: If the shoe is on the other foot, someone is experiencing what they used to make others experience, normally negative things.

Shoestring
: If you do something on a shoestring, you try to spend the absolute minimum amount of money possible on it.

Shoot down in flames

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If someone demolishes your argument, it (and you) have been shot down in flames.

Shoot from the hip

Someone who shoots from the hip talks very directly or insensitively without thinking beforehand.

Shoot the breeze

When you shoot the breeze, you chat in a relaxed way.

Shoot your wad

When you have shot your wad, you have expended everything and have no more to say or do about a matter.

Shoot yourself in the foot

If you shoot yourself in the foot, you do something that damages your ambition, career, etc.

Shooting fish in a barrel

If something is like shooting fish in a barrel, it is so easy that success is guaranteed.

Shop floor

'Shop floor' refers to the part of an organisation where the work is actually performed rather than just managed.

Short end of the stick

If someone gets the short end of the stick, they are unfairly treated or don't get what they deserve.

Short horse soon curried

A convenient and superficial explanation that is normally unconvincing is a short horse soon curried.

Short shrift

If somebody gives you short shrift, they treat you rudely and brusquely, showing no interest or sympathy.

Short-change

If you are short-changed, someone cheats you of money or doesn't give you full value for something.

Shot across the bow

A shot across the bow is a warning to tell someone to stop doing something or face very serious consequences.

Shot in the dark

If you have a shot in the dark at something, you try something where you have little hope of success.

Shotgun marriage

A shotgun marriage, or shotgun wedding, is one that is forced because of pregnancy. It is also used idiomatically for a compromise, agreement or arrangement that is forced upon groups or people by necessity.

Show me the money

When people say this, they either want to know how much they will be paid for something or want to see evidence that something is valuable or worth paying for.

Show someone a clean pair of heels

If you show someone a clean pair of heels, you run faster than them when they are chasing you.

Show someone the ropes

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If you show someone the ropes, you explain to someone new how things work and how to do a job.

Show your true colors

To show your true colors is to reveal yourself as you really are.

Shrinking violet

A shrinking violet is a shy person who doesn't express their views and opinions.

Sick and tired

If you are sick and tired of something, it has been going on for a long time and you can no longer tolerate it.

Sick as a dog

If somebody's as sick as a dog, they throw up (=vomit) violently.

Sick as a parrot

If someone's sick as a parrot about something, they are unhappy, disappointed or depressed about it.

Sick to death

If you are sick to death of something, you have been exposed to so much of it that you cannot take any more.

Sight for sore eyes

Someone or something that is a sight for sore eyes is a pleasure to see.

Sight to behold

If something is a sight to behold, it means that seeing it is in some way special, either spectacularly beautiful or, equally, incredibly ugly or revolting, etc.

Signed, sealed and delivered

If something's signed, sealed and delivered, it has been done correctly, following all the necessary procedures.

Silence is golden

It is often better to say nothing than to talk, so silence is golden.

Silly season

The silly season is midsummer when Parliament is closed and nothing much is happening that is newsworthy, which reduces the press to reporting trivial and stupid stories.

Silver bullet

A silver bullet is a complete solution to a large problem, a solution that seems magical.

Silver screen

The silver screen is the cinema.

Silver surfer

A silver surfer is an elderly person who uses the internet.

Since time immemorial

If something has happened since time immemorial, it's been going on for such a long time that nobody can remember a time without it.

Sing for your supper

If you have to sing for your supper, you have to work to get the pay or reward you need or want.

Sing from the same hymn sheet

If people are singing from the same hymn sheet, they are expressing the same opinions in public.

Sing like a canary

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If someone sings like a canary, they tell everything they know about a crime or wrongdoing to the police or authorities.

Sink or swim

Of you are left to sink or swim, no one gives you any help and it's up to you whether you fail or succeed.

Sit on the fence

If someone sits on the fence, they try not to support either side in a dispute.

Sit pretty

Someone who's sitting pretty is in a very advantageous situation.

Sit well with

If something doesn't sit well with you, it doesn't please you or is not acceptable to you.

Sitting duck

A sitting duck is something or someone that is easy to criticise or target.

Six feet under

If someone is six feet under, they are dead.

Six of one and half-a-dozen of the other

This is an idiom used when there is little or no difference between two options.

Sixes and sevens

If something is all at sixes and sevens, then there is a lot of disagreement and confusion about what should be done.

Sixty-four-thousand-dollar-question

The sixty-four-thousand-dollar-question is the most important question that can be asked about something.

Skate on thin ice

If someone is skating on thin ice, they are taking a big risk.

Skeleton in the closet

If someone has a skeleton in the closet, they have a dark, shameful secret in their past that they want to remain secret.

Skin and bones

If someone is skin and bones, they are very underweight and look bad.

Skin in the game

A person who has skin in the game has invested in the company they are running.

Skin someone alive

If someone skins you alive, they admonish and punish you hard.

Skunkworks

An unauthorised, or hidden program or activity, often research-oriented, and out of the bureaucratic chain of command is known as a 'skunkworks'.

Sky is the limit

When people say that the sky is the limit, they think that there are no limits to the possibilities something could have.

Slap leather

(USA) This is used as an instruction to tell people when to draw their guns.

Slap on the wrist

If someone gets a slap on the wrist, they get a very minor punishment when they could have been punished more severely.

Sleep like a baby

If you sleep very well, you sleep like a baby.

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Sleep like a log

If you sleep like a log, you sleep very soundly.

Sleep well- don't let the bedbugs bite

This is a way of wishing someone a good night's sleep.

Sleight of hand

Sleight of hand is the ability to use your hands in a clever way, like a magician performing tricks you can't see.

Slim chance

A slim chance is a very small chance.

Sling your hook

This is used as a way of telling someone to leave or go away.

Slip of the tongue

If you say something accidentally, it is a slip of the tongue.

Slip through one's fingers

If something slips through one’s fingers it escapes or is lost through carelessness.

Slippery customer

A person from whom it is difficult to get anything definite or fixed is a slippery customer.

Slippery slope

A slippery slope is where a measure would lead to further worse measures.

Slough of despond

If someone is very depressed or in despair, they're in a slough of despond.

Slow and steady wins the race

This expression means that consistency, although progress may be slow, will eventually be more beneficial than being hasty or careless just to get something done.

Slow boat to China

This idiom is used to describe something that is very slow and takes a long time.

Slow but sure

If something or someone is slow but sure, they may take their time to do something, but they are reliable.

Slower than molasses going uphill in January

(USA) To move extremely slowly. Molasses drips slowly anyway but add January cold and gravity, dripping uphill would be an impossibility, thereby making the molasses move very slowly indeed!

Slowly, slowly catchy monkey

This means that eventually you will achieve your goal.

Sly as a fox

Someone who is as sly as a fox is cunning and experienced and can get what they want, often in an underhand way.

Smack in the face

If something is a smack in the face, it is a shock, usually one that impedes progress.

Small beer

If something is small beer, it's unimportant.

Small dog, tall weeds

This idiom is used to describe someone the speaker does not believe has the ability or resources to handle a task or job.

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Small fry

If someone is small fry, they are unimportant. The term is often used when the police arrest the less important criminals, but are unable to catch the leaders and masterminds.

Small-time

If a person or a thing is called 'small-time' it means they're inconsequential, not worth much, don't play in the 'big leagues', as in 'a small-time operator'.

Smart Alec

A smart Alec is a conceited person who likes to show off how clever and knowledgeable they are.

Smart as a whip

A person who is smart as a whip is very clever.

Smarty pants

A smarty pants is someone who displays the intelligence in an annoying way.

Smell a rat

If you smell a rat, you know instinctively that something is wrong or that someone is lying to you.

Smoke and mirrors

An attempt to conceal something is smoke and mirrors.

Smoke like a chimney

Someone who smokes very heavily smokes like a chimney.

Smoke the peace pipe

If people smoke the peace pipe, they stop arguing and fighting.

Smokestack industry

Heavy industries like iron and steel production, especially if they produce a lot of pollution, are smokestack industries.

Smoking gun

A smoking gun is definitive proof of someone's guilt.

Smooth as a baby's bottom

If something is smooth as a baby's bottom, it has a regular, flat surface.

Smooth sailing

If something is smooth sailing, then you can progress without difficulty. ('Plain sailing' is an also used.)

Snake in the grass

Someone who is a snake in the grass betrays you even though you have trusted them.

Snake oil

Advice or medicine which is of no use.

Snake oil salesperson

A person who promotes something that doesn't work, is selling snake oil.

Snug as a bug in a rug

If you're as snug as a bug in a rug, you are feeling very comfortable indeed.

So it goes

This idiom is used to be fatalistic and accepting when something goes wrong.

So on and so forth

And so on and so forth mean the same as etcetera (etc.).

Sod's law

Sod's law states that if something can go wrong then it will.

Soft soap someone

If you soft soap someone, you flatter them.

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Some other time

If somebody says they'll do something some other time, they mean at some indefinite time in the future, possibly never, but they certainly don't want to feel obliged to fix a specific time or date.

Something nasty in the woodshed

Something nasty in the woodshed means that someone as a dark secret or an unpleasant experience in their past.

Sound as a bell

If something or someone is as sound as a bell, they are very healthy or in very good condition.

Sound as a pound

(UK) if something is as sound as a pound, it is very good or reliable.

Sour grapes

When someone says something critical or negative because they are jealous, it is a case of sour grapes.

Sow the seeds

When people sow the seeds, they start something that will have a much greater impact in the future.

Sow your wild oats

If a young man sows his wild oats, he has a period of his life when he does a lot of exciting things and has a lot of sexual relationships. for e.g. He'd spent his twenties sowing his wild oats but felt that it was time to settle down.

Spanish practices

Unauthorized working methods that benefit those who follow them are Spanish practices.

Spanner in the works

(UK) If someone puts or throws a spanner in the works, they ruin a plan. In American English, 'wrench' is used instead of 'spanner'.

Spare the rod and spoil the child

This means that if you don't discipline children, they will become spoilt.

Speak of the devil!

If you are talking about someone and they happen to walk in, you can use this idiom as a way of letting them know you were talking about them.

Speak to the organ grinder not the monkey

Talk to the boss not the subordinate

Speak volumes

If something speaks volumes, it tells us a lot about the real nature of something or someone,even though it may only be a small detail.

Speak with a forked tongue

To say one thing and mean another, to lie, to be two-faced

Spend a penny

(UK) This is a euphemistic idiom meaning to go to the toilet.

Spend like a sailor

Someone who spends their money wildly spends like a sailor.

Spice of life

The spice of life is something that makes it feel worth living.

Spick and span

If a room is spick and span, it is very clean and tidy.

Spill the beans

If you spill the beans, you reveal a secret or confess to something.

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Spin a yarn
: If someone spins a yarn, they tell a story, usually a long or fanciful one.

Spinning a line
: When someone spins you a line, they are trying to deceive you by lying.

Spinning a yarn
: When someone spins you a yarn, they are trying to deceive you by lying.

Spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak
: If the spirit is willing but the flesh is weak, someone lacks the willpower to change things they do because they derive too much pleasure from them.

Spirit of the law
: The spirit of the law is the idea or ideas that the people who made the law wanted to have effect.

Spit blood
: If someone is spitting blood, they are absolutely furious.

Spit it out
: People say this when someone has something to say but is too embarrassed, shy, etc, to say it.

Spit the dummy
: Reference to an infant spitting out their dummy (or pacifier) in order to cry. 'To spit the dummy' is to give up.

Spitting image
: If a person is the spitting image of somebody, they look exactly alike.('Spit and image' is also used and some suggest it is a hasty pronunciation of "spirit & image", to suggest that someone completely resembles someone else. Example: He's the spirit & image of his grandfather.)

Split hairs
: If people split hairs, they concentrate on tiny and unimportant details to find fault with something.

Split the blanket
: If people split the blanket, it means they get a divorce or end their relationship.

Spoil the ship for a ha'pworth of tar
: (UK) If someone spoils the ship for a ha'pworth (halfpenny's worth) of tar, they spoil something completely by trying to make a small economy.

Spot on
: If something is spot on, it is exactly right.

Sprat to catch a mackerel
: If you use a sprat to catch a mackerel, you make a small expenditure or take a small risk in the hope of a much greater gain.

Spring to mind
: If something springs to mind, it appears suddenly and unexpectedly in your thoughts.

Spur of the moment
: If you do something on the spur of the moment, you do it because you felt like it at that time, without any planning or preparation.

Sputnik moment
: A Sputnik moment is a point where people realise that they are threatened of challenged and have to redouble their efforts to catch up. It comes from the time when the Soviet Union launched the first satellite, the Sputnik 1, and beat the USA into space.

Square meal

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A square meal is a substantial or filling meal.

Square Mile

(UK) The Square Mile is the City, the financial area of London.

Square peg in a round hole

If somebody's in a situation, organisation, etc, where they don't fit in and feel out of place, they are a square peg in a round hole.

Square the circle

When someone is squaring the circle, they are trying to do something impossible.

Squared away

Being prepared or ready for business or tasks at hand. Having the proper knowledge, skill and equipment to handle your assignment or station. 'He is a great addition to the squad; he is squared away.'

Squeaky clean

If something is squeaky clean, it is very clean indeed- spotless. If a person is squeaky clean, they have no criminal record and are not suspected of illegal or immoral activities.

Squeaky wheel gets the grease

(USA) When people say that the squeaky wheel gets the grease, they mean that the person who complains or protests the loudest attracts attention and service.

Squeeze blood out of a turnip

(USA) When people say that you can't squeeze blood out of a turnip, it means that you cannot get something from a person, especially money, that they don't have.

Stalking horse

A stalking horse is a strategy or something used to conceal your intentions. It is often used where someone put themselves forwards as a candidate to divide opponents or to hide the real candidate.

Stand in good stead

If something will stand you in good stead, it will probably be advantageous in the future.

Stars and stripes

The stars and stripes is the American flag.

Stars in your eyes

Someone who dreams of being famous has stars in their eyes.

Start from scratch

When you start something from scratch, you start at the very beginning.

State of the art

If something is state of the art, it is the most up-to-date model incorporating the latest and best technology.

Status quo

Someone who wants to preserve the status quo wants a particular situation to remain unchanged.

Steal a march

This expression indicates the stealthiness of a person over another to gain advantage of the situation. For instance, if two persons are offered some jobs which are vacant, they resolve to go together next day at an agreed time, but one of them, without telling the other, goes earlier than the other and secures the better of the two jobs, he is said to steal a march on the other person.

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Steal someone's thunder
: If someone steals your thunder, they take the credit and praise for something you did.

Steer clear of
: If you steer clear of something, you avoid it.

Stem the tide
: If people try to stem the tide, they are trying to stop something unpleasant from getting worse, usually when they don't succeed.

Step on it
: This idiom is a way of telling someone to hurry up or to go faster.

Step on someone's toes
: If you step on someone's toes, you upset them, especially if you do something that they should be in charge of.

Step up to the plate
: If someone steps up to the plate, they take on or accept a challenge or a responsibility.

Stew in your own juices
: If you leave someone to stew in their own juices, you leave them to worry about the consequences of what they have done wrong or badly.

Stick in your craw
: If someone or something really annoys you, it is said to stick in your craw.

Stick out like a sore thumb
: If something sticks or stands out like a sore thumb, it is clearly and obviously different from the things that are around it.

Stick to your guns
: If you stick to your guns, you keep your position even though people attack or criticise you.

Stick your neck out
: If you stick you neck out, you take a risk because you believe in something.

Stick-in-the-mud
: A stick-in-the-mud is someone who doesn't like change and wants things to stay the same.

Sticking point
: A sticking point is a controversial issue that blocks progress in negotiations, etc, where compromise is unlikely or impossible.

Sticky end
: (UK) If someone comes to a sticky end, they die in an unpleasant way. ('Meet a sticky end' is also used.)

Sticky fingers
: The tendency to keep (or steal) an object you touch. Also, to steal something quickly without anyone noticing. (ex: 'You stole that guy's wallet? You have some sticky fingers, my friend.')

Sticky wicket
: (UK) If you are on a sticky wicket, you are in a difficult situation.

Stiff as a poker
: Something or someone that is stiff as a poker is inflexible. ('Stiff as a board' is also used.)

Stiff upper lip
: (UK) If you keep your emotions to yourself and don't let others know how you feel when something bad happens, you keep a stiff upper lip.

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Stiff-necked
: A stiff-necked person is rather formal and finds it hard to relax in company.

Still in the game
: If someone is still in the game, they may be having troubles competing, but they are not yet finished and may come back.

Still waters run deep
: People use this idiom to imply that people who are quiet and don't try to attract attention are often more interesting than people who do try to get attention.

Stir the blood
: If something stirs your blood, it arouses feelings or passions,.

Stitch in time saves nine
: A stitch in time saves nine means that if a job needs doing it is better to do it now, because it will only get worse, like a hole in clothes that requires stitching.

Stone dead
: This idiom is a way of emphasizing that there were absolutely no signs of life or movement.

Stone deaf
: Someone who is stone deaf is completely deaf.

Stone's throw
: If a place is a stone's throw from where you are, it is a very short distance away.

Stool pigeon
: (USA) A stool pigeon is a police informer.

Stop cold
: To stop suddenly out of surprise.

Storm in a teacup
: If someone exaggerates a problem or makes a small problem seem far greater than it really is, then they are making a storm in a teacup.

Straight face
: If someone keeps a straight face, they remain serious and do not show emotion or amusement.

Straight from the shoulder
: If someone talks straight from the shoulder, they talk honestly and plainly.

Strain every nerve
: If you strain every nerve, you make a great effort to achieve something.

Strange at the best of times
: To describe someone or something as really weird or unpleasant in a mild way.

Straw man
: A straw man is a weak argument that is easily defeated. It can also be a person who is used as to give an illegal or inappropriate activity an appearance of respectability.

Straw poll
: A straw poll is a small unofficial survey or ballot to find out what people think about an issue.

Straw that broke the camel's back
: The straw that broke the camel's back is the problem that made you lose your temper or the problem that finally brought about the collapse of something.

Streets ahead
: If people are streets ahead of their rivals, they are a long way in front.

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Strike a chord

If strikes a chord, it is familiar to you, reminds you of something or is connected to you somehow.

Strike while the iron is hot

If you strike while the iron is hot you do something when things are going well for you and you have a good chance to succeed.

Stroll down memory lane

If you take a stroll down memory lane, you talk about the past or revisit places that were important to you in the past. (You can also 'take a trip down memory lane'.)

Strong as an ox

Someone who's exceedingly strong physically is said to be as strong as an ox.

Stubborn as a mule

Someone who will not listen to other people's advice and won't change their way of doing things is as stubborn as a mule.

Stuffed to the gills

If someone is stuffed to the gills, they have eaten a lot and are very full.

Succeed in the clutch

If you succeed in the clutch, you perform at a crucial time; it is particularly used in sports for the decisive moments of the game. The opposite is 'fail in the clutch.'

Suck hind teat

A person who sucks hind teat is at a disadvantage or considered worse or less important that others.

Sunday driver

A Sunday driver drives very slowly and makes unexpected manoeuvres.

Sure as eggs is eggs

These means absolutely certain, and we do say 'is' even though it is grammatically wrong.

Sure-fire

If something is sure-fire, it is certain to succeed. ('Surefire' is also used.)

Swansong

A person's swansong is their final achievement or public appearance.

Swear like a sailor

Someone who is foul-mouthed and uses bad language all the time, swears like a sailor.

Swear like a trooper

Someone who is foul-mouthed and uses bad language all the time, swears like a trooper.

Sweat blood

If you sweat blood, you make an extraordinary effort to achieve something.

Sweat like a pig

If someone is sweating like a pig, they are perspiring (sweating) a lot.

Sweep off your feet

If you are swept off your feet, you lose control emotionally when you fall in love or are really impressed.

Sweep things under the carpet

If people try to ignore unpleasant things and forget about them, they sweep them under the carpet.

Sweet as a gumdrop

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This means that something or someone is very nice or pretty.

Sweet tooth

If you have a sweet tooth, you like eating food with sugar in it.

Swim against the tide

If you swim against the tide, you try to do something that is very difficult because there is a lot of opposition to you. ('Go against the tide' is an alternative form.)

Swim with the fishes

If someone is swimming with the fishes, they are dead, especially if they have been murdered. 'Sleep with the fishes' is an alternative form.

Swim with the tide

If you swim with the tide, you do the same as people around you and accept the general consensus. ('Go with the tide' is an alternative form.)

Swimmingly

If things are going swimmingly, they are going very well.

Swing the lead

If you swing the lead, you pretend to be ill or do not do your share of the work.

Swinging door

This idiom refers to something or someone that can go in two conflicting or opposite directions.

Swings and roundabouts

If something's swings and roundabouts, it has about as many disadvantages as it has advantages.

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Tables are turned

When the tables are turned, the situation has changed giving the advantage to the party who had previously been at a disadvantage.

Tackle an issue

If you tackle an issue or problem, you resolve or deal with it.

Take a hike

This is a way of telling someone to get out.

Take a leaf out of someone's book

If you take a leaf out of someone's book, you copy something they do because it will help you.

Take a nosedive

When things take a nosedive, they decline very quickly and head towards disaster.

Take a punch

If somebody takes a blow, something bad happens to them.

Take a raincheck

If you take a rain check, you decline an offer now, suggesting you will accept it later. ('Raincheck' is also used.)

Take a straw poll

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If you take a straw poll, you sound a number of people out to see their opinions on an issue or topic.

Take by the scruff of the neck

If you take something by the scruff on the neck, you take complete control of it.

Take for a test drive

If you take something for a test driver, you try something to see if you like it.

Take for granted

If you take something for granted, you don't worry or think about it because you assume you will always have it. If you take someone for granted, you don't show your appreciation to them.

Take forty winks

If you take 40 winks, you have a short sleep.

Take guts

If something takes guts, it requires courage in the face of danger or great risk. It takes guts for firemen to enter a burning building to save someone.

Take it in your stride

If you take something in your stride, you deal with it even though it is difficult or unpleasant without letting it bother or upset you.

Take it on the chin

If you take something on the chin, something bad happens to you and you take it directly without fuss.

Take no prisoners

If people take no prisoners, they do things in a very aggressive way, without considering any harm they might do to achieve their objectives.

Take sand to the beach

Doing something that is completely pointless or unnecessary is like taking sand to the beach.

Take someone down a peg

If someone is taken down a peg (or taken down a peg or two), they lose status in the eyes of others because of something they have done wrong or badly.

Take someone for a ride

If you are taken for a ride, you are deceived by someone.

Take someone to task

If you take someone to task, you scold them for something they have done wrong.

Take someone to the woodshed

If someone is taken to the woodshed, they are punished for something they have done.

Take someone under your wing

If you take someone under your wing, you look after them while they are learning something.

Take stock

To assess a situation, to conduct a personal inventory of ones beliefs and values, etc.

Take the biscuit

(UK) If something takes the biscuit, it is the absolute limit.

Take the bull by its horns

Taking a bull by its horns would be the most direct but also the most dangerous way to try to compete with such an animal. When we use the phrase

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in everyday talk, we mean that the person we are talking about tackles their problems directly and is not worried about any risks involved.

Take the chair

If you take the chair, your become the chairman or chairwoman of a committee, etc.

Take the fall

If you tall the fall, you accept the blame and possibly the punishment for another's wrongdoing, with the implication that the true culprit, for political or other reasons, cannot be exposed as guilty (accompanied by a public suspicion that a reward of some sort may follow).

Take the fifth

(USA) If you do not want to answer a question you can take the fifth, meaning you are choosing not to answer. ('Plead the fifth' is also used.)

Take the flak

If you take the flak, you are strongly criticised for something.('Take flak' is also used.)

Take the floor

Start talking or giving a speech to a group

Take the heat

If you take the heat, you take the criticism or blame for something you didn't do, normally to protect the guilty person.

Take the Mickey

(UK) If you take the Mickey, you tease someone. ('Take the Mick' is also used.)

Take the plunge

If you take the plunge, you decide to do something or commit yourself even though you know there is an element of risk involved.

Take the rough with the smooth

People say that you have to take the rough with the smooth, meaning that you have to be prepared to accept the disadvantages as well of the advantages of something.

Take to your heels

If you take to your heels, you run away.

Take up the torch

If you take up the torch, you take on a challenge or responsibility, usually when someone else retires, or leaves an organisation, etc.

Take your breath away

If something takes your breath away, it astonishes or surprises you.

Take your eye off the ball

If someone takes their eye off the ball, they don't concentrate on something important that they should be looking at.

Take your hat off

If you say that you take your hat off to someone, you are showing your respect or admiration.

Take your hat off to somebody

If you take your hat off to someone, you acknowledge that they have done something exceptional or otherwise deserve your respect.

Taken as read

If something can be taken as read, it is so definite that it's not necessary to talk about it.

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Tale of the tape
: This idiom is used when comparing things, especially in sports; it comes from boxing where the fighters would be measured with a tape measure before a fight.

Talk a blue streak
: (USA) If someone talks a blue streak, they speak quickly and at length. ('Talk up a blue streak' is also used.)

Talk a glass eye to sleep
: Someone who could talk a glass eye to sleep is very boring and repetitive.

Talk is cheap
: It's easy to talk about something but harder to actually do it.

Talk nineteen to the dozen
: If someone talks very quickly, they talk nineteen to the dozen.

Talk of the town
: When everybody is talking about particular people and events, they are he talk of the town.

Talk out of the back of your head
: If someone is talking out of the back of their head, they are talking rubbish.

Talk out of your hat
: If someone is talking out of their hat, they're talking utter rubbish, especially if compounded with total ignorance of the subject on which they are pontificating. ('Talk through your hat' is also used.)

Talk shop
: If you talk shop, you talk about work matters, especially if you do this outside work.

Talk the hind legs off a donkey
: A person who is excessively or extremely talkative can talk the hind legs off a donkey.

Talk turkey
: When people talk turkey, they discuss something frankly.

Talking to a brick wall
: If you talk to someone and they do not listen to you, it is like talking to a brick wall.

Tall drink of water
: Someone who is very tall and slender is a tall drink of water. ('A tall glass of water' is also used.)

Tall order
: Something that is likely to be hard to achieve or fulfil is a tall order.

Tall story
: A tall story is one that is untrue and unbelievable.

Tally ho!
: (UK) This is an exclamation used for encouragement before doing something difficult or dangerous.

Tar baby
: A tar baby is a problem that gets worse when people try to sort it out.

Tar with the same brush
: If people are tarred with the same brush, they are said to have the same set of attributes or faults as someone they are associated with.

Taste blood

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If someone has tasted blood, they have achieved something and are encouraged to think that victory is within their grasp.

Taste of your own medicine

If you give someone a taste of their own medicine, you do something bad to someone that they have done to you to teach them a lesson.

Teach your grandmother to suck eggs

When people say 'don't teach your grandmother to suck eggs', they mean that people shouldn't try to teach someone who has experience or is an expert in that area.

Teacher's pet

The teacher's favorite pupil is the teacher's pet, especially if disliked by the other pupils.

Tear your hair out

If someone is tearing their hair out, they are extremely worried or agitated about something.

Tears before bedtime

(UK) This idiom is used when something seems certain to go wrong or cause trouble.

Teeny-weeny

If something is teensy-weensy, it is very small indeed.('Teeny-weeny' and 'teensie-weensie' are also used.)

Teething problems

(UK) The problems that a project has when it is starting are the teething problems.

Tell them where the dog died

(USA) If you tell them where the dog died, you strongly and sharply correct someone.

Tempest in a teapot

If people exaggerate the seriousness of a situation or problem, they are making a tempest in a teapot.

Tempt providence

If you tempt providence, you take a risk that may well have unpleasant consequences. ('Tempt fate' is also used.)

Ten a penny

(UK) If something is ten a penny, it is very common. ("Two a penny" is also used.)

Test the waters

If you test the waters, or test the water, you experiment to see how successful or acceptable something is before implementing it.

That and 50 cents will buy you a cup of coffee

(USA) This is used to describe something that is deemed worthless. "He's got a Ph.D. in Philosophy." "So? That and 50 cents will buy you a cup of coffee."

That dog won't hunt

(USA) Very common Southern US expression meaning: What you say makes no sense.

That is the way the cookie crumbles

"That's the way the cookie crumbles" means that things don't always turn out the way we want.

That makes two of us

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A speaker says "that makes two of us" to indicate agreement with what another speaker just said. For example, I can say, "I wish I would win the lottery." A listener who says "That makes two of us" is indicating the he or she wants to win the lottery, too.

That ship has sailed

A particular opportunity has passed you by when that ship has sailed.

That's all she wrote

(USA) This idiom is used to show that something has ended and there is nothing more to say about something.

The apple does not fall far from the tree

Offspring grow up to be like their parents.

The ball's in your court

If somebody says this to you, they mean that it's up to you to decide or take the next step.

The be all and end all

The phrase 'The be all and end all' means that a something is the final, or ultimate outcome or result of a situation or event.

The bigger they are, the harder they fall

This idiom means that the more powerful have more to lose, so when they suffer something bad, it is worse for them.

The common weal

If something is done for the common weal, it is done in the interests and for the benefit of the majority or the general public.

The grass is always greener

This idiom means that what other people have or do looks preferable to our life. The complete phrase is 'The grass is always greener on the other side of the fence'.

The line forms on the right

Something's meaning is becoming clear when the line forms on the right.

The more the merrier

The more the merrier means that the greater the quantity or the bigger the number of something, the happier the speaker will be.

The Mountie always gets his man

(Canada) The Mounties are the Royal Canadian Mounted Police and they have a reputation for catching criminals they are after.

The penny dropped

When the penny drops, someone belatedly understands something that everyone else has long since understood.

The plot thickens

When the plot thickens, a situation become more complicated and difficult.

The rough and tumble

The rough and tumble refers to areas of life like business, sports, politics, etc, where competition is hard and people will take any advantage that they can.

The sands of time

The sands of time is an idiom meaning that time runs out either through something reaching an end or through a person's death. It comes from the sand used in hourglasses, an ancient way of measuring time.

The short straw

If you take the short straw, you lose a selection process, which means that you have to do something unpleasant.

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The sun might rise in the west
: When people say this, they mean that they don't expect something to happen.

The whole shooting match
: Everything, the entire object, or all the related parts.

The world and his wife
: If the world and his wife were somewhere, then huge numbers of people were present.

Their bark is worse than their bite
: If someone's bark is worse than their bite, they get angry and shout and make threats, but don't actually do anything.

There are many ways to skin a cat
: This is an expression meaning there are many different ways of doing the same thing.

There's never a road without a turning
: No situation in life stays the same forever.

There's no such thing as a free lunch
: This idiom means that you don't get things for free, so if something appears to be free, there's a catch and you'll have to pay in some way.

There's the rub
: The meaning of this idiom is 'that's the problem'.

Thick and fast
: If things are happening thick and fast, they are happening so fast they seemed to be joined together.

Thick as mince
: (UK) If someone is as thick as mince, they are very stupid indeed.

Thick as thieves
: If people are thick as thieves, they are very close friends who have no secrets from each other.

Thick-skinned
: If a person is thick-skinned, they are not affected by criticism.

Thin as a rake
: A rake is a garden tool with a long, thin, wooden handle, so someone very thin is thin as a rake.

Thin blue line
: (UK) The thin blue line is a term for the police, suggesting that they stand between an ordered society and potential chaos. (Police uniforms are blue.)

Thin end of the wedge
: The thin end of the wedge is something small and seemingly unimportant that will lead to something much bigger and more serious.

Thin line
: If there's a thin line between things, it's hard to distinguish them- there's a thin line between love and hate.

Thin-skinned
: If somebody is thin-skinned, they are very sensitive to any sort of criticism.

Think outside the box
: If you think outside the box, you think in an imaginative and creative way.

Think the world of
: To hold something or someone in very high esteem. To love or admire immensely.

Third degree

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If someone is given the third degree, they are put under a great deal of pressure and intimidation to force them to tell the truth about something.

Third rail

The third rail of something is dangerous to alter or change. Originally, the third rail is the one carrying the electricity for a train.

Third time's the charm

This is used when the third time one tries something, one achieves a successful outcome.

Thorn in your side

A thorn in your side is someone or something that causes trouble or makes life difficult for you.

Those who live by the sword die by the sword

This means that violent people will be treated violently themselves.

Three sheets in the wind

(UK) Someone who is three sheets in the wind is very drunk. ('Three sheets to the wind' is also used. 'Seven sheets' is an alternative number used.)

Three sheets to the wind

If someone is three sheets to the wind, they are drunk.

Thrilled to bits

If you are thrilled to bits, you are extremely pleased or excited about something.

Through gritted teeth

If you do something through gritted teeth, you accept or agree with it against your will and it is obvious to others how you really feel.

Through the ceiling

If prices go through the ceiling, they rise very quickly.

Through the floor

If prices go, or fall, through the floor, they fall very quickly.

Through thick and thin

If someone supports you through thick and thin, they support you during good times and bad.

Throw a curve

(USA) If you throw someone a curve, you surprise them with something they find difficult to deal with. ('Throw' a curveball' is also used.)

Throw a monkey wrench into the works

(USA) If you throw a monkey wrench into the works, you ensure that something fails.

Throw a sickie

If you pretend to be ill to take a day off work or school, you throw a sickie.

Throw caution to the wind

When people throw caution to the wind, they take a great risk.

Throw down the gauntlet

Throw down the gauntlet is to issue a challenge to somebody.

Throw in the towel

If you throw in the towel, you admit that you are defeated or cannot do something.

Throw pearls to the pigs

Someone that throws pearls to pigs is giving someone else something they don't deserve or appreciate. ('Throw pearls before pigs' and 'Cast pearls before swine' are also used.)

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Throw someone a bone
: If you throw someone a bone, you give them a small reward or some kind words to make them feel good even if they've not really contributed much.

Throw someone a line
: If someone throws you a line, they give you help when you are in serious difficulties.

Throw someone in at the deep end
: If you are thrown in at the deep end, you have to deal with serious issues the moment you start something like a job, instead of having time to acquire experience.

Throw someone to the wolves
: If someone is thrown to the wolves, they are abandoned and have to face trouble without any support.

Throw someone under the bus
: To throw someone under the bus is to get the person in trouble either by placing blame on that person or not standing up for him.

Throw the baby out with the bath water
: If you get rid of useful things when discarding inessential things, you throw the baby out with the bath water.

Throw the book at someone
: If you throw the book at someone, you punish them as severely as possible.

Throw your hat in the ring
: If someone throws their hat in the ring, they announce that they want to take part in a competition or contest. 'Toss your hat in the ring' is an alternative.

Throw your toys out of the pram
: To make an angry protest against a relatively minor problem, in the process embarrassing the protester. The analogy is with a baby who throws toys out of the pram in order to get their parent to pay attention to them. The implication in the idiom is that the protester is acting like a baby.

Throw your weight around
: If someone throws their weight around, they use their authority or force of personality to get what they want in the face of opposition.

Thumb your nose at
: If you thumb your nose at something, you reject it or scorn it.

Thumbs down & thumbs up
: If something gets the thumbs up, it gets approval, while the thumbs down means disapproval.

Tickle your fancy
: If something tickles your fancy, it appeals to you and you want to try it or have it.

Tickled pink
: If you are very pleased about something, you are tickled pink.

Tidy desk, tidy mind
: A cluttered or disorganised environment will affect your clarity of thought. Organised surroundings and affairs will allow for clearer thought organisation.

Tie the knot
: When people tie the knot, they get married.

Tied to your mother's apron strings
: Describes a child (often a boy) who is so used to his mother's care that he (or she) cannot do anything on his (or her) own.

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Tight rein
: If things or people are kept on a tight rein, they are given very little freedom or controlled carefully.

Tight ship
: If you run a tight ship, you control something strictly and don't allow people much freedom of action.

Tighten your belt
: If you have to tighten your belt, you have to economise.

Till the cows come home
: This idioms means 'for a very long time'. ('Until the cows come home' is also used.)

Till the pips squeak
: If someone will do something till the pips squeak, they will do it to the limit, even though it will make other people suffer.

Till you're blue in the face
: If you do something till you're blue in the face, you do it repeatedly without achieving the desired result until you're incredibly frustrated.

Tilt at windmills
: A person who tilts at windmills, tries to do things that will never work in practice.

Time and again
: If something happens time and again, it happens repeatedly. ('Time and time again' is also used.)

Time and tide wait for no man
: This is used as a way of suggestion that people should act without delay.

Time does sail
: This idioms means that time passes by unnoticed.

Time flies
: This idiom means that time moves quickly and often unnoticed.

Time is on my side
: If time is on your side, you have the luxury of not having to worry about how long something will take.

Time of your life
: If you're having the time of your life, you are enjoying yourself very much indeed.

Time-honoured practice
: A time-honoured practice is a traditional way of doing something that has become almost universally accepted as the most appropriate or suitable way.

Tip of the iceberg
: The tip of the iceberg is the part of a problem that can be seen, with far more serious problems lying underneath.

Tipping point
: Small changes may have little effect until they build up to critical mass, then the next small change may suddenly change everything. this is the tipping point.

Tired and emotional
: (UK) This idiom is a euphemism used to mean 'drunk', especially when talking about politicians.

Tit for tat

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If someone responds to an insult by being rude back, it's tit for tat- repaying something negative the same way.

To a fault

If something does something to a fault, they do it excessively. So someone who is generous to a fault is too generous.

To a man

If a group of people does, believes, thinks, etc, something to a man, then they all do it.

To a T

If something is done to a T, it is done perfectly.

To all intents and purposes

This means in all the most important ways.

To be as thick as two bricks

Someone who is as thick as two bricks is really stupid.

To be dog cheap

If something's dog cheap, it is very cheap indeed.

To err is human, to forgive divine

This idiom is used when someone has done something wrong, suggesting that they should be forgiven.

To have the courage of your convictions

If you have the courage of your convictions, you are brave enough to do what you feel is right, despite any pressure for you to do something different.

To little avail

If something is to little avail, it means that, despite great efforts, something ended in failure, but taking comfort from the knowledge that nothing else could have been done to avert or avoid the result.

To the end of time

To the end of time is an extravagant way of saying 'forever'.

Toe the line

If someone toes the line, they follow and respect the rules and regulations.

Tomorrow's another day

This means that things might turn out better or that there might be another opportunity in the future.

Tongue in cheek

If something is tongue in cheek, it isn't serious or meant to be taken seriously.

Too big for your boots

If someone is too big for their boots, they are conceited and have an exaggerated sense of their own importance.

Too big for your britches

If someone is too big for their britches, they are conceited and have an exaggerated sense of their own importance.

Too many chiefs and not enough Indians

When there are too many chiefs and not enough Indians, there are two many managers and not enough workers to work efficiently.

Too many cooks spoil the broth

This means that where there are too many people trying to do something, they make a mess of it.

Too many irons in the fire

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This means juggling too many projects at once and something's bound to fail; when a smith had too many irons in his fire, he couldn't effectively keep track of all of them.

Toot you own horn

If someone toot their own horn, they like to boast about their achievements.

Top dog

The most important or influential person is the top dog.

Top notch

If something is top notch, it's excellent, of the highest quality or standard.

Touch and go

If something is touch and go, the result is uncertain and could be good or bad.

Touch base

If you touch base with someone, you contact them.

Touch wood

This idiom is used to wish for good luck. ('Knock on wood' is also used.)

Touch-and-go

If something is touch-and-go, it is very uncertain; if someone is ill and may well die, then it is touch-and-go.

Tough as old boots

Something or someone that is as tough as old boots is strong and resilient.

Tough cookie

A tough cookie is a person who will do everything necessary to achieve what they want.

Tough luck

Tough luck is bad luck.

Tough nut to crack

If something is a tough nut to crack, it is difficult to find the answer or solution. When used about a person, it means that it is difficult to get them to do or allow what you want. 'Hard nut to crack' is an alternative.

Tough row to hoe

(USA) A tough row to hoe is a situation that is difficult to handle. ('A hard row to hoe' is an alternative form.)

Trade barbs

If people trade barbs, they insult or attack each other.

Traffucked

If you are traffucked, you are stuck in heavy traffic and get where you need to be.

Trail your coat

If you trail your coat, you act in a provocative way.

Train of thought

A train of thought is a sequence of thoughts, especially when you are talking to someone and you forget what you were going to say.

Tread on someone's toes

If you tread on someone's toes, you upset them, especially if you do something that they should be in charge of.

Tread the boards

When someone treads the boards, they perform on stage in a theatre.

Tread water

If someone is treading water, they are making no progress.

Tried and tested

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If a method has been tried and tested, it is known to work or be effective because it has been successfully used long enough to be trusted.

True blue

A person who is true blue is loyal and dependable, someone who can be relied on in all circumstances.

True colours

If someone shows their true colours, they show themselves as they really are. ('True colors' is the American spelling.)

Trump card

A trump card is a resource or strategy that is held back for use at a crucial time when it will beat rivals or opponents.

Truth will out

Truth will out means that, given time, the facts of a case will emerge no matter how people might try to conceal them.

Tug at the heartstrings

f something tugs at the heartstrings, it makes you feel sad or sympathetic towards it.

Turf war

If people or organisations are fighting for control of something, it is a turf war.

Turn a blind eye

When people turn a blind eye, they deliberately ignore something, especially if people are doing something wrong.

Turn a deaf ear

If someone turns a deaf ear to you, they don't listen to you.

Turn a new leaf

If someone turns a new leaf, they change their behaviour and stop doing wrong or bad things.

Turn something on its head

If you turn something on its head, you turn it upside down or reverse it.

Turn the corner

To get over a bad run. When a loss making venture ceases to make losses, it has "turned the corner".

Turn the crack

(Scot) If you turn the crack, you change the subject of a conversation.

Turn the other cheek

If you turn the other cheek, you are humble and do not retaliate or get outwardly angry when someone offends or hurts you, in fact, you give them the opportunity to re-offend instead and compound their unpleasantness.

Turn the tables

If circumstances change completely, giving an advantage to those who seemed to be losing, the tables are turned.

Turn turtle

If something turns turtle, it turns upside down.

Turn up like a bad penny

If someone turns up like a bad penny, they go somewhere where they are not wanted.

Turn up one's toes to the daisies

If someone has turned up their toes to the daisies, it means that the person died.

Turn water into wine

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If someone turns water into wine, they transform something bad into something excellent.

Turn your nose up

If someone turns their nose up at something, they reject it or look odwn on it because they don't think it is good enough for them.

Turn-up for the books

A turn-up for the books is an unexpected or surprising event.

Twenty-four seven

Twenty-four seven or 24/7 means all the time, coming from 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

Twinkling of an eye

If something happens in the twinkling of an eye, it happens very quickly.

Twist someone's arm

If you twist someone's arm, you put pressure on them to try to make them do what you want them to do.

Twisting in the wind

If you are twisting in the wind, you are without help or support - you are on your own.

Two cents

If you add or throw in your two cents, you give your opinion on an issue.

Two heads are better than one

When two people work together more things get accomplished.

Two left feet

A person with two left feet can't dance.

Two peas in a pod

If things or people are like two peas in a pod, they look very similar or are always together.

Two sides of the same coin

If two things are two sides of the same coin, there is much difference between them.

Two-edged sword

If someone uses an argument that could both help them and harm them, then they are using a two-edged sword sword; it cuts both ways.

Two-faced

Someone who is two-faced will say one thing to your face and another when you're not there.

UUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUU

~ U ~

U-turn

If a government changes its position radically on an issue, especially when they have promised not to do so, this is a U-turn.

Ugly as a stick

(USA) If someone is as ugly as a stick, they are very ugly indeed.

Ugly duckling

An ugly duckling is a child who shows little promise, but who develops later into a real talent or beauty.

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Uncalled for
: If someone does something bad and unnecessary without consideration for anothers feelings, what they do is uncalled for.

Uncharted waters
: If you're in uncharted waters, you are in a situation that is unfamiliar to you, that you have no experience of and don't know what might happen. ('Unchartered waters' is an incorrect form that is a common mistake.)

Uncle Sam
: (USA) Uncle Sam is the government of the USA.

Under a cloud
: If someone is suspected of having done something wrong, they are under a cloud.

Under a flag of convenience
: If a ship sails under a flag of convenience, it is registered in a country where taxes, etc, are lower than in the country it comes from, so if someone does something under a flag of convenience, they attempt to avoid regulations and taxes by a similar means.

Under false colours
: If someone does something under false colours/colors, they pretend to be something they are not in order to deceive people so that they can succeed.

Under fire
: If someone is being attacked and cricitised heavily, they are under fire.

Under lock and key
: If something is under lock and key, it is stored very securely.

Under someone's heel
: If you are under someone's heel, they have complete control over you.

Under the radar
: If something slips under the radar, it isn't detected or noticed.

Under the table
: Bribes or illegal payments are often described as money under the table.

Under the weather
: If you are feeling a bit ill, sad or lack energy, you are under the weather.

Under the wire
: (USA) If a person does something under the wire, they do it at the last possible moment.

Under your belt
: If you have something under your belt, you have already achieved or experienced it and it will probably be of benefit to you in the future.

Under your breath
: If you say something under your breath, you whisper or say it very quietly.

Under your nose
: If something happens right in front of you, especially if it is surprising or audacious, it happens under your nose.

Under your skin
: If someone gets under your skin, they really annoy you.

Under your thumb
: Someone who is manipulated or controlled by another person is under his or her thumb.

Uneasy lies the head that wears the crown
: This means that people with serious responsibilities have a heavy burden.

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Unwavering loyalty
: Unwavering loyalty does not question or doubt the person or issue and supports them completely.

Up a gum tree
: (AU) If you're up a gum tree, you're in trouble or a big mess.

Up a river without a paddle
: If you up a river without a paddle, you are in an unfortunate situation, unprepared and with none of the resources to remedy the matter.

Up for grabs
: If something is up for grabs, it is available and whoever is first or is successful will get it.

Up in the air
: If a matter is up in the air, no decision has been made and there is uncertainty about it.

Up sticks
: (UK) If you up sticks, you leave somewhere, usually permanently and without warning- he upped sticks and went to work abroad.

Up the ante
: If you up the ante, you increase the importance or value of something, especially where there's an element of risk as the term comes from gambling, where it means to increase the stake (the amount of money bet).

Up the creek
: If someone or something is up the creek, they are in real trouble. 'Up the creek without a paddle' is an alternative, and 'up shit creek (without a paddle)' is a ruder form.

Up the duff
: (UK) If a woman is up the duff, she's pregnant.

Up the spout
: (UK) If something has gone up the spout, it has gone wrong or been ruined.

Up the stick
: (UK) If a woman is up the stick, she's pregnant.

Up the wall
: If someone goes up the wall, they get very angry.

Up the wooden hill
: When you go up the wooden hill, you go up the stairs to bed.

Up to scratch
: If something doesn't come up to scratch, it doesn't meet the standard required or expected.

Up to snuff
: If something isn't up to snuff, it doesn't meet the standard expected.

Up to speed
: If you bring someone up to speed, you update them on something.

Up to the eyes
: You you are up to your eyes in something, you are deeply involved or to have too much of something like work. ('Up the neck', 'up to the eyeballs' and 'up to the ears' are also used.)

Up to the neck
: If someone's in something up to the neck, they are very involved in it, especially when it's something wrong.

Up to your eyes

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When you've got too much work to do, you're up to your eyes in it.

Up to your neck

If someone is very involved in something, they are up to their neck in it, especially if it is something bad or immoral.

Up with the lark

If you get up very early, you're up with the lark.

Upper crust

The upper crust are the upper classes and the establishment.

Upper hand

If you have the upper hand, you have the advantage.

Upset the apple cart

If you upset the apple cart, you cause trouble and upset people.

VVVVVVVVVVVVVVVVVVVVVVVVVVVVVVVVVV

~ V ~

Vale of tears

This vale of tears is the world and the suffering that life brings.

Velvet glove

This idiom is used to describe a person who appears gentle, but is determined and inflexible underneath. ('Iron fist in a velvet glove' is the full form.)

Vent your spleen

If someone vents their spleen, they release all their anger about something.

Vicar of Bray

(UK) A person who changes their beliefs and principles to stay popular with people above them is a Vicar of Bray

Vicious circle

A vicious circle is a sequence of events that make each other worse- someone drinks because they are unhappy at work, then loses their job... 'Vicious cycle' is also used.

Virgin territory

If something is virgin territory, it hasn't been explored before.

Volte-face

If you do a volte-face on something, you make a sudden and complete change in your stance or position over an issue.

WWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWW

~ W ~

Wag the dog

To 'wag the dog' means to purposely divert attention from what would otherwise be of greater importance, to something else of lesser significance. By doing so, the lesser-significant event is catapulted into the limelight, drowning proper attention to what was originally the more important issue.The expression comes from the saying that 'a dog is smarter than its tail', but if the tail were smarter, then the tail would 'wag the dog'. The expression 'wag the

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dog' was elaborately used as theme of the movie. 'Wag the Dog', a 1997 film starring Robert de Niro and Dustin Hoffman, produced and directed by Barry Levinson.

Wait for a raindrop in the drought

When someone is waiting for a raindrop in the drought, they are waiting or hoping for something that is extremely unlikely to happen.

Waiting in the wings

If someone is waiting in the wings, or in the wings, they are in the background, but nearby, ready to act on short notice.

Wake up and smell the coffee

When someone doesn't realise what is really happening or is not paying enough attention to events around them, you can tell them to wake up and smell the coffee.

Wake-up call

A wake-up call is a warning of a threat or a challenge, especially when it means that people will have to change their behaviour to meet it.

Walk a fine line

If you have to walk a fine line, you have to be very careful not to annoy or anger people or groups that are competing. ('Walk a thin line' is an alternative.)

Walk a mile in my shoes

This idiom means that you should try to understand someone before criticising them.

Walk a tightrope

If you walk a tightrope, you have to be very careful not to annoy or anger people who could become enemies.

Walk in the park

An undertaking that is easy is a walk in the park. The opposite is also true - "no walk in the park".

Walk on eggshells

If you have to walk on eggshells when with someone, you have to be very careful because they get angry or offended very easily.('Walk on eggs' is also used.)

Walk the green mile

Someone or something that is walking the green mile is heading towards the inevitable.

Walk the plank

If someone walks the plank, they are going toward their own destruction or downfall

Walking encyclopedia

A very knowledgeable person is a walking encyclopedia.

Walking on air

If you are walking on air, you are so happy that you feel as if you could float.

Walking on broken glass

When a person is punished for something. e.g. 'She had me walking on broken glass.'

Walking time-bomb

A person whose behaviour is erratic and totally unpredictable is a walking time-bomb.

Wallflower

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A woman politician given an unimportant government position so that the government can pretend it takes women seriously is a wallflower.

War chest

A war chest is a fund that can be used to finance a campaign like and election or for use in emergencies or unexpected times of difficulty.

War of words

A war of words is a bitter argument between people or organisations, etc.

Warm and fuzzy

Meaning the feeling evoked as though you were enclosed in a warm and fuzzy blanket.

Warm the cockles of your heart

If something warms the cockles of your heart, it makes you feel happy.

Warpath

If someone is on the warpath, they are very angry about something and will do anything to get things sorted the way they want.

Warts and all

If you like someone warts and all, you like them with all their faults.

Wash your hands of something

If you wash your hands of something, you disassociate yourself and accept no responsibility for what will happen.

Waste not, want not

If you don't waste things, you are less likely to end up lacking.

Waste of skin

If a person is referred to as a 'waste of skin', it means he is not worth very much.

Watch grass grow

If something is like watching grass grow, it is really boring.

Watch your six

(USA) This idiom means that you should look behind you for dangers coming that you can't see.

Watching paint dry

If something is like watching paint dry, it is really boring.

Water off a duck's back

If criticism or something similar is like water off a duck's back to somebody, they aren't affected by it in the slightest.

Water over the dam

(USA) If something has happened and cannot be changed, it is water over the dam.

Water under the bridge

If something belongs to the past and isn't important or troubling any more, it is water under the bridge.

Watering hole

(UK) A watering hole is a pub.

Watery grave

If someone has gone to a watery grave, they have drowned.

Weak at the knees

If people go weak at the knees, they have a powerful emotional reaction to something and feel that they might fall over.

Wear sackcloth and ashes

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If someone displays their grief or contrition publicly, they wear sackcloth and ashes.

Wear your heart on your sleeve

Someone who wears their heart on their sleeve shows their emotions and feelings publicly.

Weather a storm

If you weather a storm, you get through a crisis or hard times.

Wedge politics

(USA) In wedge politics, one party uses an issue that they hope will divide members of a different party to create conflict and weaken it.

Weight off your shoulders

If something is a weight off your shoulders, you have relieved yourself of a burden, normally a something that has been troubling you or worrying you.

Well-heeled

Someone who is well-heeled is rich.

Well-oiled

If someone is well-oiled, they have drunk a lot.

Well-oiled machine

Something that functions very well is a well-oiled machine.

Were you born in a barn?

If someone asks you this, it means that you forgot to close the door when you came in.

Wet behind the ears

Someone who is wet behind the ears is either very young or inexperienced.

Wet blanket

A wet blanket is someone who tries to spoil other people's fun.

Wet your whistle

If you are thirsty and have an alcoholic drink, you wet your whistle. "Whet your whistle" is also used.

Whale of a time

If you have a whale of a time, you really enjoy yourself.

What can sorry do?

This means that it is not enough to apologise.

What can you expect from a hog but a grunt?

(USA) This means that you can't expect people to behave in a way that is not in their character- a 'hog' is a 'pig', so an unrefined person can't be expected to behave in a refined way.

What does that have to do with the price of tea in China?

This idiom is often used when someone says something irrelevant to the topic being discussed.

What goes around comes around

This saying means that of people do bad things to other people, bad things will happen to them.

What goes around, comes around

The good or bad you do to others is requited.

What will be will be

The expression what will be will be is used to describe the notion that fate will decide the outcome of a course of events, even if action is taken to try to alter it.

What's cooking?

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When you ask what's cooking it means you want to know what's happening.

What's good for the goose is good for the gander

This idiom means that the sexes should be treated the same way and not be subjected to different standards.

What's up?

This can be used to ask 'What's wrong?' or 'How are you?'.

What's your poison?

This is a way of asking someone what they would like to drink, especially alcohol.

What's your take on that?

This idiom is way of asking someone for their opinion and ideas.

Whatever floats your boat

When people say this, they mean that you should do whatever makes you happy.

Wheels fall off

When the wheels fall off something, it goes wrong or fails. ('Wheels come off' is an alternative.)

When hell freezes over

An impossible or very unlikely situation or event

When in Rome, do as the Romans do

This idiom means that when you are visiting a different place or culture, you should try to follow their customs and practices.

When it rains, it pours

This idiom means that when things go wrong, a lot of things go wrong at the same time.

When pigs fly

Meaning you will not get something when you want it or someone doesn't want something for you. say you are selling an item and some one doesn't want it. they might say 'I'll buy it when pigs fly'. it just means you will never get someone to say yes to you when you ask for something.

When the chickens come home to roost

When a person pays dearly for something bad he or she did in the past, the chickens come home to roost.

Where the rubber meets the road

(USA) Where the rubber meets the road is the most important point for something, the moment of truth. An athlete can train all day, but the race is where the rubber meets the road and they'll know how good they really are.

Where there's a will, there's a way

This idiom means that if people really want to do something, they will manage to find a way of doing it.

Where there's smoke, there's fire

When there is an indication or sign of something bad, usually the indication is correct.

Whet your appetite

If something whets your appetite, it interests you and makes you want more of it.

Which came first the chicken or the egg?

This idiomatic expression is used when it is not clear who or what caused something.

While the cat's away, the mouse will play

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People whose behaviour is strictly controlled go over the top when the authority is not around, which is why most teenagers have parties when their parents have gone on holiday. The parents are the scary authority figures, but the cat's away and the kids are the mice partying and enjoying their freedom.

Whistle for it

If someone says that you can whistle for something, they are determined to ensure that you don't get it.

Whistle-stop tour

A whistle-stop tour is when someone visits a number of places quickly, not stopping for long.

Whistling Dixie

(USA) If someone is whistling Dixie, they talk about things in a more positive way than the reality.

Whistling in the dark

If someone is whistling in the dark, they believe in a positive result, even though everybody else is sure it will not happen.

Whistling past the graveyard

(USA) If someone is whistling past the graveyard, they are trying to remain cheerful in difficult circumstances. ('Whistling past the cemetery' is also used.)

White as a sheet

A bad shock can make somebody go as white as a sheet.

White as snow

If something or someone is as white as snow, they are perfect or completely uncorrupted and honest.

White elephant

A white elephant is an expensive burden; something that costs far too much money to run, like the Millennium Dome in the UK.

White feather

If someone shows a white feather, they are cowards.

White lie

If you tell a white lie, you lie in order not to hurt someone's feelings.

White-bread

If something is white-bread, it is very ordinary, safe and boring.

Who wears the pants?

(USA) The person who wears the pants in a relationship is the dominant person who controls things.

Who wears the trousers?

(UK) The person who wears the trousers in a relationship is the dominant person who controls things.

Who will ring the bell?

'Who will ring the bell?' asks who will assume the responsibility to help us out of a difficult situation.

Whole ball of wax

(USA) The whole ball of wax is everything.

Whole kit and caboodle

The whole kit and caboodle means 'everything' required or involved in something. ('Kaboodle' is an alternative spelling.)

Whole new ball game

If something's a whole new ball game, it is completely new or different.

Whole nine yards

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The whole nine yards means means everything that is necessary or required for something.

Whole shebang

The whole shebang includes every aspect of something.

Why buy the cow when you can get the milk for free

This idiom is usually used to refer to men who don't want to get married, when they can get all the benefits of marriage without getting married.

Why keep a dog and bark yourself?

There's no need to do something yourself when you have somebody to do it for you, usually trivial matters.

Wide berth

If you give someone a wide berth, you keep yourself well away from them because they are dangerous.

Wide of the mark

If something is wide of the mark, it is inaccurate or incorrect.

Wild goose chase

A wild goose chase is a waste of time- time spent trying to do something unsuccessfully.

Will never fly

If an idea or project, etc, will never fly, it has no chance of succeeding.

Will-o'-the-wisp

Something that deceives by its appearance is a will-o’-the-wisp; it looks good, but turns out to be a disappointment.

Win by a nose

If somebody wins by a nose, they only just beat the others.

Window dressing

If something is done to pretend to be dealing with an issue or problem, rather than actually dealing with it, it is window dressing.

Window to the soul

Eyes are sometimes referred to as the window to the soul.

Wing and a prayer

If you do something on a wing and a prayer, you try to do something and hope you'll succeed even though you have very little chance of success.

Winner takes all

If everything goes to the winner, as in an election, the winner takes all.

Wipe the floor with

(UK) If you wipe the floor with someone, you destroy the arguments or defeat them easily.

Wipe the smile of someone's face

If you wipe the smile of someone's face, you do something to make someone feel less pleased with themselves.

With a heavy hand

If someone does something with a heavy hand, they do it in a strict way, exerting a lot of control.

With child

(UK) If a woman's with child, she's pregnant.

With flying colours (colors)

If you pass something with flying colours (colors), you pass easily, with a very high mark or grade.

With friends like that, who needs enemies?

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This expression is used when people behave badly or treat someone badly that they are supposed to be friends with.

Wither on the vine

If something withers on the vine, it fails to get the intended result, doesn't come to fruition.

Within a whisker

If you come within a whisker of doing something, you very nearly manage to do it but don't succeed.

Without a hitch

If something happens without a hitch, nothing at all goes wrong.

Woe betide you

This is used to wish that bad things will happen to someone, usually because of their bad behaviour.

Woe is me

This means that you are sad or in a difficult situation. It's archaic, but still used.

Wolf in sheep's clothing

A wolf in sheep's clothing is something dangerous that looks quite safe and innocent.

Wood for the trees

(UK) If someone can't see the wood for the trees, they get so caught up in small details that they fail to understand the bigger picture.

Word of mouth

If something becomes known by word of mouth, it is because people are talking about it, not through publicity, etc.

Word of the law

The word of the law means that the law is interpreted in an absolutely literal way which goes against the ideas that the lawmakers had wished to implement.

Words fail me

If words fail you, you can't find the words to express what you are trying to say.

Work like a charm

If something works like a charm, it works perfectly.

Work like a dog

If you work like a dog, you work very hard.

Work the system

If people work the system, they exploit the state or simialr setup to their advantage.

Work your fingers to the bone

If you work your fingers to the bone, you work extremely hard on something.

Work your socks off

If you work your socks off, you work very hard.

Work your tail off

If you work your tail off, you work extremely hard.

World at your feet

If everything is going well and the future looks full of opportunity, you have the world at your feet.

World is your oyster

When the world is your oyster, you are getting everything you want from life.

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Worm information
: If you worm information out of somebody, you persuade them to tell you something they wanted to keep from you.

Worm's eye view
: A worm's eye view of something is the view from below, either physically or socially.

Worse for wear
: If something's worse for wear, it has been used for a long time and, consequently, isn't in very good condition. A person who's worse for wear is drunk or high on drugs and looking rough.

Worse things happen at sea
: This idiomatic expression is used as a way of telling someone not to worry so much about their problems.

Worth a shot
: If something is worth a shot, it is worth trying as there is some chance of success.

Worth your salt
: Someone who is worth their salt deserves respect.

Wouldn't touch it with a bargepole
: (UK) If you wouldn't touch something with a bargepole, you would not consider being involved under any circumstances. (In American English, people say they wouldn't touch it with a ten-foot pole)

Wouldn't touch it with a ten-foot pole
: (USA) If you wouldn't touch something with a ten-foot pole, you would not consider being involved under any circumstances. (In British English, people say they wouldn't touch it with a bargepole)

Wrap yourself in the flag
: If someone wraps themselves in the flag, they pretend to be doing something for patriotic reasons or out of loyalty, but their real motives are selfish. ('Drape yourself in the flag' is an alternative form of this idiom)

Wrench in the works
: (USA) If someone puts or throws a wrench, or monkey wrench, in the works, they ruin a plan. In British English, 'spanner' is used instead of 'wrench'.

Writ large
: If something is writ large, it is emphasised or highlighted.

Writing on the wall
: If the writing's on the wall for something, it is doomed to fail.

Written all over your face
: If someone has done something wrong or secret, but cannot hide it in their expression, it is written all over their face.

Written in stone
: If something is written in stone, it is permanent and cannot be changed.

Wrong end of the stick
: If someone has got the wrong end of the stick, they have misunderstood what someone has said to them.

Wrong foot
: If you start something on the wrong foot, you start badly.

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~ X ~

X factor
: The dangers for people in the military that civilians do not face, for which they receive payment, are known as the X factor.

X marks the spot
: This is used to say where something is located or hidden.

X-rated
: If something is x-rated, it is not suitable for children.

YYYYYYYYYYYYYYYYYYYYYYYY

~ Y ~

Yah boo sucks
: Yah boo & yah boo sucks can be used to show that you have no sympathy with someone.

Yank my chain
: If some one says this to another person (i.e. stop yanking my chain) it means for the other person to leave the person who said it alone and to stop bothering them.

Yellow press
: The yellow press is a term for the popular and sensationalist newspapers.

Yellow streak
: If someone has a yellow streak, they are cowardly about something.

Yellow-bellied
: A yellow-bellied person is a coward.

Yen
: If you have a yen to do something, you have a desire to do it.

Yes-man
: Someone who always agrees with people in authority is a yes-man.

Yesterday's man or Yesterday's woman
: Someone, especially a politician or celebrity, whose career is over or on the decline is yesterday's man or woman.

You are what you eat
: This is used to emphasise the importance of a good diet as a key to good health.

You can catch more flies with honey than with vinegar
: This means that it is easier to persuade people if you use polite arguments and flattery than if you are confrontational.

You can choose your friends, but you can't choose your family
: Some things you can choose, but others you cannot, so you have to try to make the best of what you have where you have no choice.

You can lead a horse to water, but you can't make it drink

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This idiom means you can offer something to someone, like good advice, but you cannot make them take it.

You can say that again

If you want to agree strongly with what someone has said, you can say 'You can say that again' as a way of doing so.

You can't fight City Hall

This phrase is used when one is so cynical that one doesn't think one can change their Representatives. The phrase must have started with frustration towards a local body of government.

You can't have cake and the topping, too

(USA) This idiom means that you can't have everything the way you want it, especially if your desires are contradictory.

You can't have your cake and eat it

This idiom means that you can't have things both ways. For example, you can't have very low taxes and a high standard of state care.

You can't make a silk purse out of a sow's ear

If something isn't very good to start with, you can't do much to improve it.

You can't make an omelette without breaking eggs

This idiom means that in order to achieve something or make progress, there are often losers in the process.

You can't take it with you

Enjoy life, enjoy what you have and don't worry about not having a lot, especially money...because once you're dead, 'you can't take it with you.' For some, it means to use up all you have before you die because it's no use to you afterwards.

You can't unring a bell

This means that once something has been done, you have to live with the consequences as it can't be undone.

You could have knocked me down with a feather

This idiom is used to mean that the person was very shocked or surprised.

You do not get a dog and bark yourself

(UK) If there is someone in a lower position who can or should do a task, then you shouldn't do it.

You get what you pay for

Something that is very low in price is not usually of very good quality.

You reap what you sow

This means that if you do bad things to people, bad things will happen to you, or good things if you do good things. It is normally used when someone has done something bad.

You said it!

Used to say you agree completely with something just said.

You scratch my back and I'll scratch yours

This idiom means that if you do something for me, I'll return the favour.

You what?

This is a very colloquial way of expressing surprise or disbelief at something you have heard. It can also be used to ask someone to say something again.

You're toast

If someone tells you that you are toast, you are in a lot of trouble.

You've got rocks in your head

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(USA) Someone who has acted with a lack of intelligence has rocks in their head.

You've made your bed- you'll have to lie in it
: This means that someone will have to live with the consequences of their own actions.

Young blood
: Young people with new ideas and fresh approaches are young blood.

Young Turk
: A Young Turk is a young person who is rebellious and difficult to control in a company, team or organisation.

Your belly button is bigger than your stomach
: If your belly button is bigger than your stomach, you take on more responsibilities than you can handle.

Your call
: If something is your call, it is up to you to make a decision on the matter.

Your name is mud
: If someone's name is mud, then they have a bad reputation.

Your sins will find you out
: This idiom means that things you do wrong will become known.

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Zero hour
: The time when something important is to begin is zero hour.

Zero tolerance
: If the police have a zero tolerance policy, they will not overlook any crime, no matter how small or trivial.

Zigged before you zagged
: If you did things in the wrong order, you zigged before you zagged.

Zip it
: This is used to tell someone to be quiet.

Zip your lip
: If someone tells you to zip your lip, they want to to shut up or keep quiet about something. ('Zip it' is also used.)

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