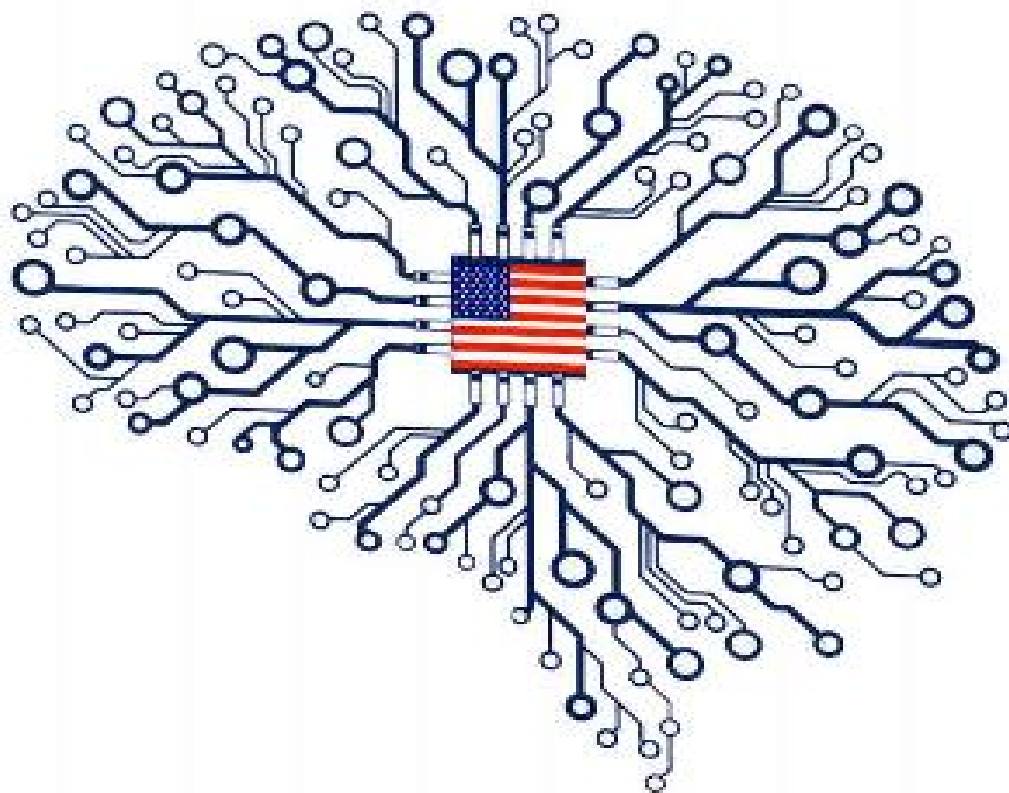


# THE GREAT BOOK OF AMERICAN IDIOMS

A Dictionary of American Idioms, Sayings,  
Expressions & Phrases



Lingo  Mastery

# **The Great Book of American Idioms**

**A Dictionary of American Idioms, Sayings, Expressions, & Phrases**

**Lingo**  **astery**

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# Introduction

If we “*go out on a limb*,” it must be a “*piece of cake*” to study a new tongue, right? Surely it can’t be “*like pulling teeth*” to become fluent in a language. We think that you can “*bet your bottom dollar*” that you’ll be an expert if you don’t “*cut corners*.” Wait... what?

Learning a language – that is, navigating around the basic terms, tools, and vocabulary, as well as learning to speak with others – can be a pretty straightforward experience if you have the right resources.

But what about learning to speak like a native? That’s definitely not a simple task that you can accomplish overnight. Being able to communicate with a fluency that would put you on the same level as the people who have been speaking the language *all* their lives is a true challenge that many struggle to achieve.

More importantly, however, there are many big obstacles that can keep you from rising up the ranks to the highest level of fluency and vocabulary when learning English.

Spoken by around *two billion* people across the world and with native English-speaking nations on all six continents (seven, if you count the scientists housed on Antarctica!), as well as owning the title of the most widely learned second language in the world, you can be sure that possessing the ability to speak a native level of English will prove invaluable in both your personal life and your professional career.

In the first paragraph, we discreetly introduced you to some of the most typical expressions used in English across the globe, and most commonly in the United States of America (home to over 230 million speakers): idioms. Idioms are phrases that add value to sentences through figurative or literal meanings, allowing the speaker to express their emotions or thoughts in an interesting – and occasionally amusing – manner that adds very specific meaning to their words.

As you may imagine, idioms can be complicated both to understand and to use, due to the fact that they commonly have a different meaning than what they literally express. For example, someone being a

“*dark horse*” has *literally* nothing to do with running on four legs with a rider on their back!

What makes idioms so special is that they give you an immense new range to express your thoughts, and they allow you to develop vocabulary for your learning; this means that you will have additional tools when speaking or writing, and you’ll be able to approach a native level of English at a greater rate. It’s a “*win-win*,” so to speak.

All of these reasons are why we have created this book for you!

- *Do you want to discover how to tell somebody they’re not behaving as they should?*
- *Do you need to explain that you have no idea what somebody is saying, but are not sure how to say it amusingly?*
- *What about using the most curious and unique expressions to describe a situation?*

Once you have studied this book in depth, you will learn all of these things and more, and you will be able to shock your peers with your new knowledge of important expressions in English!

## **What this book is about and how it has been structured**

As teachers and other professionals of the language-learning industry, we have discovered that some of the most important tools for expanding a student's grasp of any language are the learning of idioms, expressions, and sayings. With these, a student will find that they possess a much better ability to communicate their ideas in conversations, and their integration into English-speaking cultures will be easier.

For this reason, we have produced *The Great Book of American Idioms*. This book will allow English students to learn these otherwise complicated and often overlooked concepts. Possessing such a resource can help them achieve a better understanding of a language as widely spoken as English, which is a skill as crucial at a personal level as it is at a professional one.

In this book, we've researched and put together a *vast* list of more than 1300 idioms, expressions, and sayings; these entries reflect an astonishing variety of origins, meanings, and uses, with many of them representing complicated phrases that would otherwise be difficult for the student to compile and study.

To ensure the student will enjoy a highly enriching experience, we have presented these idioms, expressions, and sayings in the following way:

- Over 1300 idioms listed alphabetically from A to Z, covering hundreds of different subjects and uses.
- The definition for each idiom, followed by an example that illustrates how the expression might be used.
- An easy-to-read example of the idiom in a sentence or short paragraph, intended to enhance the reader's understanding of the individual expression.



These idioms do not represent a theme; they cover countless subjects that the student may encounter at a personal, academic, or professional level. Most have American origins and usage, but others are used in Britain, Australia, and other native English-speaking nations.

This book will enable you to study each group of idioms by each letter in the alphabet, in turn, allowing you to rapidly gain the vocabulary you will surely need as you work toward becoming a native-level English speaker.

### **How to make the most out of this book**

As with any other language-learning resource, this book – for all the hard work and effort put into its creation – is only as good as the student who is using it to learn. We're good at what we do, but only *you*, the learner, can ensure that adequate results are achieved by continuously studying and implementing proper strategies.

But what type of tactics can you apply to improve your learning? What do we recommend as English teachers? What works and what doesn't? That's

where the true questions lie, and where many students end up failing.

It might be tempting to pick up this book, “*breeze through*” it, and never touch it again, checking it off an imaginary list like the groceries you’ve just bought at the supermarket, but these types of resources don’t work that way. You actually need to establish a system for what you’re doing.

Do not despair, however, as we have produced tried and tested methods for getting the most possible out of this book. Please apply these strategies if you want your learning to be at its best and most effective:

1. **Don’t rush.** The idea of learning is mastering the curve, improving your abilities, and working toward your goals. This can take place in days, weeks, months, or years – the choice is truly yours, and each student varies from one to the next. There is no sense in *plowing* through this book in a hurry; if you do, you won’t really absorb what you set out to learn. Rushing is just one big, bad idea.

**2. Take note of your progress for motivation.**

As we already mentioned, all of our resources are designed for progressive learning and gradual improvement, so be prepared to concentrate on long-term results. For this reason, it will be better if you take note of your progress and allow yourself to celebrate small victories as you go, instead of waiting until you reach the end to cheer and give yourself a pat on the back.

**3. Carry this book when you can – it makes for good reading material and an even better travel partner.**

You can pull out this book when you travel and have time to kill; you can read it when there's some time off at work or school and you feel like it's the best moment; you can even take it out when at an airport or on a train, so that it can accompany you along the way and provide you with valuable lessons.

**4. Jot down anything that you need to practice or work on.**

These are two distinct concepts. In this book, “practicing” refers to building sentences and writing your own

examples. On the other hand, “working on” something refers to identifying your flaws and looking for ways to tackle your lack of concentration, your problems with pronunciation, or your weaknesses in fluency, etc.

All in all, the strategies mentioned above—as well as any tactics you apply in your daily studying—should prove invaluable during your language-learning journey.

Good luck and don’t be upset if at first you don’t succeed. We don’t want to sound cliché here, but Rome wasn’t built in a day! Achieving a native level of English won’t happen in a day either, so start studying now and get ready for the next level of English!

**Now, let’s begin...**

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Get one's feet wet  
Get out of hand  
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Get with it  
Get your act together  
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In the least

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In the loop

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No big deal

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No pain, no gain

No rhyme or reason

No-brainer

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On a shoestring

On a tear

On a treadmill

On cloud nine

On pins and needles

On the ball

On the blink

On the cheap

On the dot

On the fence

On the fly

On the fritz

On the house

On the level

On the line

On the same page

On the spot

On the spur of the moment

On the top of the world

On the up and up

On the warpath

On thin ice

Once and for all

Once bitten, twice shy

Once in a blue moon

One fell swoop

One-trick pony.  
Open a can of worms  
Out of date  
Out of left field  
Out of my hands  
Out of order  
Out of the blue  
Out of the frying pan and into the fire  
Out of the question  
Out of the woods  
Out of this world  
Out on the town  
Out to lunch  
Over my dead body.  
Packed like sardines  
Pain in the neck  
Paint the town red  
Paint you a picture  
Pandora's box  
Par for the course  
Party animal  
Pass the buck  
Passed the course  
Pay a pretty penny.  
Pay an arm and a leg  
Pay the piper  
Pay through the nose  
Pedal to the metal  
Peg out  
Pencil/paper pusher

Peter out  
Pick up the tab  
Pick up your ears  
Pie in the sky  
Pig out  
Pigheaded  
Pipe down  
Pipe dream  
Pitch dark  
Pitch in  
Play by ear  
Play devil's advocate  
Play hardball  
Play second fiddle  
Playing dumb  
Playing with fire  
Poker face  
Pound the pavement  
Power dressing  
Pride comes before a fall  
Pull his/her own weight  
Pull it off  
Pull out all the stops  
Pull rank  
Pull someone's leg  
Pull strings  
Pull the plug  
Pull the wool over your eyes  
Pull up stakes  
Pull your chain

Pull yourself together  
Pulled a rabbit out of one's hat  
Pulled the rug out from under me  
Pulling my leg  
Puppy love  
Pushing your luck  
Put a sock in it  
Put in their place  
Put it on the back burner  
Put my foot down  
Put on my thinking cap  
Put our heads together  
Put someone on the spot  
Put something down in black and white  
Put something into practice  
Put something on ice  
Put the squeeze/screws on someone  
Put your finger on it  
Put your money where your mouth is  
Quality time  
Racking my brain  
Rain on someone's parade  
Rain or shine  
Raise Cain  
Read someone the riot act  
Real McCoy  
Red flag  
Red herring  
Red in the face  
Red letter day

Rest on one's laurels  
Right this way  
Ring a bell  
Rinky-dink  
Roll out the red carpet  
Rolling in it  
Rome wasn't built in a day  
Rub elbows with someone  
Ruffle feathers  
Rule of thumb  
Run amok  
Run circles around someone  
Run errands  
Run its course  
Run like the wind  
Run-of-the-mill  
Run one's mouth off  
Run out of steam  
Run the show  
Running on fumes  
Sail close to the wind  
Sales pitch  
Salt of the earth  
Saved by the bell  
Saved someone's skin  
Saving for a rainy day  
Say uncle  
Say your piece  
Scapegoat  
Scare the pants off someone

School of thought

School someone in something

Scot-free

Screw up

Sea legs

Second-rate (or third- or fourth-rate)

Security blanket

See eye to eye

See someone's true colors

See the big picture/look at the big picture

See the light

See through someone/something

Sell like hotcakes

Sell someone short

Set my teeth on edge

Shake a leg

Shape up or ship out

Sharp as a tack

Ships passing in the night

Shoestring budget

Shoot from the hip

Shoot hoops

Shoot off one's mouth

Shoot the breeze

Shot in the arm

Shot in the dark

Show of hands

Sick as a dog

Sit tight

Sitting like a bump on a log

Sitting pretty

Sixth sense

Skeleton in the closet

Skelton crew

Skip class/cut class

Slap on the wrist

Sleep like a log

Slim chance

Slip of the tongue

Slow and steady wins the race

Small world

Smell a rat

Smoke and mirrors

Smoke like a chimney

Snowed under

So far so good

Sold me out

Something is killing me

Something sucks

Something to crow about

Sour grapes

Speak of the devil

Spice things up

Spill the beans

Spin doctor

Spineless

Spitting image

Splitting hairs

Spread too thin

Square meal



Squeaky clean  
Stab someone in the back  
Stand my ground  
Stay in touch  
Stay on budget  
Steal someone's thunder  
Step up your game  
Stew in your own juices  
Stick out like a sore thumb  
Stick to your guns  
Sticking points  
Stick-in-the-mud  
Sticky fingers  
Stop on a dime  
Street-smart  
Stretch the truth  
Strike it rich  
String someone along  
Stuffed shirt  
Swallow your pride  
Sweat blood  
Sweating bullets  
Take a rain check  
Take a shine to something/someone  
Take it easy.  
Take it with a grain of salt/a pinch of salt  
Take someone at their word  
Take something by storm  
Take something in stride  
Take the cake

Take the floor  
Take the plunge  
Take the wind out of your sails  
Taken for a ride  
Talk a blue streak  
Talk of the town  
Talk someone's ear off  
Talk through one's hat  
Talk to someone like a Dutch uncle  
Talk to the hand  
Talk turkey.  
Talking shop  
Tall order  
Tall story.  
Tar someone with the same brush  
Tell me about it  
Test the waters  
That hit the spot  
That is to say.  
That ship has sailed  
That's all she wrote  
That's the last straw  
That's wicked  
The apple of my eye  
The ball is in your court  
The bee's knees  
The best of both worlds  
The best thing since sliced bread  
The Big Apple  
The Big Easy.

The bottom line  
The boys in blue  
The brush-off/brushed me off  
The burning question  
The cat's meow  
The devil is in the details  
The early bird gets the worm  
The elephant in the room  
The eleventh hour  
The gift of the gab  
The last minute  
The lion's share  
The long and short of it  
The munchies  
The other day  
The patience of Job  
The pits  
The pot calling the kettle black  
The road less travelled  
The same wavelength  
The school of hard knocks  
The shoe is on the other foot  
The short end of the stick  
The squeaky wheel gets the grease  
The straight and narrow  
The tide has turned  
The tip of the iceberg  
The whole nine yards  
There are clouds on the horizon  
There are other fish in the sea

There's a method to his madness  
There's no such thing as a free lunch  
They were thrown together  
Think outside the box  
Third time's a charm  
This is the life  
Those who live in glass houses shouldn't throw stones  
Three sheets to the wind  
Threw me for a loop  
Through thick and thin  
Throw a curveball/Throw a curve  
Throw a monkey wrench into the works  
Throw caution to the wind  
Thrown to the wolves  
Tickled pink  
Tighten your belt (or belt-tightening)  
Tilt at windmills  
Time flies when you're having fun  
Time is money.  
To be a chicken/to chicken out  
To be beside yourself  
To be closefisted  
To be loaded  
To be named after  
To be out of the question  
To be tied up with something or someone  
To be up to something  
To beat the band  
To bend someone's ear  
To black out

To blow your own horn  
To bomb  
To box someone in  
To bug someone  
To butt in  
To call it a day  
To call someone on the carpet  
To carry a torch for someone  
To come out flat-footed  
To come out swinging  
To corner the market  
To cry wolf  
To do a number on something  
To draw a blank  
To drink like a fish  
To drop by  
To find fault with  
To follow up on something  
To get bent out of shape  
To get in touch with  
To get rid of  
To get your walking papers  
To give in  
To give someone the heads-up  
To go down like a lead balloon  
To go Dutch  
To go off the deep end  
To have another thing coming  
To have one's back to the wall  
To hold out an olive branch

To hold your own  
To keep an eye on  
To know by sight  
To live beyond your means  
To live hand-to-mouth  
To look down one's nose  
To make a long story short  
To make a mountain out of a molehill  
To make matters worse  
To nix something  
To outdo oneself  
To paddle your own canoe  
To pony up  
To run/blow hot and cold  
To see the light  
To serve one right  
To smooth things over  
To stand up for  
To start over from scratch  
To stonewall  
To take a load off someone's back  
To take it easy  
To take something for granted  
To the hilt  
Tongue-in-cheek  
Too big for one's boots  
Too many irons in the fire  
Top dog  
Top-notch  
Touch and go

Touch base  
Track record  
Train of thought  
Train wreck  
Travel light  
Treat someone to something  
Treat/handle someone with kid gloves  
Troubled waters  
True blue  
Tuckered out  
Turn a blind eye  
Turn a place upside down  
Turn over a new leaf  
Turn the other cheek  
Turn the tables  
Turn up the heat  
Twist someone's arm  
Two peas in a pod  
Under a cloud  
Under someone's thumb  
Under the table/counter  
Under the weather  
Under the wire  
Until the cows come home  
Up a blind alley.  
Up a gum tree  
Up for grabs  
Up in arms  
Up in the air  
Up the creek without a paddle

Up to snuff  
Upset the apple cart  
Use your loaf  
Veg out  
Walk in someone's shoes  
Walk in the park  
Walking on air  
Wallflower  
Washing my hands of something/someone  
Waste not, want not  
Watch out for  
Water under the bridge  
Watering hole  
Wave of the future  
We see eye to eye  
Wear many different hats  
Wear your heart on your sleeve  
Weasel out of something  
Weather the storm  
Well begun is half done  
We'll cross that bridge when we come to it  
Well-heeled  
Went the extra mile  
Wet behind the ears  
Wet blanket  
Wet my whistle  
What are you up to?  
When it rains, it pours  
When pigs fly  
When push comes to shove



When the chips are down  
Where the rubber meets the road  
Where were we?  
White elephant  
White lie  
Whitewash  
Who asked you?  
Who do you think you are?  
Whole ball of wax  
Wild and woolly  
Will take place  
Wine and dine  
Winging it  
With bated breath  
With bells on  
With flying colors  
Wolf in sheep's clothing  
Work against the clock  
Worth one's salt  
Wouldn't be caught dead  
Wouldn't hurt a fly  
Wouldn't touch it with a ten-foot pole  
Wrap your head around something  
X marks the spot  
You bet  
You can bet your boots  
You can bet your bottom dollar  
You can lead a horse to water, but you can't make him drink  
You can say that again  
You can't have your cake and eat it too

You can't judge a book by its cover

You can't make an omelet without breaking some eggs

You can't squeeze blood out of a turnip

You can't take it with you

You can't teach an old dog new tricks

You get what you pay for

You'll catch more flies with honey than with vinegar

Your guess is as good as mine

You're telling me

You've sold me

Zero tolerance

Zip it

Conclusion

# Idioms

**9-to-5** - An average job schedule.

He decided that he was going to look for a 9-to-5 job soon.

**A bad apple** - A bad (or morally questionable) person within a group of good individuals, who might corrupt the entire group. Like a rotten apple in a barrel of good ones.

Onlookers were worried that the entire group of trick-or-treaters was bad, but there were really only a couple of bad apples.

**A baker's dozen** - Thirteen, or one more than an actual dozen (which is twelve).

We went to the grocery store and bought a baker's dozen of chocolate chip muffins. We're looking forward to eating them later.

**A ballpark figure** - An approximate figure.

This is only a ballpark figure. It may not be very accurate once you add up all the numbers.

**A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush** - What you have at this moment carries more value than something you might obtain later.

Jane asked me whether she should take the current job offer or wait for a better one. I told her to accept the current one. After all, a bird in the hand is worth two in the bush.

**A bit/A little bit** - To a small extent or a small amount.

I think I'll have just a little bit of cereal this morning. I'm not very hungry.

**A blessing in disguise** - Something that seems bad initially, but that ends up having a positive outcome.

He was very upset about not getting the job, but it ended up being a blessing in disguise as he got a better one later on.

**A bone to pick** - A reason why one is upset.

I have a bone to pick with you. I don't like the way you did this.

**A breath of fresh air** - A person who is different from others in a very positive way. Everyone thought that Sasha was a breath of fresh air. She was so clever and friendly, and so different from anyone else they'd ever met.

**A bunch of** - A group of people, animals, or objects.

A bunch of friends and I are going on a day trip tomorrow.

**A chip on your shoulder** - You have a grievance of some kind—or an attitude—that you won't let go of.

Have you met Max? That guy has a real chip on his shoulder. He's always a bit arrogant and on the defensive.

**A day late and a dollar short** - Too little and too late.

Elizabeth tried to hand in her assignment, but her teacher said it was a day late and a dollar short.

**A dime a dozen** - A very common thing or occurrence.

Shirts in that style are a dime a dozen at the local mall.

**A doozy** - Something incredible, usually in a negative way.

That storm the other day was a real doozy! I don't think I'll ever forget it. The thunder was terrible.

**A doubting Thomas** - Someone who has a very skeptical attitude and who requires strong evidence to believe something.

Jonathan is very hard to convince about anything. He always wants evidence. He's a real doubting Thomas.

**A far cry from (something)** - Has a great many differences from something.

That movie was a far cry from anything I would like. I just didn't enjoy it.

**A fifth wheel** - Useless or unnecessary.

The team decided that the additional guest speaker was a fifth wheel and not necessary to include.

**A flash in the pan** - Something that seems promising at first but ultimately doesn't deliver anything.

We were excited about what happened, but it ended up just being a flash in the pan. Nothing came of it.

**A fool and his money are easily parted** - It's easy to convince a foolish person to give you their money for something silly.

I can't believe so many people have bought the product from that questionable infomercial. Well, you know what they say! A fool and his money are easily parted.

**A for effort** - Made an excellent effort (but might not have done very well otherwise).

I have to give the script writers an A for effort, but I don't feel that the program came together very well in the end.

**A fork in the road** - A situation in which you can choose one path or another.

I think I've reached a fork in the road here. I don't know which direction to go.

**A good Samaritan** - A person who helps others in need.

Shelly was always such a good Samaritan. She always helped people in need.

**A hang-up** – Something—perhaps irrational—that consistently worries you.

Helen tended to be difficult to deal with. She had a lot of hang-ups, and it was easy to offend her.

**A hard nut to crack** - Someone who is difficult to get to know or understand, or someone who is tricky to deal with.

Yes, I'm enjoying my new job. My boss, though, is a hard nut to crack. I'm having difficulty in understanding what he wants.

**A hot potato** - An issue, probably from current events, that is causing a lot of discussion and controversy.

The family tried to avoid bringing up political hot potatoes during the holidays.

**A kickback** - A bribe or other illegal payment of money, usually offered to get someone to do something.

The politician was known to be corrupt. It had been proven that he had accepted kickbacks from several people.

**A little bird told me** – A person (possibly someone recognized by both participants in the conversation) who imparted the information in question. How did I find out that your sister is getting married? A little bird told me.

**A little learning is a dangerous thing** - People who have only a limited understanding of something can be dangerous.

Some people are always promoting opinions that make me realize that a little learning can be a dangerous thing.

**A memory like a sieve** - An inadequate memory.

I can't believe I forgot that! I have a memory like a sieve.

**A penny for your thoughts** - Tell me your thoughts.

You're very quiet today. A penny for your thoughts.

**A penny saved is a penny earned** – If you save money right now, you will have more later.

Try to save more of your money. Remember that a penny saved is a penny earned.

**A perfect storm** - When several things go wrong at once, creating the worst situation possible.

The family seemed to be experiencing a perfect storm of unfortunate events.

**A picture is worth a thousand words** - It is more effective to show than it is to tell.

Look at the sad faces on everyone. They wouldn't believe it if they hadn't seen it. A picture is worth a thousand words.

**A piece of cake** - Very easy.

Don't worry about the exam. I took one for the same course last year and it was a piece of cake.

**A ray of sunshine** - Someone who is always cheerful and makes other people feel more positive.

Audrey is a ray of sunshine. She is always so cheerful that she inevitably cheers me up as well.

**A rip-off** - Something that costs too much for what it is really worth.

The coat was a rip-off. It was extremely expensive and ended up being low-quality.

**A screw loose** - To be crazy.

We thought he had a screw loose when we saw him dancing around as if his shoes were on fire!

**A screwup** - A mistake.

It turned out that what they said in the announcement was a screwup! They're not really opening on August 15th.

**A sledgehammer to crack a nut** - Using a disproportionate (and probably ineffective) solution for a problem.

I can't understand why Charles is doing such drastic things to try to solve a simple problem. It's like using a sledgehammer to crack a nut!

**A smart cookie** - A clever and quick-thinking person.



You're a really smart cookie, so you're sure to do well on the test if you study hard.

**A snowball effect** – A series of events gain momentum and build upon one another, leading to a more impactful outcome.

Things started to go wrong; eventually, it seemed like they were dealing with a snowball effect.

**A snowball's chance in hell** - No chance of something happening.

Jake wants to travel this summer but there's not a snowball's chance in hell that he will get to.

**A stitch in time saves nine** - Deal with the problem now because it will get worse if you leave it.

Abby decided to deal with the problem and not leave it for later. After all, a stitch in time saves nine.

**A stone's throw** - Very close by.

We had an awesome time on vacation! The hotel was just a stone's throw away from lots of the museums we were eager to visit.

**A storm in a teacup** - A lot of fuss about an insignificant problem.

Jill and Amy got really upset about the issue but calmed down later on. They realized it was just a storm in a teacup.

**A storm is brewing** - There is likely to be significant trouble in the near future.

Do you really think everything is okay? I have a feeling that if it is, it won't be for long. I think a storm is brewing.

**A surefire way** - An approach that will definitely lead to something happening.

Failing to study early on in a course is a surefire way of getting a bad mark.

**A sweet tooth** - To love sweet foods and flavors.

I'm afraid I have a terrible sweet tooth. I eat far too much cake and candy.

**A toss-up** - Something that is difficult to decide.

She couldn't decide which of her friends had improved the most in their running skills. It was a toss-up!

**Absentminded** - Gives the impression of not being aware of what is happening in the present moment.

He seemed a bit absentminded that day. His focus seemed to be somewhere else.

**Ace in the hole** - A hidden, but very effective, method for winning a conflict.

My resume ended up being my ace in the hole when competing for the job. I was the most highly qualified.

**Ace up the sleeve** - A hidden advantage in a competition.

No, I'm not worried about the upcoming competition. I have an ace up my sleeve.

**Achilles' heel** - A significant weakness and/or reason for potential downfall.

His love of junk food was his Achilles' heel. It really was his downfall, as it greatly affected his health.

**Acid test** - An important or critical test of something.

Beth felt that their outing on the upcoming weekend would be the acid test for her friendship with Meredith. It would tell her whether the friendship could really continue.

**Across the board** - In every area and/or in every way.

We decided to change the rules for the contest across the board. They just weren't fair.

**Actions speak louder than words** - A person's actions will give you a better idea of their character than their words.

My friend apologized for upsetting me, but I'm not sure if I believe that she will change yet. Actions speak louder than words.

**Add fuel to the fire** - To make something even worse.

Maxine tried to help with the problem, but it turned out that her advice only added fuel to the fire.

**Add insult to injury** - To worsen an already bad situation or cause more problems for someone.

I bought a new sweater that I thought was on sale, but they didn't give me the discount. To add insult to injury, they wouldn't give me a refund when I brought it back.

**Against the clock** - Running out of time.

Madison was really rushing with the end of her exam. She was working against the clock.

**Ahead of schedule** - To finish something earlier than the schedule requires.

Things are getting done ahead of schedule. Our boss is very pleased about that.

**All bark and no bite** - Seems more intimidating than he, she, or it actually is.

Don't worry about Larry getting angry. He's a bit like his big dog. His bark is worse than his bite!

**All bets are off** - Any existing agreements are discarded.

When Angela found out that her friend had talked behind her back, she decided that all bets were off and she would do the same to her.

**All Greek to me** - I don't understand it.

I'm having a hard time understanding this instructions pamphlet. It's all Greek to me.

**All heart** - To be very kind and loving to others. (This can sometimes be said in a sarcastic manner, in reference to a person who seems to be the opposite.)

Abigail is a wonderful, caring person. She's all heart.

**All in the same boat** - All in the same situation.

We are all in the same situation right now. Without a doubt, we are all in the same boat.

**All kidding aside** - I was joking before, but now I'm going to speak seriously.

So, do you think it would be okay if I spent all day, every day, at the beach this summer? But all kidding aside, I do want to spend a lot of time by the ocean this year.

**All over the map** - Something (for example, a conversation) that doesn't stay on target with the primary topic or purpose—it's a bit scattered in different directions.

We discussed the issue, but the conversation was all over the map. It wasn't very focused.

**All set** - Ready to go or proceed.

Are you all set to go? We need to leave soon.

**All thumbs** - Clumsy, especially with intricate tasks that require a lot of dexterity.

I ended up ruining my knitting project. I'm all thumbs with complicated things like that.

**All wet** - Wrong to the extent of being unbelievable or just silly.

Harry really gets on my nerves sometimes. Some of the things he says are all wet. He tends to be silly.

**Along for the ride** - To be present when something is happening, without actually participating in it.

I thought that my friend wanted to come on the trip to keep me company and make me feel better, but it turned out that she was just along for the ride.

**An about-face** - A sudden change, usually in the opposite direction.

She did an about-face on this topic a little while ago. She completely changed her position and opinions.

**An albatross around my neck** - An encumbrance or significant burden.

Her illness was extremely persistent and difficult to deal with. It was like an albatross around her neck.

**An apple a day keeps the doctor away** - Eating healthfully, for example eating apples, will help to preserve good health.

My co-workers always joke about how I bring an apple for lunch every day. But I tell them that an apple a day keeps the doctor away.

**An old head on young shoulders** - Someone who seems to have more perception and wisdom than most other people the same age.

Marissa was an old head on young shoulders. She was only seventeen years old but seemed so wise and sensible.

**An old soul** - Someone who seems to have more emotional insight and wisdom than other people the same age.

Everyone said that Henry was an old soul. He seemed to have so much wisdom and insight for a sixteen-year-old boy.

**An open book** - Someone who is extremely open about themselves.

It was very easy to get to know Hannah. She was an open book and made friends easily.

**An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure** - It's better to deal with a problem early. It will be more difficult to fix if you leave it for later.

Henry decided to go to the doctor about his headaches. It probably wasn't anything serious, but an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.

**Are you kidding me?** - Are you joking? Often said to express disbelief, even if the speaker doesn't think that the other person is joking.

Are you kidding me? I can't believe that what you just said is true. Is it?

**Armchair quarterback** - A person who offers opinions and advice but shows no evidence that they actually have any necessary knowledge and/or skill. Especially used with regard to American football.

Bob wouldn't keep quiet during the football game; he constantly talked about what the players were doing wrong. He's such an armchair quarterback.

**Armed to the teeth** - To be heavily armed.

I watched that war movie I mentioned last night. All the characters were armed to the teeth.

**Around-the-clock** - At every time of day and night.

Their boss seems quite unreasonable. It appears he expects an immediate response from them around-the-clock!

**As busy as a bee** - Very busy.

I'm as busy as a bee this morning. I've run lots of errands and completed lots of tasks.

**As easy as ABC** - Very simple and easy.

Don't worry about learning how to ride a bike. It's as easy as ABC once you get going.

**As easy as pie** - Extremely easy.

No problem. I'll show you to how to do this tomorrow. Don't worry! It's as easy as pie.

**As genuine as a three-dollar bill** - Fake, as three-dollar bills do not exist.

Xavier was showing us many of his antiques, telling us that they are rare and expensive. In my opinion, though, some of them are about as genuine as a three-dollar bill.

**As happy as a clam** - Happy and content.

Don't worry about the kids. They're as happy as clams playing video games in the other room!

**As quiet as a mouse** - Very quiet and reserved.

She is as quiet as a mouse. It seems like she hardly ever speaks.

**As rare as hen's teeth** - Extremely rare or non-existent.

No, I have never seen that animal even though it's supposed to live around here. I've found they're as rare as hen's teeth.

**As right as rain** - It's good or perfect.

Maggie asked me how my work was going and I told her the truth, that it's as right as rain.

**As the crow flies** – Either in a straight line or directly, without the use of roads.

The mall is only two miles away, as the crow flies. It's takes longer to get there when you take certain routes.

**As white as a sheet/as white as a ghost** - Extremely pale, so much so that it causes concern.

What's wrong? You look as white as a sheet! Are you ill? Has something terrible happened?

**At best** - In the best-case scenario.



At best, I can say that he was kind of creative in his essay. It wasn't very good, overall.

**At-large** - At liberty when one shouldn't be. For example, if a criminal has escaped from the authorities and his whereabouts are unknown.

The news bulletin said that the individual who escaped from prison is still at-large.

**At least** - At a minimum.

It's disappointing that she can't go with you this time, but at least she might be able to next time.

**At loggerheads** - In conflict with each other.

The two co-workers were at loggerheads on the project. They just couldn't agree on the correct direction.

**At my wits' end** - Getting extremely frustrated and close to becoming angry.

Janette explained that she was at her wits' end with a few of her friends. They were very difficult to deal with and she felt she couldn't communicate with them.

**At the bottom of the totem pole** - Having a low-status position, especially at work.

Michael decided against giving any suggestions about how things should be done at work. After all, he was still at the bottom of the totem pole and didn't have much influence.

**At the crack of dawn** - Extremely early in the morning.

They need to wake up at what seems like the crack of dawn in order to get there in time.

**At the drop of a hat** - Right away and without hesitation.

Juliana was really impatient as she waited for her friends to join her, but they couldn't just come over at the drop of a hat.

**At the end of your rope** - Reached the limit of endurance and/or patience with something or someone.

The teacher felt like she was almost at the end of her rope with some of the students. They were very difficult to deal with in class and liked to test her patience.

**Baby boomer** - Someone born during the years following World War II.

Linda was born a few years after WWII, so she is part of the baby boomer generation. She's always talking about how she's a baby boomer.

**Backseat driver** - A passenger who tries to interfere with the driver's driving.

Tammy always gets very irritated with backseat drivers. She can't understand why they won't just trust her to drive well!

**Back to basics** - To go back to thinking about the basic elements of something.

This issue seems to have become quite complex. Let's just try to go back to basics, so that we can better understand it.

**Back to square one** - Back to the beginning of an endeavor.

Everything has gone wrong with the project! We have to go back to square one.

**Back to the drawing board** – After experiencing failure, it's time to start a task over from scratch.

Ashley and her co-workers realized their first attempt at the task had been unsuccessful and they needed to go back to the drawing board.

**Backhanded compliment** - A compliment that is really meant as an insult.

Can you believe how rude she was? She gave me such a backhanded compliment. She said that it's hard to be as beautiful as she is, and she would rather just be sweetly pretty like I am. She was definitely implying that I'm not as attractive as she is.

**Bad blood** - Ill or negative feelings.

There is quite a bit of bad blood between them now. They used to be friends, but a lot has happened to cause anger between them.

**Bad hair day** - Hair is not looking as good as one would like.

Zack said he was having a very bad hair day. It was sticking up all over the place and he couldn't seem to tame it!

**Band-Aid on a bullet wound** - Trying to deal with a serious situation in a negligent way.

Linda was amazed at the bad advice her cousin gave her on how to deal with the serious problem she was experiencing. It would be like putting a Band-Aid on a bullet wound.

**Barking up the wrong tree** - To be searching for solutions in the wrong places.

I'm afraid you're barking up the wrong tree. I can't help you with your problem.

**Batting a thousand** - To accomplish a task perfectly. A term taken from baseball.

Melissa knew that she was batting a thousand when she wrote the quiz. She knew the answer to every question.

**Be my guest** - Go ahead.

I tried to get him to agree but wasn't successful. If you want to make an attempt, be my guest.

**Bear in mind/keep in mind** - Remember something, especially while thinking about something else.

It's true that we lost the game, but keep in mind that the other team cheated.

**Beat a hasty retreat** - To leave really quickly, especially to flee a difficult situation.

Ethan and Michael jumped out of their seats when they realized how tricky the situation had become. They beat a hasty retreat.

**Beat around the bush** - Trying to avoid saying something directly, often because the truth is uncomfortable.

Don't beat around the bush! Just tell me what you want to say.

**Beat someone to the draw** - You do something before someone else manages to.

Joshua was determined to practice hard and beat his brother to the draw when it came to getting on a baseball team.

**Beat someone to the punch** - To accomplish something before someone else does.

I'm so frustrated! I thought I was the first one to think of this idea, but it turned out that Mason beat me to the punch!

**Beat the bushes** - To search thoroughly.

She said she simply can't find her tablet. She claimed that she beat the bushes looking for it and there's just no sign of it.

**Beating a dead horse** - Continuing to talk about a subject that is now useless to discuss.

Matthew kept talking about the subject and nobody knew why. Beating a dead horse like that was pointless.

**Beating around the bush** - Trying to avoid a topic.

No more beating around the bush! Tell me exactly what I need to know.

**Bed head** - Hair that is messy after sleeping on it.

I had really bad bed head this morning. My hair was sticking up all over the place when I got up to brush my teeth!

**Bed of roses** - A blissfully happy and comfortable situation.

It's a good job, but don't expect it to be a bed of roses. It's quite difficult in many ways.

**Before you know it** - Very soon.

The town is only about fifteen minutes away by car. We'll be there before you know it.

**Behind someone's back** - Without someone knowing.

Max went behind my back and told people my secret. I'm really upset and don't know if we can be friends anymore.

**Behind the eight ball** - In a difficult position or unfavorable circumstances.

I feel like I'm behind the eight ball here. These are really tricky circumstances.

**Belt and suspenders** - Exercising caution and avoiding of risks.

Brian is a very cautious person. He avoids risks whenever possible. Belts and suspenders is his motto.

**Bend over backward** - Try extremely hard to do something, usually to help someone with a specific issue.

They bent over backward to help me learn this. I will always appreciate the effort they made.

**Bent out of shape** - Annoyed and upset.

There's no need to get so bent out of shape! I didn't say anything that you should be very angry about.

**Beside oneself** - Very troubled or anxious and distraught.

Alexander was beside himself. He was so incredibly upset about his uncle's illness. His uncle had always been like a father to him.

**Beside the point** – Irrelevant.

They dismissed what I said, claiming that it was beside the point. They had already concluded the discussion.

**Bestie** - Best friend.

We're really good friends. She's my bestie, actually.

**Bet the ranch** - To risk everything on an endeavor that you believe will be successful.

I tried to convince David to think more carefully about what he was doing. It's very dangerous to bet the ranch in that way. He could lose everything.

**Better late than never** - It's preferable to do a thing late than to never do it. It took me a long time to get there, but better late than never!

**Between a rock and a hard place** - Having to choose between two inadequate options when in a difficult situation.

Sean's friends can't understand why he hasn't been able to make a decision yet, but when you look at his options his hesitation is clear. Neither of them are good; he's between a rock and a hard place.

**Between the devil and the deep blue sea** - Having to deal with the reality of two difficult possible outcomes for the same situation.

I think we're between the devil and the deep blue sea in this situation. No matter what we do, it's not going to solve the problem!

**Beyond the pale** - Outside of the limits of socially or morally acceptable behavior.

The way they acted was truly beyond the pale. It was simply unacceptable. Don't you agree?

**Big cheese** - A very important person, especially the most important person in an organization.

The boss is the big cheese in our company. She's the person who decides what gets done.

**Big fish in a small pond** - Someone who seems more significant than they are because they live in a small or relatively insignificant community.

Mr. Jones is always so arrogant at social events. He and his family are important in their little town. They're big fish in a small pond.

**Big shot** - A powerful person. Often used in a sarcastic or resentful way. Marvin thinks he's a big shot. He thinks he's better than us and can tell us what to do.

**Big wheel** - An influential, powerful, and important person. He's a big wheel in this organization. Whatever he says goes.

**Bigger bang for your buck** - More value for money. The salesperson directed me to a fridge different from the one I had originally wanted to buy. He claimed that it offered better features and bigger bang for my buck.

**Bigwig** - A powerful person with a high position in a corporate structure. Everyone knows that the CEO is the most important bigwig in any company.

**Bird's-eye view** - A broad and expansive view of a place or something. The helicopter ride was a lot of fun! We got a bird's-eye view of the entire town!

**Birds of a feather flock together** - Friends are often alike (usually used in a negative sense).

They weren't surprised that the group of friends exhibited similar personalities. After all, birds of a feather flock together.

**Bite off more than you can chew** - To take on a task that you're unable to finish.



We weren't surprised when Barbara and Matthew couldn't finish the task. They'd bitten off more than they could chew.

**Bite the bullet** - To commence with something that is unpleasant, but inevitable.

They decided to bite the bullet and go ahead with the necessary expense.

**Bite the dust** - For something to cease to exist.

My plans for vacation bit the dust when I found out that I'd only be getting one week off.

**Bite your tongue** - To stop talking.

I was going to give my opinion on his outfit, but I decided to bite my tongue at the last minute. I didn't think he'd like what I had to say.

**Black and blue** - To be bruised.

Christopher's knees were black and blue after falling off his bike a few days ago.

**Black-and-white** - To think in an extreme way—everything is either completely right or entirely wrong

Josh always seemed to take a black-and-white view of things. It was difficult to make him see that there could be gray areas.

**Black market** - An illegal market of some sort.

The counterfeit goods market is illegal. It is a black market.

**Black sheep** - To not fit in within a specific group.

When she was growing up, Julia felt like she was the black sheep of her family. She was very rebellious and didn't feel like she fit in.

**Black tie event** - A very formal event in which men must wear tuxedos and women wear formal gowns.

The banquet was a black tie event. That's why everyone wore tuxedos and gowns.

**Blackball someone** - To cause someone to be rejected by workplaces or other establishments throughout a field in a certain location.

The actor realized that he'd been blackballed since he hadn't been able to get along with a certain director. He couldn't get any new parts.

**Blast from the past** - A vivid reminder of the past.

Did you see the old acid-washed jean jacket that Megan found in her closet yesterday? Talk about a blast from the past! I think I had one of those.

**Blaze a trail** - To take a different and challenging path.

Emily was so daring and adventurous. She wasn't afraid of making unconventional choices and blazing a trail.

**Blew me away** - Incredibly impressed me.

Yes, we went to the movie last night. It really blew me away! I thought it was incredible.

**Blonde bombshell** - An extremely beautiful and glamorous woman with blonde (probably light blonde) hair.

Many of the actresses of the 1940s and '50s were called blonde bombshells. Marilyn Monroe is certainly the most famous.

**Blow a fuse** - To lose one's temper.

My friend blew a fuse the other day when I found fault with their work. I guess I don't really blame them for getting angry.

**Blow off steam** - To vent energy, frustration, or anger.

I have had a very stressful week and I'm hoping to blow off some steam this Saturday. I'll be playing baseball with my team.

**Blow one's top** - To lose one's temper.

They were afraid that she would blow her top when she heard the news. It was just the kind of thing that could make her angry.

**Blowing smoke** - Exaggerating and/or making false claims about oneself, most often to make oneself look better.

Richard was known for boasting about his accomplishments. People thought he was just blowing smoke.

**Blue blood** - To be a member of the aristocracy or a royal family. In the American context, this can apply to people who belong to old and famous families with a great deal of wealth.

The family considered themselves blue blood, but I didn't think they were as distinguished as they thought.

**Blue law** - A law meant to regulate personal behavior (for example, gambling or seeing a certain movie).

I didn't realize that this state had any blue laws. Not being allowed to gamble is unusual.

**Boiling point** - The point at which someone becomes angry.

I think I'm starting to reach my boiling point! They're making me so mad!

**Bolt from the blue** - Something that occurs without any warning and is a total surprise.

Hearing the news caught us off guard. It was really a bolt from the blue.

**Bone of contention** - A source of conflict or disagreement.

The major bone of contention was the question of whether or not Jonah and James should be in charge of the project. No one could agree and people were debating each man's merits.

**Bookworm** - Someone who reads books very frequently, or almost all of the time.

I'm definitely a bookworm. I love to read and do so whenever I get the chance.

**Born with a silver spoon in one's mouth** - To be born into a wealthy family with lots of privileges.

Zoe always had lots of designer clothes and expensive jewelry when she was a kid. She was born with a silver spoon in her mouth.

**Bottom of the barrel** - The lowest quality option.

Wow! They were really scraping the bottom of the barrel with this. They're using their last option.

**Boxed in** - To feel trapped in some way.

James felt boxed in with the situation. He didn't feel he had any real options.

**Brainstorm** - To come up with as many ideas as possible.

The team at the office brainstormed to come up with ideas for the new venture.

**Bread and butter** - A job or endeavor that allows someone to make a living.

Abigail does several different kinds of work, but tutoring is her bread and butter.

**Break a leg** - A wish of good luck, especially in a performance.

You're starring in a play tonight? That's amazing! Well, break a leg!

**Break even** - To neither gain nor lose money.

Patrick is worried about his investment, thinking it might have been unwise. He'd be happy and relieved just to break even.

**Break someone's heart** - To romantically disappoint someone who is in love with you.

He was afraid of telling her his real feelings in case he broke her heart.

**Break the bank** - For something to cost a huge amount of money.

I'm glad to hear about our upcoming vacation to Hawaii. Aren't you worried that it might break the bank, though?

**Break the ice** - Do something to help new acquaintances feel more comfortable

Things were awkward at the party until we played a game to help break the ice.

**Break the news** - To tell someone (or a group of people) news about something.

It took her a while to get up the courage to break the news about what had happened.

**Breeze through** - To get through something with very little or no effort.

Abby breezed through the course. She found it very easy and it didn't take a great deal of effort.

**Bright and early** - Early in the morning.

Remember to wake up bright and early tomorrow. There's a lot to do.

**Bring down the house** - To be extremely successful, usually in a performance.

The cast brought down the house with last night's performance. They were amazing and got a standing ovation!

**Bring home the bacon** - To earn most, or all, of the money an individual or family needs.

Her best friend told her there's no shame in any honest job, as long as it lets you bring home the bacon.

**Bring my A game** - To make my best effort.

I promised my friends that I'd bring my A game to the competition tomorrow, so I need to get lots of sleep.

**Brought up** - To begin speaking on a topic.

He brought up a topic I didn't want to discuss. I explained that I just didn't want to have a conversation about that today.

**Brownie points** - To earn Brownie points is to be good and kind to others. Brownie refers to the Brownies, a club for kids.

Kate is always kind and helpful to everyone. And she's so honest, too. She's always earning her Brownie points!

**Bull in a china shop** - To be clumsy and perhaps oafish when a more delicate approach is needed.

Walt didn't know how to act in a delicate situation. He was like a bull in a china shop.

**Burgers and dogs** - Hamburgers and hotdogs (a hotdog is a sausage made of a meat such as pork or beef in a bread bun).

Come to my picnic next week! We're having some burgers and dogs.

**Burn bridges** - To ruin relationships.

Paul was considered very unreliable by everyone. He was known for burning bridges and ruining friendships.

**Burn the candle at both ends** - To live a frantic sort of life, going to bed too late and having to wake up too early, thus not getting enough rest.

I'm worried about Tim. I think he's burning the candle at both ends. He doesn't get enough rest and always seems worried and frantic.

**Burn the midnight oil** - To continue working late into the night. This is a reference to long ago when people didn't have electric light.

Evan and Elsie are still working on their school assignment and it's well past three o'clock in the morning. They're really burning the midnight oil!

**Burned out** - To feel exhausted as the result of a specific endeavor.

William felt burned out from his job. He was too tired to think and felt like he couldn't deal with anything else.

**Bury the hatchet** - To let go of a disagreement or grudge and call a truce.

They have been friends for a long time. When they fought a few weeks ago, they ended up not talking for several days. They eventually decided to make up and bury the hatchet, though.

**Bury your head in the sand** - Pretending something doesn't exist, or completely ignoring it.

I know you're having a difficult time with the situation but burying your head in the sand isn't going to help make the problem go away.

**Busy bee** - Someone who always seems to be busy.

Louise is definitely a busy bee. She's always running around, getting things done.

**Butter someone up** - To flatter and be excessively nice to someone, in an attempt to make them see things your way or do something you want.

His parents still haven't said that he's allowed to go. He's still trying to butter them up.

**Button one's lip** - To stop talking and be quiet.

The teacher told her pupil to button his lip while she was talking. He was trying to interrupt her.

**Buy a lemon** - To buy a car that ends up being highly faulty or non-functioning.

He was so excited to buy his second-hand car, but it ended up being a lemon! He's going to have to spend a fortune on repairs and even then it still might give him trouble.

**Buy something for a song** - To buy something for very little money.

Do you like my new coat? I got it for a song! It was on sale.



**By hook or by crook** - No matter what, or by any means.

Don't worry about it. By hook or by crook, we'll definitely find a way to get the job done.

**By the book** - Strictly following the rules.

They always do everything by the book. They follow the rules meticulously.

**By the skin of my teeth** - Barely.

Yes, I made it to the appointment by the skin of my teeth. I got there just five minutes before the scheduled time.

**By word of mouth** - People telling something to one another verbally.

The business didn't really do much advertising. People learned about the line by word of mouth.

**Call a spade a spade** - Identifying what something, or someone, really is.

Abby thought we were rude for calling her a liar, but I always like to call a spade a spade. She lies all the time, so she's a liar.

**Call it a day** - Decide to stop working on something for the time being.

I think we have accomplished as much as we can for today. Let's call it a day and continue tomorrow.

**Call the shots** - To make decisions, especially for other people.

The boss was the person who called the shots in the office. She made all the decisions.

**Call their bluff** - To try to force someone to show that they are lying.

Amy told us that if we didn't accompany her this time, she would never go again. We decided to call her bluff and told her that it was fine; we didn't think she should go again anyway.

**Calm before the storm** - It may be calm right now but something bad is coming.

Everything seems okay right now, but everyone is scared that it might be the calm before the storm.

**Calm someone down** - To help make someone calm.

Annie tried to calm her friend down after she found out some extremely upsetting news.

**Can't hold a candle to something or someone** - Cannot compete.

We felt that the movie we saw last night couldn't hold a candle to any of the films that came out last year. The script and the acting were both average.

**Can't judge a book by its cover** - You shouldn't attempt to judge someone or something just by how it looks.

Maureen said she didn't like how the new teacher looked, but I told her she shouldn't judge a book by its cover.

**Can't keep up** - Cannot stay at the same level of achievement.

I'm afraid I just can't keep up in this advanced chemistry program. Everyone seems to have much more of a science background.

**Can't put a face to the name** - When you hear a name you recognize but you cannot remember what the person looks like.

Tom Watson? Yes, I've heard his name but can't remember what he looks like. I just can't put a face to the name.

**Can't see the forest for the trees** - Unable to fully see or understand the whole situation because one is distracted or overwhelmed by the details.

Cindy ended up making the wrong decision because she wasn't thinking clearly. She just couldn't see the forest for the trees.

**Card sharp or card shark** - Someone who makes money from cheating at cards.

He lost quite a bit of money at the poker game. It took a while for him to realize that he had been playing with a card shark.

**Carry the ball** - To take on greater responsibility in order to help ensure a project continues.

Ariana decided to carry the ball on the project. She could see that her teammates weren't going to do what they should, but she wanted the endeavor to succeed. For this reason, she did most of the work.

**Cast-iron stomach** - A stomach that never seems to get upset, regardless of what one eats.

Don't worry about my friends getting ill from this spicy food. They have cast-iron stomachs.

**Cast pearls before swine** - To display fine attributes to people incapable of appreciating them.

At first, Ava was frustrated by how people weren't appreciating her work. But then she remembered what her mother had told her about casting pearls before swine.

**Castle in the sky** - A hope or daydream for the future that will probably never come true.

I'm sure that my dream of spending a month in Europe is a castle in the sky, but I guess you never know.

**Cat got your tongue?** - Why aren't you responding or talking?

Cat got your tongue? You haven't answered my question.

**Cat nap** - A brief nap.

I went for a long run this morning and I'm tired. I think I'll take a cat nap this afternoon.

**Catch-22** - Something that illogically gets in the way of something else, creating a trap. Comes from the title of the novel, *Catch-22*.

I needed to get a piece of equipment to repair something in my house. Then I found out that the equipment I needed had to be repaired before I could get it. Talk about a catch-22!

**Catch some rays** - To sit in the sunshine in order to get a tan.

Barry enjoyed catching some rays a few days a week during the summer. He liked having a tan.

**Catch some Zs** - To sleep.

Lizzie decided to catch some Zs before starting the work she would have to do later that day.

**Catch someone's eye** - To attract someone's interest, usually in a romantic way.

Olivia caught his eye the first time he saw her. She was very beautiful.

**Catch the bus** - To get on a bus after going to or waiting at a stop.

She said she was planning to catch the bus and go to the mall today.

**Catching up/playing catch-up** - Doing the work necessary to get where you need to be in a schedule.

Lots of people were on vacation last week. They are all playing catch-up in the office now.

**Caught red-handed** - Caught in the act of doing something one shouldn't, such as stealing.

The thief was caught red-handed. We actually saw him with the product in his hands.

**Caught someone red-handed** - To catch someone in the act of doing something that they shouldn't be doing.

The thieves were caught red-handed the other day. People saw them stealing the items and said something.

**Caught with your hand in the cookie jar** - Caught doing something one shouldn't be doing.

It looks like Mark is in trouble. He was caught with his hand in the cookie jar at work, so to speak. He stole money.

**Change horses in midstream** - To alter plans or to start following a different leader in the middle of an event or action of some sort.

I was surprised when they suggested that we change plans. It seemed like changing horses in midstream. Why make huge changes right in the middle of an endeavor like that?

**Change of heart** - Significant change in feelings.

They both had a change of heart about their argument. They realized that their friendship was more important than politics.

**Charley horse** - A cramp or stiff leg.

Billy had to stop running because of a terrible charley horse.

**Charmed life** - A life that seems extraordinarily lucky and strangely free of unpleasant consequences.

Elizabeth seemed to live a charmed life. No matter how many stupid things she did, everything always seemed to turn out okay.

**Chasing rainbows** - Trying to pursue unrealistic dreams.

Monica thinks that she will become a famous actress one day, but I think she's just chasing rainbows.

**Checkered past** - A questionable past with many questionable actions, especially frowned upon or criminal activities.

Maxwell had a checkered past. It seemed that he had a criminal record and there were many strange rumors about him.

**Cheer up** - To feel happier when you're sad.

Cheer up! You look so sad. What's wrong?

**Chew someone out** - To scold someone.

Jane was angry with her friend for betraying her. She definitely chewed her out.

**Chew something over** - To thoroughly think or talk about something.

I spent a long time chewing it over before I made a final decision. I always think things through like that.

**Chewing the fat** - Talking about something, usually just chatting.

The two best friends enjoyed chewing the fat as much as they could. They loved nothing more than an afternoon of good conversation.

**Chow down** - Eat heartily.

This pizza looks delicious. Let's chow down!

**Chuffed to bits** - Very pleased or happy.

I was chuffed to bits about my birthday presents! They were all so nice.

**Clean slate** - A fresh beginning.

Wouldn't it be nice to start over again with a clean slate? I'd love to be free of regrets and worries.

**Clean someone out** - To steal or take all of a person's possessions and/or money.

The property was recently robbed. The thieves completely cleaned the owners out of all their money and equipment.

**Clear as mud** - Not clear at all and therefore difficult to understand.

I really wanted to play the new board game, but I found the instructions to be as clear as mud. It was really confusing.

**Clear the air** - To resolve a disagreement or address and resolve a resentment.

We decided to clear the air with Maria. We knew that she resented some of the things that we had done and so we talked to her and apologized.

**Climb the walls** - To feel restless.

They felt closed in that winter. It was really cold outside, and they were climbing the walls, wishing it was spring and that they could go outside and play some sports.

**Close but no cigar** - Closely approaching success or the right answer, but not quite there.

During the quiz show, Joseph gave his answer to the first question, certain he had it right. But he was wrong, so the host said "close but no cigar."

**Close shave** - Just managing to escape.

We managed to free ourselves from the situation but it was a close shave. We almost weren't able to.

**Closed-minded** - To be unable or unwilling to listen to and think about new ideas or perspectives.

I didn't like William. I found him very closed-minded. He refused to listen to any ideas that contradicted anything he already thought.

**Clown around** - To joke around, telling jokes and being silly.

The teacher got frustrated with her students. They wouldn't stop clowning around and they refused to concentrate on the work at hand.

**Cock-and-bull story** - An implausible or far-fetched story.

Yes, Corey told me about his adventures in Europe. I think it's a cock-and-bull story.



**Coin a new term** - To come up with a new way of saying something (a word or phrase) .

Meredith is quite creative. She actually coined a new term yesterday. I joked that maybe it should be added to the dictionary!

**Coin a phrase** - To invent a new phrase or way of expressing something.

I ended up coining a new phrase yesterday. People said they'd never heard something described that way before.

**Cold enough to freeze the ball off a brass monkey** - Very cold.

I was so cold yesterday, even with a heavy coat on. It was cold enough to freeze the balls off a brass monkey.

**Cold feet** - To feel nervous to the point of thinking about removing yourself from a situation.

Ethan had cold feet about the speech. Even though he had practiced it, he got so nervous beforehand that he felt like running away.

**Cold shoulder** - To be cold and unfriendly to someone.

Mia gave me the cold shoulder the other day; she acted as if she barely knew me.

**Collecting dust** - Not being used.

The vase had been collecting dust on that table for many years. They just never used it.

**Come a long way** - To progress in some area in life.

I feel that I've come a long way from how I was a few years ago. I'm much more successful now.

**Come alive** - To gain animation in some way.

All of the ideas in the book came alive when I saw the documentary.

**Come clean** - To tell the truth about something that one has done wrong.

The police officer advised the person she arrested to come clean with what he had done. It was better to just tell the truth, she said.

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**Come down with a cold** - To show symptoms of a cold.

I came down with a cold after going for a long hike in intemperate weather.

**Come hell or high water** - No matter what.

We're going to Mexico this year, come hell or high water. Nothing will stop us!

**Come in handy** - To end up being useful.

That tool ended up coming in handy after I'd had it for a while.

**Come out of your shell** - To stop being so shy.

We all hoped that Helen would come out of her shell soon. She was shy and got so nervous around new people.

**Come out smelling like roses/a rose** - To come out seeming like a wonderful person, especially when it's not fair.

We were all very frustrated. Even though Patricia had done all sorts of bad things, she always came out smelling like a rose. People thought she was

wonderful.

**Come rain or shine** - Something will be accomplished no matter what.  
Ryan said that he would definitely get the job done, come rain or shine.

**Comfort food** - Food that comforts you and makes you feel better.  
What is your favorite comfort food? I think mine is macaroni and cheese, or maybe hot chicken soup.

**Comparing apples to oranges** - Comparing two entirely different things that really should not, or cannot, be compared.  
Mary asked Veronica which pair of pants she liked best, but Veronica said that the styles were so different that it would be like comparing apples to oranges.

**Computer crashed** - Computer is no longer working.  
Darryl's computer crashed yesterday. He's in a panic, trying to figure out what to do to fix it.

**Cook someone's goose** - To ruin their plans.  
It turned out that their goose was cooked. Their plan was ruined.

**Cook up** - To plan or invent.  
They were highly skilled at cooking up new ideas that the boss loved. We wished that we could be that inventive.

**Cooked the books** - To do bookkeeping or accounting in a dishonest way, often to avoid taxes.

The company was a shady one. Lots of people said that they cooked the books.

**Cool as a cucumber** - Calm and relaxed.

Jim never gets worried about interviews. He always seems to be cool as a cucumber.

**Cool your jets** - Calm down.

There's no need to get so angry about this! Cool your jets.

**Copycat** - Someone who copies something someone else has done.

One of the kids in class said that the boy beside him was a copycat because he copied some of his math homework.

**Cost me a mint** - It cost me a lot of money.

The luxury car cost him a mint! It was extremely expensive.

**Costs an arm and a leg** - Costs a lot of money.

They were thinking about buying a boat but decided not to. The problem was that it cost an arm and a leg.

**Couch potato** - Someone who spends a lot of time on the couch in front of the TV.

They are worried about their cousin's health because he is such a couch potato. He doesn't get enough exercise.

**Couldn't care less** - Expresses complete lack of interest in something.

Honestly, I couldn't care less about not being invited to the party. It just doesn't matter to me.

**Country mile** - A long distance.

It turned out we had to walk a country mile to get to Annie's house. It took forever.

**Cover a lot of ground** - Get a lot of things done, in a variety of areas.

We expect to cover a lot of ground during our meeting today. There are lots of things that we need to discuss.

**Crack a book** - To open a book and read it.

Why are you so surprised that you don't know very much about anything? You need to crack a book sometimes.

**Crack open a cold one** - Open a cold can of beer.

After a long day at work, they decided to crack open a cold one and sit outside on the porch for a while.

**Crack someone up** - Make someone laugh.

I love that comedian. She always cracks me up!

**Crank out a paper** - To write a paper (or essay) in a mechanical sort of way, probably in a rush.

The students cranked out the paper that was due the next day.

**Cream of the crop** - The best.

These students were the cream of the crop in their class. They had extremely impressive grades.

**Crickets** - Complete silence or lack of communication about something.

I called Sarah the other day and left a message asking if she'd like to come over for dinner. The response: crickets!

**Crocodile tears** - Fake tears.

Noah started to cry about the situation, but we knew it was just crocodile tears.

**Cross that bridge when you come to it** - Deal with the problem when it becomes an obstacle.

Isabella tended to be a worrier, letting things overwhelm her mind. There was one potential problem that was making her very anxious. Her best friend told her to cross that bridge when she came to it.

**Cross your fingers** - Hope that my wish comes true.

I'm hoping I'll win that prize in the raffle. Cross your fingers for me.

**Crunch time** - A time when things need to finally get done.

It's crunch time at work. We've got lots of deadlines coming up and there's lots of work to do.

**Cup of Joe** - Cup of coffee.

Adam always started his day with a cup of Joe. He didn't think he could function without coffee!

**Curiosity killed the cat** - It can be dangerous to be too curious and ask too many questions.

If I were you, I wouldn't ask any more questions. Remember: curiosity killed the cat.

**Curve ball** - Something that is deceptive or confusing.

His boss threw him a real curve ball the other day. He wanted him to restart the entire project.

**Cut and dried** - Unequivocal or clear, or perhaps routine.

The instructions were cut and dried—they left no room for questions.

**Cut someone off at the knees** - To humiliate someone or compel them to do something you want.

Daniel felt his supervisor was cutting him off at the knees by the way he was criticizing his work.

**Cut the mustard** - Do something well or up to standard.

Chloe tried her best in completing the task, but people said that she just didn't cut the mustard.

**Cut them some slack** - Refrain from being too critical of someone.

He did poorly on the test but studied hard. Cut him some slack!

**Cut to the chase** - Get to the point quickly.

We only have about fifteen minutes for this meeting, so I'm going to have to cut to the chase.

**Cut to the quick** - To deeply wound or hurt someone.

Amy felt cut to the quick when her friends rejected her. She cried for a long time afterward.

**Cute as a bug** - Endearing and sweet.

We saw the puppy their family is getting. It is as cute as a bug!

**Cutting corners** - Doing a task inadequately in an effort to save money or time.

It seemed like the builders had cut corners and that was the reason why the building was unstable.

**Damn someone with faint praise** - To criticize someone in a way that seems to be praise but actually communicates disapproval or condemnation.

Emma tried to give the impression to others that she was complimenting me, but I knew that she was just damning me with faint praise.

**Dark horse** - A previously unknown person who becomes prominent or known for something.

Did you realize that Hailey had so many talents? She's certainly a dark horse!

**Dawned on me** - To suddenly realize or recognize something.

I was taking a walk when it suddenly dawned on me that I should do that more often. It would be good for my health.

**Dead from the neck up** - Unintelligent or stupid.

That guy seems really stupid. I think he's dead from the neck up.

**Dead in the water** - No longer effective.

The project is dead in the water. It is ruined and there is no way to move forward with it.

**Dead quiet** - Extremely quiet.

It was dead quiet in there. But that's appropriate, of course. It's a library!



**Dead ringer** - To look exactly like someone else.

Ashley is a dead ringer for my favorite actress. She really looks just like her.

**Dead tired** - Extremely tired.

They were dead tired after an exhausting day spent moving to a different city.

**Dead to the world** - In a deep sleep.

I couldn't wake Aiden up! He was dead to the world. I think it's because he couldn't get any sleep on the plane.

**Dead-end job** - A job that doesn't seem to have any opportunities for advancement.

I think that's a dead-end job. It has really low pay and there doesn't seem any way to advance.

**Deep down** - How you really feel inside, even if you don't realize it.

Deep down, I think I always felt that their friendship wouldn't last.

**Diamond in the rough** – Someone, or something, that may not seem wonderful right now but has a lot of potential.

Marie didn't seem very impressive at first, but her instructors realized that she was a diamond in the rough and would be a great dancer after more training.

**Different strokes for different folks** - Different people do things differently, in ways that suit their personalities.

I was really surprised to see how Mia decorated her house. Oh well, different strokes for different folks.

**Dig in your heels** - To retain your position on something in spite of what others say.

I don't agree with what the others are saying about this. They're right when they accuse me of digging in my heels.

**Dirt cheap** - Extremely cheap.

They went shopping the other day and found some good items for dirt cheap. There were big sales going on.

**Dish the dirt** - Reveal an embarrassing or scandalous secret, probably about someone else; spread gossip.

The tabloid dished the dirt on all sorts of celebrities. No one was sure if the stories were true, though.

**Divide the spoils** - To divide the rewards resulting from an endeavor.

The business partners divided the spoils from their newest venture.

**Do or die** - To do no matter what the obstacles.

Renee decided that it was do or die with advancing in her career. She would do it, no matter what it took.

**Do someone a good turn** - To do something kind for someone.

She did me a good turn yesterday. She helped me out of a tricky situation, even though she must know that there's very little I'm able to do for her in return.

**Do something at the drop of a hat** - To do something right away, without any planning.

My friends surprised me when they expected me to do something at the drop of a hat. I already had plans, so I couldn't accommodate them.

**Do something by the seat of your pants** - To tackle something without really knowing what you're doing at first.

I didn't really understand the job when I first started. I was doing it by the seat of my pants.

**Doesn't hold water** - Isn't credible and cannot withstand scrutiny.

This argument doesn't hold water. It doesn't make sense and no informed person would agree with it.

**Doesn't know beans about it** - Knows very little, or nothing, on a subject.

Jordan doesn't know beans about this. I don't know why he's offering an opinion.

**Dog and pony show** - A presentation of some kind that has quite a bit of style but lacks real content.

The speech was well-attended but it was really just a dog and pony show. Nothing important was said.

**Dog days of summer** - The hottest summer days.

I always hate the dog days of summer. It's so hard to stay cool on those extremely hot days!

**Dog-eat-dog** - A ruthless environment.

The corporate world can be dog-eat-dog. People often try to take advantage of you.

**Dollars for doughnuts** - A certainty, or a sure bet.

I'm certain that my team will win the game. Dollars for doughnuts.

**Don't sweat the small stuff** - Don't spend time worrying about insignificant issues and small problems.

Stop worrying about all those little things! Remember, don't sweat the small stuff.

**Done to a turn** - Food is cooked perfectly.

The chicken was delicious. It was truly done to a turn.

**Don't beat a dead horse** - The subject is over and it's time to move on.

Look, there's no point in discussing this anymore. Don't beat a dead horse.

**Don't count your chickens before they hatch** - Don't assume that something good will happen until it has actually happened.

You don't know that you will be offered the job yet. Don't count your chickens before they've hatched.

**Don't cry over spilt milk** - There is no point in complaining or lamenting something that cannot be fixed.

Don't cry over spilt milk. There's nothing you can do about your dropping the ball during the game today. Just try harder next time.

**Don't do anything I wouldn't do** - Don't behave foolishly; sometimes said in a jovial way.

Have a great time in California! Don't do anything I wouldn't do.

**Don't give up your day job** - You're not very competent at a task, or you're not good enough to do it professionally.

Thanks for inviting me to your show, but I have to be honest: Don't give up your day job.

**Don't hold your breath** - Don't be hopeful or imagine that something will happen.

Don't hold your breath about the vacation. There's a strong chance that it won't happen.

**Don't know him from Adam** - Don't know a person.

He said that I know him? That's strange. I don't know him from Adam.

**Don't know if I'm coming or going** - Extremely confused about a situation.

Honestly, I'm so confused that I don't know if I'm coming or going right now.

**Don't look a gift horse in the mouth** - Don't find fault with a gift you are given.

I always remember to never look a gift horse in the mouth. That's why I never look for fault with presents that I am given.

**Don't put all your eggs in one basket** - Don't make everything depend on one circumstance; avoid taking unnecessary risks.

You've sent out one resume, but that's not enough. Remember not to put all your eggs in one basket.

**Don't quote me on that** – This might be the answer, but I'm not 100 percent sure.

It sounds like you might be allergic to dust. But don't quote me on that, I'm not a doctor.

**Don't throw the baby out with the bath water** - Don't try to throw away everything in a situation when there might be elements that you would like to keep or that would benefit you to keep.

I think you should slow down and ensure you're making the right decision here. Remember, don't throw the baby out with the bath water.

**Don't want to hear that** - You don't like what is being said and would rather not hear it, even though you acknowledge it could be real, or is, real. Please don't talk about that. I just don't want to hear about it.

**Doom and gloom** - To talk or dwell on something depressing or gloomy. Alfred always seemed to have a negative outlook on life. Everything was always doom and gloom.

**Double whammy** - To have to deal with two difficult things at the same time.

To find out that two things went wrong yesterday was a double whammy for me.

**Down in the dumps** - Down and depressed.

He's been down in the dumps lately. He just feels depressed and a bit despondent.

**Down in the mouth** - Sad.

She's down in the mouth. She's really upset about the things that have happened lately.

**Down the tube** - For something to go wrong, especially if something goes wrong with an exciting plan.

We were so excited about our upcoming party plans, but everything ended up going down the tube.

**Down-to-earth** - To be practical and have lots of common sense.

One of the things I like most about Katie is how down-to-earth she is. She's always so sensible and I like going to her for advice.

**Down to the wire** - The deadline for a project is quickly approaching.

We're down to the wire on this project! We must devote all our energy to it until it is complete.

**Dragging your feet** - Putting off doing something.

Why are you dragging your feet on dealing with this problem? The longer you leave it, the worse it might get.

**Drastic times call for drastic measures** - Difficult circumstances can call for decisive action.

Marianne felt a bit hesitant at first, but the circumstances were so serious that she knew she had to. Drastic times call for drastic measures.

**Draw a blank** - To realize you have forgotten something you now want or need to remember.

I tried to remember what I wanted to say but drew a blank. I couldn't remember! It was quite embarrassing.

**Drawing card** - A famous individual whose presence draws people to an event.

The committee was excited to hear that the celebrity had agreed to appear at their event. She would definitely be a drawing card. Attendance was sure to be great!

**Dressed to kill** - Dressed in a very impressive way.

They were dressed to kill at the event. Everyone was so fashionable and impressive.



**Drive someone up the wall** - To greatly annoy someone and make them angry.

The music coming from next door was driving them up the wall. It was way too loud and was disturbing them as they tried to work.

**Driving me nuts** – Something is making me extremely annoyed and frustrated, or perhaps angry.

That noise coming from the radio is driving me nuts! It sounds like nails on a blackboard!

**Drop by** - Come over to one's house in an informal way.

Brenda dropped by my friend's house the other day.

**Drop in the bucket** - Something so insignificant that it won't make any real difference.

They decided to begin a serious fundraising effort for the charity. The amount they'd received so far was just a drop in the bucket compared to what they needed.

**Drop someone a line** - To write to someone, probably just a short letter or message.

Maude set aside some time to drop her friend a line. It was just a few words, but that was all that was needed.

**Drop-dead gorgeous** - Very beautiful or gorgeous.

Lots of people were jealous of the model when she was growing up. She was drop-dead gorgeous.

**Dry run** - Rehearsal.

The band is doing a dry run of the show tonight. They always make sure to practice their numbers in advance.

**Ducks in a row** - Well-organized and prepared.

Ruth has everything ready that she needs to apply to college. She really has her ducks in a row.

**Dyed-in-the-wool** - To have a trait or characteristic that seems basic to the individual's nature or that is ingrained in some way.

The entire family are dyed-in-the-wool tennis fans.

**Eager beaver** - An extremely eager person.

They said that the students who arrived for class half an hour early were eager beavers.

**Easy come, easy go** - You get something easily and you lose it easily.

They lost all their winnings from the contest. Oh well! I guess easy come, easy go.

**Easy does it** - Move or act more slowly and carefully.

Could you pick up that heavy box for me, please? Easy does it! You don't want to hurt your back.

**Eat crow** - To admit that you were mistaken about something.

Noah was completely wrong in the approach he took. He's definitely going to have to eat crow and admit his error.

**Eat like a bird** - To eat very little.

My friend doesn't eat very much at lunch. Honestly, he eats like a bird.

**Eat like a horse** - To eat a lot and have a big appetite.

That guy has at least five meals a day. He eats like a horse!

**Eat my hat** – When someone says that they will “eat my hat” if something happens, they are essentially saying that they think it will not happen.

I will eat my hat if he wins the competition. It's just impossible!

**Eat your heart out** - To have to deal with hopeless circumstances or suffer without saying anything. Often said triumphantly.

“Joey loves me, so eat your heart out,” Sarah said to her best friend Lucy, knowing that Lucy was actually in love with Joey herself.

**Egg on your face** - To seem, or be, embarrassed.

The politician had egg on his face; he messed up several lines his last speech.

**Elevator pitch** - A very short speech in which you promote your capabilities and discuss how you can benefit an individual or organization; used in job searches.

I quickly started my elevator pitch, but he had to walk away after getting a text. I don't think I'll get the job.

**Elvis has left the building** - The show is over now. Everything is over.

It looks like Elvis has left the building. There's no sign of Mr. Smith anywhere.

**Every cloud has a silver lining** - Good things can arise as a result of, or after, bad things.

I know you're disappointed about missing out on taking a vacation, but remember that every cloud has a silver lining. Maybe you'll get a promotion.

**Every dog has his day** - Everyone has a chance of some success, of some kind, at least once.

He said the guy had a bit of success in something and that every dog has his day.

**Every now and then** – Occasionally.

We go to that park every now and then. It's not something we can do all the time.

**Everything but the kitchen sink** - Pretty much everything has been included.

I always find it a bit difficult to pack for vacation. It's because I always want to pack everything but the kitchen sink!

**Exact change** - The exact amount of coins needed.

It's best to have exact change when you want to take the bus.

**Excuse my French/Pardon my French** - Excuse the fact that I used an offensive (swear) word.

Sorry. Pardon my French. I don't usually use swear words like that!

**Face the music** - Face the consequences of something you have done.

My sister was really offended when I wasn't able to attend her event last week. I think I'll have to call her and face the music.

**Fair and square** - To be done fairly and correctly.

Your share of the pie is one quarter, because there are four people. That's fair and square!

**Fair to middling** - Average in quality.

The quality of the car was fair to middling. It was just average.

**Fair-weather friend** - A person who only acts like a friend when things are going well and they can benefit in some way.

Linda was a fair-weather friend. I only ever heard from her when she could get something from me.

**Fall by the wayside** - Something that comes to be ignored.

Our concern about the first issue fell by the wayside when we heard about the new problem.

**Fall off the wagon** - To fail to stick to a determination to do something, for example, to give up alcohol (for an alcoholic) or smoking.

Brittany had been determined to quit smoking but she ended up falling off the wagon. She was determined to get back on it again, though, and become a non-smoker.

**Fall on deaf ears** - Someone is not listening to what is said.

I tried to give her some good advice but it seemed to fall on deaf ears. She didn't listen.

**Familiarity breeds contempt** - You begin to like or respect someone less the better you know them.

Bill didn't like his best friend's other friends after he got to know them. But maybe it's because familiarity breeds contempt.

**Fancy pants** - Very fancy and maybe ostentatious.

The family was always showing off the things they had and making a big deal of it. People called their kids fancy pants at school.

**Fashion victim** - Someone who is obsessed with fashion, probably to the point where they go overboard and end up looking worse.

We weren't impressed by what we saw at last night's fashion show. It looked like a parade of fashion victims.

**Fat cat** - A wealthy, but usually very lazy, person.

People thought the leaders of the company were all fat cats. They were wealthy but never seemed to do very much of anything.

**Feather in one's cap** - Something one is proud of.

The fact that he got the promotion was truly a feather in his cap. He was very proud of it.

**Feather one's nest** - To gather up resources to ensure future comfort. Often used sarcastically, implying that someone is doing this in a dishonest or exploitative way.

We think that he was trying to get as much money as he could, even if it meant that we didn't receive our fair share. He was definitely feathering his nest.

**Feeding frenzy** - To eat a large amount of food, probably in a frantic manner. Also refers to consuming anything in a frantic way, such as the public being in a feeding frenzy about the latest celebrity story.

It seemed like all the magazines were in a feeding frenzy for stories about my favorite celebrity. There were stories printed all over the place.

**Feel like a million dollars** - To feel extremely good—both in the way you feel inside and the way you look.

I felt like a million dollars when I was dressed up for the banquet last night.

**Feel the pinch** - To feel the effects of a lack of money or other resources.

The business had been feeling the pinch. Money was in short supply and they weren't sure how they could continue to offer their services.

**Feel/look like death warmed over** - To feel or look extremely tired and drained.

Jesse's flu seems to be over, but he still looks like death warmed over. His face appears so tired and pale.

**Feeling blue** - Feeling sad or depressed.

She's feeling a bit blue right now. We're trying to cheer her up.

**Fender bender** - A minor car accident.

We got into a fender bender yesterday. Just a minor car accident. It was stressful at the time, though.

**Field day** - An enjoyable circumstance or day.

We had a field day on our excursion last week. We had a great time.

**Fifteen minutes of fame** - To enjoy an extremely short period of fame or recognition of some sort.

James is doing really well with his YouTube channel. But you know what they say: everyone has their fifteen minutes of fame.

**Fight an uphill battle** - To deal with a difficult situation that becomes harder as you go.

My sister told me that what I was attempting to do would probably end up being an uphill battle. It would be extremely difficult and the number of obstacles would only increase the longer that I tried to do it.

**Fight tooth and nail** - To fight hard and determinedly.

I was determined to succeed in this field, deciding that I'd fight tooth and nail if I had to.

**Fill in the blanks** - To guess the content of missing information.

We were left to fill in the blanks with the missing information about the course.

**Filthy rich** - Extremely wealthy.

The Addison family owned two houses and five cars. Everyone said they were filthy rich.

**Find your feet** - Adjust and become accustomed to new circumstances or expectations.

It took Mark quite a long time to find his feet in his new career, but he's doing great now!

**Finger lickin' good** - Delicious food (very informal).

I wish you could have come to the barbeque the other day. The food was finger lickin' good!

**Fish out of water** - To be in an environment that you're not used to or that you don't readily fit into.



He's a fish out of water here. He doesn't know anything about this field and doesn't understand its culture.

**Fishy** - Seems suspicious.

Do you think the situation seemed kind of fishy? I thought something appeared suspicious.

**Fit as a fiddle** - In excellent health.

When I went for a checkup with the doctor, he said there were a few problems. I was surprised. I had thought I was as fit as a fiddle.

**Fit to be tied** - Extremely angry.

I was fit to be tied when they told me the news. I don't think I've ever been so angry.

**Fits and starts** - Very brief bursts of motion.

Louise progressed in her career in fits and starts. She'd make a lot of progress at certain points but then fight to get any further for a while.

**Five o'clock shadow** - The signs of hair starting to grow back on the face of a man who has recently shaved.

Daniel suddenly realized that he had forgotten to shave. He definitely had quite a bit of five o'clock shadow.

**Fix someone's wagon** - To ruin someone's chance of success, often in revenge for a grievance.

I can't believe that she treated me that way. I'm going to fix her wagon. She can't get away with this.

**Fixed in your ways** - Inflexible in the ways you do things.

Betty always did things the same way. She was very fixed in her ways.

**Flavor of the month** - Something that is trendy or fashionable to care about at the moment.

Interest in that hobby is really popular right now, but I actually think it's just the flavor of the month.

**Flea market** - A market where people buy and sell secondhand and/or inexpensive goods.

We went shopping this weekend, but instead of the mall we went to the nearby flea market. It was fun to look for some deals! My friend found a vintage hat.

**Flesh and blood** - People who are related to you, or anyone or anything that is alive.

My cousin was happy to do the favor for me. After all, she said, I'm her flesh and blood.

**Fly in the face of something** - To act in opposition to something or to show disrespect for someone or something.

The statement he made flew in the face of everything his friends expected of him. They were very disappointed.

**Fly in the ointment** - Something unpleasant in a situation that is otherwise entirely pleasant.

The lack of money was a fly in the ointment. It could ruin their plans to travel to Europe this summer.

**Fly off the handle** - To suddenly become extremely angry, especially if overreacting to something.

Wow! I was really surprised at how they got so angry about this. They really flew off the handle!

**Fly the coop** - To escape.

Jack was tired of the job he had held for twenty years and felt he wanted to advance in the field. He decided to fly the coop and look for a position elsewhere.

**Fly-by-night** - Markedly untrustworthy or undependable.

The restaurant seemed like a fly-by-night. The furnishings were in a state of disrepair and the staff were extremely rude. It seemed like they could close down tomorrow.

**Foam at the mouth** - To show rage.

David was incredibly angry about the situation. It seemed like he was almost foaming at the mouth.

**Follow in someone's footsteps** - To follow the same path in life as someone else.

Liam was a plumber. His son decided to follow in his father's footsteps and become a plumber, too.

**Follow the money** - To follow the direction of people gaining large amounts of money when investigating corruption.

The investigators always remembered to "follow the money" when investigating financial crimes.

**Food for thought** - Something that you or others think is worth carefully thinking about.

When my best friends gave me their opinion, I realized that it was certainly food for thought.

**Fool around** - To joke around and act in a jovial or silly way.

The high school students were fooling around outside the school, joking with each other and laughing.

**Fool's gold** - Something that looks like gold but isn't.

They thought that the opportunity would be very lucrative. However, it ended up being fool's gold.

**Foot in the door** - To find an opportunity to make progress in a desired direction.

Isabella explained that she had hoped to be offered a better position with the company. The job she got, though, is a foot in the door.

**Footloose and fancy-free** - To be free of care and worry, able to have fun all the time.

Patricia had a wonderful life. She had lots of money and didn't have to worry about anything. Most of her time was spent shopping and traveling. She was footloose and fancy-free.

**For crying out loud** - Something one says when one is frustrated or at the end of one's patience.

For crying out loud! Why are you still worrying about this? There's no reason to!

**For goodness' sake** - Something one says when one is frustrated or in a state of disbelief.

For goodness' sake, why do you feel the need to go shopping again today?  
You bought so much yesterday!

**For heaven's sake** - Something one says when one is frustrated or in a state of disbelief.

For heaven's sake, why are you doing this? It's a mistake.

**For the birds** - A waste of energy and time, or confused and disorganized.

I think that's for the birds. It's a waste of time and doesn't make any sense.

**Fork over/shell out money** - To pay money (often a large or unaffordable amount) for something.

They went to a fancy restaurant and ended up having to fork over much more money than they had anticipated. It was probably because of the wine they ordered.

**Fortune favors the bold** - Taking risks can lead to success.

I tend to worry about taking risks but I need to remember that fortune favors the bold.

**Forty winks** - A very short nap, usually during the day.

I'm very tired. I think I'll lie down and try to get forty winks.

**Freak out** - To become very angry, worried, or frightened.

I thought she would be okay with the news but she started to freak out! She seemed really worried.

**From day one** - From the very beginning.

That employee has been difficult to deal with since day one. He's been giving us problems since we hired him.

**From rags to riches** - To go from being poor to wealthy.

They had always been good at computer programming. It was their skills that helped them go from rags to riches with an amazing tech company.

**From the get-go** - From the beginning.

Andrew left his job last week. He said he knew from the get-go that it wouldn't work out.

**From the word go** - From the very beginning.

There have been problems with this project from the word go. There were issues ingrained in it from the beginning.

**From time to time** - Occasionally.

I like to go for nature hikes from time to time. It's not something I do all the time, just sometimes on cooler days.

**Fuddy-duddy** - An excessively old-fashioned person.

Mr. Roberts is so old-fashioned and inflexible with his thinking. He's definitely a fuddy-duddy.

**Full of crap** - Doesn't know what he or she is talking about. Offensive in most contexts.

Don't tell anyone I said this, but I think that professor is full of crap.

**Full of hot air** - To be a person who talks a lot but has no idea what they are talking about and/or is arrogant.

The speaker was full of hot air. He was arrogant and didn't seem to have any real idea of what he was talking about.

**Full steam ahead** - Enthusiastically moving forward.

Yes, we've decided to move forward with the business. Full steam ahead!

**Gain ground** - To advance and make progress.

The company has really been gaining ground lately. It's doing well.

**Gave someone the thumbs-up** - Gave someone approval.

Her parents gave her the thumbs-up when she asked if they'd allow her to go camping this summer.

**Get a handle on something** - To gain control or understanding of something.

It took her a long time to get a handle on the situation. It was difficult to control.

**Get a hold of something** - To obtain possession of something.

I couldn't get a hold of any of that brand of perfume yesterday. It seems to be unavailable right now.

**Get a hold of yourself** - To gain control of yourself.

Get a hold of yourself! There's no reason to be so upset.

**Get a move on** - To start being active again in something.

It's time to get a move on! If we don't leave now, we'll never get there on time.

**Get a second wind** - Gain more energy after feeling tired.

I had to take a break during my run. I needed to get my second wind.

**Get a taste of your own medicine** - Experience being treated badly, as you have treated other people.

We think you've been really mean to Mary lately. Maybe one day you'll get a taste of your own medicine.

**Get a word in edgewise** - To be able to say something when someone won't stop talking.

It's hard to talk to James. He never lets you get a word in edgewise.

**Get along with each other** - To have a harmonious relationship with someone; to refrain from argument or conflict.

Mike and Mitchell get along really well. They never argue.

**Get back to someone** - To contact a person again to tell them something in the near future.

Yes, I got her phone message. I'm going to get back to her tomorrow.

**Get down to brass tacks** - To get down to the basics of a situation.

I think we've been explaining things to the employees in an excessively complicated way. Let's just get down to brass tacks.

**Get down to business** - Start doing the practical things that need to be done.

Let's get down to business! This work has to be done by tomorrow.



**Get down to the nuts and bolts** - To focus on the basics of something or a situation.

Let's get down to the nuts and bolts of the issue. It's best to focus on the basics first.

**Get from A to B** - To get from one place to another.

It seems to take a long time to get from A to B in this city. There's too much traffic.

**Get hold of someone** - To get in contact with someone.

I tried to call and text her, but I couldn't get hold of Sarah yesterday. I don't know where she is.

**Get in someone's hair** - To annoy someone or cause them some kind of irritation or hindrance.

Hannah has really been getting in my hair! She's always causing problems for me.

**Get into deep water** - In a lot of trouble.

Michelle has been having a lot of financial trouble with her business. I'm afraid she'll get into deep water with it.

**Get it off my chest** - To express something that has been bothering you or making you sad.

Nicole was relieved to express her feelings and get them off her chest. She had been keeping them to herself for a long time and it was a burden.

**Get it through your head** - Try to understand what one is saying. This is an impolite expression.

Why can't he understand what I'm saying? I really wish he'd get it through his head.

**Get off on the wrong foot** - To start something the wrong way.

They got off on the wrong foot at first, but they became very good friends later on.

**Get off your high horse** - Stop imagining that you are superior.

I told Jane to get off her high horse. She always gives the impression that she thinks she's better than I am.

**Get one's feet wet** - To start something new, such as a new job or occupation.

One day, during their internships, the students got their feet wet in the fields they wanted to enter.

**Get out of hand** - For something to get out of control.

Things started quietly early in the evening but the party eventually got out of hand!

**Get over it** - To stop feeling annoyed or upset about something.

My brother is still really upset about not making it onto the basketball team. I felt bad for him at first but he needs to get over it.

**Get something for peanuts** - To get something for very little money.

Do you like my new top? I got it for peanuts yesterday, at a clearance sale.

**Get something out of your system** - To do something you have wanted to do so that you can feel relieved and move on.

Anne was quite wild when she was younger, but she wanted to get things out of her system.

**Get the go-ahead** - To get permission to proceed.

Don't worry! We got the go-head for the project from the boss yesterday. We can start it very soon.

**Get the green light** - To get permission to proceed.

We got the green light to move forward with the project. Let's get started!

**Get the hang of it** - To become proficient in an activity or task.

It took me a few months to get the hang of my new hobby.

**Get the message** - To understand what is communicated.

I wish that Ashley would get the message and realize that I don't want to go out every weekend.

**Get the sack** - To be fired from one's job.

The new employee got the sack the other day. Yes, he got fired.

**Get this show on the road** - To get something started.

Let's get started! It's time to get this show on the road.

**Get to the bottom of something** - To understand all the aspects and origins of something.

We're determined to find out what caused all of this. We'll get to the bottom of it.

**Get to the point** - To more clearly and promptly express what one is saying.

She always takes a long time to explain things. It would be better if she made more of an effort to get to the point.

**Get up on the wrong side of bed** - To wake up in a bad mood or to be in a bad mood first thing in the morning.

I think Cecilia got out of the wrong side of bed this morning. She was in a terrible mood when I saw her!

**Get wind of something** - To hear news of something that has been kept secret.

I finally got wind of the plans that they are making. I couldn't find out anything about them before.

**Get with it** - To become more alert and make more of an effort to understand what is going on.

Look, you don't seem to be keeping up with what you need to know. It's time to get with it.

**Get your act together** - Start doing better or you will be in trouble.

Robert was in trouble at work. His boss said he had better get his act together or he might get fired.

**Get your dander up** - For something to make you upset.

Nicholas made everyone really frustrated and angry that day. He really got our dander up!

**Get your goat** - To make someone annoyed or angry.

My friends are nice people but they really frustrated me yesterday. They certainly got my goat when they laughed at my new haircut.

**Get your head around it** - To come to understand something.

This is a really tricky subject. I'm having trouble getting my head around it.

**Getting by** - Managing to survive, especially financially.

Ben isn't very happy in his job. He's only making enough to get by. He wants to be more financially successful.

**Getting on my last nerve** - Something is annoying you to the point that you feel you might lose your temper.

This movie is so stupid that it's annoying. I'm telling you, that scene really got on my last nerve.

**Getting on my nerves** - Something is making you feel annoyed.

That song is getting on my nerves. I've already heard it five times today.

**Get-up-and-go** - Physical energy.

I didn't have enough get-up-and-go to finish it quickly. I lacked the energy.

**Give a run for one's money** - To present a significant challenge to someone.

William didn't end up winning the contest but he gave his opponent a real run for his money.

**Give props to** - To express appreciation for someone.

That is a challenging academic program. I give props to everyone who has completed it.

**Give someone a hard time** - To cause difficulty for someone.

The kids gave their parents a hard time when they weren't allowed to go to Disney World.

**Give someone a piece of my mind** - To tell someone you strongly disagree with them and disapprove of something they've done or that they think.

I gave the salesperson a piece of my mind the other day when I went in to get a refund for the top I had purchased. All the stitching came out when I washed it!

**Give someone a song and dance** - To waste someone's time instead of giving them an explanation or something else that they require.

I asked for an explanation for what happened the other day, but all I got was a song and dance. They didn't take responsibility for anything.

**Give someone short shrift** - To give only a very short amount of time to someone.

Sarah gave her friend the short shrift. She wouldn't spend enough time with her and wouldn't listen to what she had to say.

**Give someone the benefit of the doubt** - To trust what someone says until you see proof that you shouldn't.

Susan gave her friend the benefit of the doubt. She had no reason to disbelieve what she said.

**Give someone the cold shoulder** - To ignore or act dismissively toward someone.

She had looked forward to seeing her old friend at the reunion, and was surprised she was given the cold shoulder.

**Give them the slip** - To escape or get away from someone.

The college students didn't want to see their professor, so they gave him the slip and left the classroom before he saw them.

**Go against the grain** - To act in a way that is different from the people around you and to follow your own path.

Rose was an independent thinker. She was never afraid to go against the grain and do what she thought was right, even if others disagreed with her.

**Go around in circles** - To keep trying to do the same thing, with little to no progress.

I'm sorry, but we just couldn't get it done. We kept going around in circles, trying to decide what we could do to fix the situation.

**Go back to the drawing board** - To completely start over.

I don't think this has turned out very well. We'd better go back to the drawing board.

**Go bananas** - To go crazy.

They got so excited and acted so strangely that I almost started to wonder if they'd gone bananas!

**Go belly up** - For a business to fail.

The store around the corner went belly up just a few months after it opened.

**Go bonkers** - To go crazy.

She went bonkers when she found out that she failed the exam.

**Go cold turkey** - To suddenly and completely stop a practice, often smoking or drinking.

Laureen had smoked for ten years and knew that she had to quit. She had tried to go cold turkey several times but hadn't succeeded, so she decided to find some help.

**Go down in flames** - To fail in a spectacular way.

I thought my plans would work out but, sadly, everything went down in flames.

**Go fly a kite** - To go away; to leave someone alone.

Joseph got angry at his friend the other day and told him to go fly a kite.

**Go fry an egg** - To go away; to leave someone alone.

Anthony was in a bad mood yesterday. When I tried to talk to him, he got mad at me and told me to go fry an egg!

**Go haywire** - To become erratic and behave very strangely.

Joe and Tom were acting really strangely last week. I told people that they had gone haywire!

**Go it alone** - To do something alone, with little or no help.

We decided to go it alone with the business. We knew we could do it by ourselves.

**Go off half-cocked** - To try to do something without being properly prepared for it.

I made sure to read the instruction booklet and understand what I was doing before I tried. I didn't want to go off half-cocked.



**Go off the deep end** - To panic or act irrationally.

I was really worried about Alex the other day. It seemed like he was about to go off the deep end after he learned the bad news.

**Go on a wild goose chase** - To undertake a pointless endeavor.

Connie went out to run some errands and ended up going on a wild goose chase. There was one item on her list that she couldn't find anywhere.

**Go out of one's way** - To make an extra effort to do something for someone else.

I went out of my way to help her study for the final exam. I didn't have to do that, but wanted to be of assistance.

**Go out on a limb** - To put oneself in a difficult position just to help someone else or to assist with something.

Derek went on a limb for me. He didn't have to help me get out of the situation but he did, even though it caused him some difficulties.

**Go overboard** - To do something in excess.

I'm afraid I might have gone overboard with my shopping the other day! I bought a designer handbag and designer shoes!

**Go postal** - To go crazy in an aggressive way.

Lydia didn't tell me about what was happening. Maybe she was afraid that I'd go postal? Just kidding!

**Go south** - When something starts to go badly.

Everything with the new venture seemed to be going so well, but it suddenly started to go south.

**Go the extra mile** - To do more than is required.

Meredith always went the extra mile with her job. That's why she was considered such a great employee.

**Go the whole hog** - Do the whole thing and go to the fullest extent.

Her daughter decided she wanted to go the whole hog with her upcoming birthday party. She wanted it to be really exciting and to have everything you could imagine.

**Go through it with a fine-tooth comb** - To explore a topic, or object, in an extremely thorough way.

The detectives looked at the situation extremely carefully. They went through it with a fine-tooth comb.

**Go to hell in a handbasket** - Headed for disaster or deteriorating significantly.

Have you looked at the building project on the corner lately? It really seems like it's going to hell in a handbasket.

**Go to pieces/Fall to pieces** - To feel frantic and/or not be able to cope with something.

Poor Nicole! She seemed to fall to pieces the other day when her boyfriend broke up with her.

**Go to the dogs** - To significantly deteriorate in condition or circumstances.

Mike was terrified when he found out that he'd lost his job. He was afraid that he'd end up going to the dogs.

**Go to town** - To do something very enthusiastically or to get permission to go overboard.

They told me to go to town with what I wanted to do. They liked my enthusiasm.

**Go up in smoke** - There's a possibility of something disappearing or significantly deteriorating.

Linda was afraid that her chances of getting her dream job had gone up in smoke. It seemed like they'd been destroyed.

**Go with the flow** - To take an easygoing attitude and just go along with whatever is happening.

Robert overreacted a bit at first and got pretty upset about the situation, but he decided to try to just go with the flow.

**Goes without saying** - Something is obvious and therefore doesn't really need to be said.

It goes without saying that I'll want to relax this weekend. You see how tired I am.

**Golden age** - The most wonderful period of a stretch of time.

Ava loved her time in college. She considered it the golden age of her life.

**Golden opportunity** - An incredible opportunity.

The job offer was a golden opportunity.

**Good egg** - Someone who is generally a good and reliable person but who has some peculiarities or eccentricities.

He's can be little odd on occasion, but it's definitely a good egg. He's very sweet and just a little awkward.

**Good for you!** - That's great and you should be proud of yourself.

You got an A+ on your exam? Good for you. That's amazing!

**Good riddance** - To be glad that something or someone one dislikes is gone.

They are gone now? Good riddance! They were so rude to me.

**Good things come to those who wait** - If you're patient, you are likely to eventually be rewarded.

Don't lose heart! Good things come to those who wait. You're sure to find good career opportunities soon. Just keep trying!

**Good to know** - That's useful to be aware of.

Oh, you're going this weekend? Good to know. I might go too, then.

**Goody, goody gumdrops** - An expression usually used by children. A child (especially a girl) who is very good and never misbehaves.

Our son said that there's a girl in his class who never, ever misbehaves and who always helps the teacher during recess. He calls her a goody, goody gumdrop, but I told him he should be like that, too.

**Goof off** - To act in a silly way and to take a break from more serious things.

The professor became annoyed when some of the students in his class wouldn't stop goofing off.

**Got off scot-free** - To not be held responsible for something.

I couldn't believe it when they got off scot-free! They did something serious that deserved to be punished.

**Got the third degree** - To be questioned intensely and persistently.

Her parents gave her the third degree when she came home too late the other night. They asked her questions for at least an hour.

**Got their hackles up** - To make upset or to offend.

That thing Anthony said really got my hackles up. I have never felt so insulted in my life!

**Go-to-guy** - The person you go to for help with a certain endeavor or issue. He's their go-to-guy for office equipment problems. He's a great repairman.

**Grasping at straws** - Desperate to find solutions.

They're having a difficult time. They've been grasping at straws, desperate to find a solution.

**Graveyard shift** - A work shift between about midnight and eight in the morning, when most other people are asleep.

They found out that they'd need to work the graveyard first when they first started their new job. They weren't looking forward to having to work all night!

**Gravy train** - Something that allows people to make lots of money with hardly any, or no, effort.

The people in the town didn't trust their local officials. They felt they were corrupt and riding a gravy train.

**Gray area** - Something that cannot really be thought of in black-and-white terms. There are both bad and good aspects to the situation.

My opinion was that it was a gray area. It was neither completely good nor completely bad.

**Grease monkey** - A mechanic (this expression might be considered dismissive if said to a mechanic).

The mechanic seemed offended when I called him a grease monkey. I won't do that again.

**Greased lightning** - Very fast.

The race car was like greased lightning! It was amazingly fast.

**Great minds think alike** - Intelligent people often have the same ideas.

Wow, I can't believe we both had the same idea at the same time! Great minds think alike!

**Green around the gills** - Feeling nauseous or sick to your stomach.

Sophia often got motion sickness in cars. After a few minutes on the highway, she'd be green around the gills.

**Green room** - A room where people wait before they go on a TV or radio show.

The stars of the show are waiting in the green room. They're ready to go on.

**Green thumb** - Talent with gardening.

Louise always has such a beautiful garden. She has a green thumb.

**Green with envy** - To be extremely jealous or envious.

My friends were green with envy when they saw my new designer shoes.

**Grin and bear it** - To deal with something and endure it without complaint.

I was upset when they told me to just grin and bear it. This problem is interfering with my life.

**Guinea pig** - Someone who considers himself or herself to be experimented on in some way.

They felt as if they'd been used as guinea pigs when they realized the new product had been released without the company knowing whether or not it was actually safe to use.

**Gung ho** – Enthusiastic.

Tommy is certainly gung ho about his upcoming vacation in the Caribbean. He's so enthusiastic. We're a bit jealous!

**Gut feeling** - An intuition.

I just had a gut feeling that I shouldn't go shopping today. I'm not sure why. It was just my intuition.

**Hair of the dog** - An alcoholic beverage of some kind taken in an attempt to cure a hangover.

Bill woke up with a terrible hangover. He didn't make the wisest decision, however, when he had some hair of the dog. That drink just made it worse.

**Hair's breadth** - A very narrow space.

I felt there was only a hair's breadth of difference between the two approaches. They seemed almost exactly the same.

**Half a mind to do something** - Thinking about doing something.

I have half a mind to learn how to play tennis. All my friends love the sport and I wish I could take part in it with them.

**Half the battle** - Half of the effort or work required.

Learning how to do this is half the battle. Once you've become good at it, you'll be able to work much more quickly.

**Half-baked** - Inadequately thought-out or planned.

I think it's a terrible plan. Honestly, it's half-baked. Didn't anyone think it out?

**Hammering out a deal** - To negotiate and arrive at a deal.

They managed to hammer out a great deal with the salesperson.

**Hand in glove** - Very close.

The two parts of the business worked hand in glove. They were necessary for each other.

**Hand over fist** - Very quickly.

We were surprised by how much money they spent yesterday. It seemed like they were paying out cash hand over fist!

**Hang in there** - Stay determined and persistent.

I know things are difficult right now but hang in there!

**Hang tight** - Just wait for something to happen.

It's okay! Hang tight. It'll definitely happen eventually.

**Happy-go-lucky** - Very cheerful and happy.

Don't worry about him! He's always so happy-go-lucky; it seems like he can deal with almost anything with a smile on his face.

**Hard sell** - To use selling techniques that are relatively aggressive or pushy.



The used car salesperson always used a hard sell when dealing with customers. That's why people tried to avoid him. He was pushy.

**Hard/bitter pill to swallow** - Something that is difficult to take or accept. The fact that he hadn't done well in the course was a bitter pill to swallow. He didn't want to accept it.

**Haste makes waste** - Rushing through something will likely lead to mistakes.

Susan tried to hurry as she made the dress, but her friend advised her that haste makes waste.

**Have an axe to grind** - To be upset about something and to perhaps desire revenge of some kind

Laura definitely has an axe to grind with Lindsey. It seems like Lindsay did something to upset her in the past and she still hasn't let it go.

**Have bats in one's belfry** - Eccentric or crazy in a harmless way.

That professor seems weird. I think he has bats in his belfry!

**Have hell to pay** - To be in severe difficulties.

I'm afraid there could be hell to pay if we don't get this done by the deadline. We'll be in a lot of trouble.

**Have something down pat** - To thoroughly understand something.

Don't worry about Isabella. She has the instructions for the task down pat.

**Have the world by the tail** - To be doing remarkably well with something; to be in control of one's life and prospects.

It seems like Madison has the world by the tail. She appears to be in control of everything and is immensely successful.

**Have time off** - To have time away from work.

Marissa has a bit of time off work. She is planning to use it for a short vacation to a nearby city.

**Have two left feet** - To be clumsy, especially while dancing.

I'm a terrible dancer! I have two left feet.

**Have your head in the clouds** - To fail to concentrate or to live in a dreamworld.

Max always seemed to have his head in the clouds. He never appeared to focus and seemed to live in a dreamworld.

**He has bigger fish to fry** - He/she has more important issues to deal with than what we are currently discussing.

Don't bother him with that problem right now. He is very busy and has bigger fish to fry.

**He who laughs last laughs loudest** - I'll get some kind of revenge for what you have done.

You think that you've outsmarted me, but remember: he who laughs last laughs loudest.

**Head and shoulders above** - Vastly superior.

The literary critic thought that the first book was head and shoulders above the second. It was superior in every way.

**Head honcho** - Someone in the highest position of power within an organization or company.

We told them they would need to ask our boss about it. She's the head honcho, after all, and makes all the important decisions.

**Head in the clouds** - Tending to live in the imagination and not firmly grounded in reality.

Noreen's head is always in the clouds. She seems to live mostly in her imagination. I can't get her to think of practical things.

**Head over heels** - To fall, or to be, deeply in love.

The couple is very much in love. They are head over heels for each other.

**Heads-up** - An update that provides new knowledge or understanding of something.

I asked her to give me a heads-up if anything about the situation changed.

**Hear it on the grapevine** - To hear a rumor about someone or something.

Olivia wondered how Emily had heard about her news. Emily explained that she heard it on the grapevine, through rumors from friends.

**Hear something straight from the horse's mouth** - To hear information directly from the individual involved.

It's true, I promise you. He's going to Europe this summer. I got it straight from the horse's mouth.

**Heebie-jeebies** - A creepy feeling that might make you shudder.

Lizzy hates any kind of spider or insect. They always give her the heebie-jeebies! If she sees one, she'll ask someone else to deal with it!

**Here and there** - Sometimes/occasionally, or in several different places.

I buy new shoes here and there. I don't go shopping very often because trying on new shoes takes too long.

**He's a chip off the old block** - A son who is similar to his father.

Look at him, fishing like he's been doing it forever! I can't believe this is his first try. He must be a chip off the old block.

**He's not playing with a full deck** - He's not very smart.

Derek told me the news, so I'm not sure if I really believe it's true. After all, he's not playing with a full deck.

**He's off his rocker** - Someone who is very irrational, even crazy.

I can't believe he'd run in front of traffic like that! He must be off his rocker.

**High on the hog** - To live in a luxurious way.

Their family has lots of money, and they always seem to live high on the hog. They went on four vacations last year.

**High, wide, and handsome** - Large and impressive.

We couldn't believe it when we saw the house! It is truly high, wide, and handsome. I've never known anyone with such an impressive piece of property.

**Hissy fit** - To get really upset and to show it.

I couldn't believe how upset they got! They never stopped talking loudly; they even shouted about their frustration. For adults, they threw quite a hissy fit.

**Hit it on the nose** - To have a perfect understanding of something or to do something perfectly.

Olivia was very smart. She seemed to get everything right at work, constantly hitting things on the nose.

**Hit me up** - To get in contact with someone. For example to email, text, or call an acquaintance.

Hit me up if you'd like to join the team.

**Hit pay dirt** - To come upon something of significant value.

We were so lucky we found that the other day. We certainly hit pay dirt.

**Hit someone below the belt** - To insult or otherwise treat a person in an unfair way.

I can't believe what Brad said to his best friend. That insult was really below the belt, wasn't it?

**Hit the books** - To study intensely.

I have three exams coming up next week. I'm really nervous and have to hit the books soon.

**Hit the ceiling** - To get extremely angry.

When they asked how she reacted, I had to say the truth: she hit the ceiling! Yes, she was extremely angry.

**Hit the hay** - To go to bed.

I had a long day and I'm so tired. I think I'll hit the hay soon.

**Hit the jackpot** - To come into possession of wealth or something of great value.

Lisa hoped that maybe one day she would win the jackpot on the lottery, and use all her winnings to travel and and luxurious cars.

**Hit the nail on the head** - You've figured out the exact truth.

I haven't been able to figure it out, but you have hit the nail on the head!

**Hit the road** - To start on a journey.

Hurry up! It's time to hit the road if we're going to get there in time.

**Hit the sack** - To go to bed and sleep.

I've had a very long day. I think I'll hit the sack and see you in the morning.

**Hocus-pocus** - Magic of some sort, or perhaps trickery.

I couldn't help but joke that they must have used some hocus-pocus. Why else would their professor give them an extension on the assignment?

**Hold the fort** - To take responsibility for a place or maintain an activity while someone is away.

Could you possibly hold the fort while I go to the store? I just need you to watch my dog.

**Hold your horses** - Wait for a bit before acting.

Hold your horses! You shouldn't send a reply to that email until you've had time to calm down and think about it.

**Hold your tongue** - Stop talking, especially about something specific.

Make sure you hold your tongue about this. I don't want you to mention anything about it to my brother.

**Holding the bag** - Having to be responsible for something.

Kevin ended up holding the bag for the team project. The others just weren't responsible enough.

**Hopping mad** - Extremely angry.

Heather was hopping mad when she found out that her friend had talked about personal business behind her back.

**Horse around** - To act in a silly way.

The kids weren't really fighting. They were just horsing around.

**Horse of a different color** - Something that is very different, especially with regard to a situation or an idea in the context of a debate.

He didn't feel that the situations were comparable. Each was a horse of a different color, he said.

**Hot-button issue** - An issue that people tend to have strong opinions on.

Politics are a hot-button issue in the area. Everyone has an opinion and people get into arguments.

**Hot under the collar** - Angry.

They got hot under the collar when they discovered that someone had deliberately ruined their project.

**Hotshot** - An important and powerful person in a particular place or situation.

He's a local hotshot because of all the businesses he owns. He's very influential.

**How do you like them apples** - An expression used to boast about/gloat over something to someone. Can also be used to express surprise.

Nancy and Alexis didn't get along. They were always competing to see who could be more successful. When Nancy got an amazing new job, she couldn't wait to tell Alexis. "How do you like them apples?" she planned to say.

**Hunky-dory** - Happy and comfortable.

There was no need for you to worry about me being uncomfortable in my hotel room while on vacation. Everything was hunky-dory!

**I can't imagine** - Something is unbelievable or terrible.

I'm sorry to hear that you didn't get into the program on the third try. I just can't imagine.

**I don't have two nickels to rub together** - A drastic lack of money.

My friends said I should go with them on vacation to the islands. I had to explain to them that I don't have two nickels to rub together.

**I suck at something** - I'm terrible or disappointing at something.

I suck at basketball. I can never get the ball in the hoop.

**I wasn't born yesterday** - I am not naïve.

Can you believe that ridiculous trick the salesperson tried to play on me? I wasn't born yesterday!



**Icing on the cake** - Something extra that is good, that comes along with something else that's very good, too.

We're going to France this year, and to put the icing on the cake, we're visiting Spain, too.

**I'd give my right hand to** - Would give up anything to be able to do something or to have something.

She said she'd give her right hand to go to Europe for six months! It was her dream to explore France and Portugal.

**Idle hands are the devil's tools** - Idleness can lead to boredom, and that might result in someone doing stupid or bad things.

What are you doing? Nothing? You should be doing something. Remember that idle hands are the devil's tools.

**If I had a nickel for every time something happened** - A specific thing happens a lot.

If I had a nickel for every time Hannah boasted about her vacations, I'd have a thousand dollars. She is always bragging!

**If worst comes to worst** - If the worst possible scenario happens.

If worst comes to worst, we'll have to do something more drastic to deal with the situation.

**If you can't stand the heat, get out of the kitchen** - If you don't want to deal with the difficulties required to complete a task, then don't bother to do it at all.

Gary was always complaining about the work involved in preparing for his dream career. His instructors told him that if he couldn't stand the heat, to get out of the kitchen! Their declaration made him try harder to deal with it.

**If you play your cards right** - If you do the right things.

If you play your cards right, I think you'll get a promotion at work this year.

**Ignorance is bliss** - It's easier not to know.

Sometimes not knowing everything about a situation can make things easier for you. You know what they say: ignorance is bliss.

**I'm losing it** - I feel like I'm going crazy.

I think I'm losing it! I've forgotten to do the gardening for the last few days in a row.

**In a bind** - To be in a tricky position or situation.

I decided I needed to help my friends. They were in a bind and needed some assistance to get out of it.

**In a jam** - To be in a difficult situation that may be difficult to get out of.

Her best friend was always there for her. She could always count on her when she was in a jam.

**In a nutshell** - In a concise way.

It would take me a long time to explain the whole thing, so I'll just put it in a nutshell for you and be brief.

**In a pinch** - If necessary, for example, in an emergency.

I realized I didn't have one of the ingredients in the recipe, but I looked online and found out I could use a substitute in a pinch.

**In a rut** - Stuck in a mundane routine.

Edward realized he was in a rut with his job. The work was boring and he wanted to look for a change.

**In charge of** - To have ultimate authority over something, someone, or a group of people.

Our teacher left the most responsible student in charge while he left the classroom for a moment.

**In full swing** - At the highest level of intensity or activity.

The summer season was in full swing at the tourist destination when they arrived for their holiday.

**In high gear** - To get into a much faster pace.

Angela's plans are going exactly as she wanted. Everything seems to be going into high gear.

**In hot water** - In trouble.

He has made a lot of mistakes on the accounts, so I think he's going to be in hot water at work.

**In my book** - In my opinion.

You asked me for my opinion, and so I'll tell you. In my book, you shouldn't go out dancing tonight when you have a test in two days.

**In my element** - In an area in which one feels comfortable and/or knowledgeable.

Danielle was really in her element when teaching music. She was so good at it, and it made her feel good about herself.

**In seventh heaven** - To feel blissfully happy, especially about a certain situation or outcome.

The kids were in seventh heaven when they found out they were going to Disney World this summer.

**In spades** - There is a lot of something.

She had been hoping her project would be well-received and was pleased with how successful it was. She got praise in spades!

**In stitches** - Laughing uncontrollably.

The comedian had me in stitches with his hilarious jokes.

**In the bag** - Certain to be successful.

Don't worry about our presentation tomorrow. It's in the bag! We're sure to do great, as we've prepared so carefully.

**In the black** - To have more money than you owe.

Audrey is really happy that her finances are back in order again. She says it feels so good to finally be in the black.

**In the boondocks** - In a very isolated and rural area.

Her family lived out in the boondocks. That's why it was hard to get to, and find, their house.

**In the chips/money** - To have (probably unexpectedly) received—or to be about to receive—a large, or relatively large, amount of money.

We're going to have lots of fun when we go on our trip. We're in the chips, so we'll have plenty to spend!

**In the doghouse** - Someone is mad at you and probably ignoring you.  
Mark is in the doghouse right now. His girlfriend is really angry with him.

**In the heat of the moment** - Feeling negatively overwhelmed by current circumstances.

He ended up blurting something out that he shouldn't have during the meeting. It was in the heat of the moment. He didn't take the time to think it through first.

**In the least** - At all.

I don't think he wants to be a doctor in the least. He's not interested in science.

**In the long run** - Over the long-term.

I know it's a difficult decision to make, but I think it'll be the right one in the long run. Eventually, you'll see the benefits.

**In the loop** - To be aware of what is going on.

I'm sick right now, but I've asked my co-workers to keep me in the loop about what is going on at the office.

**In the nick of time** - Just in time.

We arrived at the theatre in the nick of time—just one minute before the show was scheduled to start.

**In the pink** - To be healthy or in excellent condition.

No need to worry about Jacqueline. She's in the pink right now.

**In the red** - To be in debt.

Tom's in the red for quite a bit of money because he overspent on his cruise.

**In the sticks** - In a rural area with not much going on.

It was a much longer drive to the dinner party last night than we had anticipated. Their house is way out in the sticks!

**In the way** - Some kind of obstruction.

There were lots of people in the way when we were trying to get into the popular nightclub.

**It ain't over till the fat lady sings** - This has not ended yet.

She thinks that she will definitely win the contest, but it's not over till the fat lady sings.

**It is a poor workman who blames his tools** - Don't cast blame elsewhere if you can't do the job right.

They did a really bad job on the roof and blamed other factors. I told them it's a poor workman who blames his tools.

**It is always darkest before the dawn** - The most difficult times come before much better ones.

I know you're going through a really terrible time, but try to stay positive. Remember that it's always darkest before the dawn.

**It takes one to know one** - If you call me a name, you must be what you have called me.

Bullies called the little boy names. He told them that it takes one to know one.

**It takes two to tango** - Both people are responsible; you cannot place the blame on just one person.

Jane tried to blame the whole thing on Anna, but everyone knows that it takes two to tango.

**Itchy feet** - Feeling restless and wanting to get up and move around.

The presentation went on for a very long time. I enjoyed it, but I must admit I got itchy feet about an hour in.

**It's a piece of cake** - Something that is very simple and easy to do.

I did that project for a course last year. Don't worry about it. It's a piece of cake.

**It's a scorcher** - It's a hot day.

We're in the middle of a heat wave here. Today is a scorcher!

**It's crunch time** - An important project or some other task must be completed very soon.

Things are extremely busy at work at the moment. Many deadlines are coming up quickly. It's crunch time!

**It's in the bag** - Something is secure or certain.

There's no need to worry about it. It's in the bag and sure to be successful.

**It's no skin off my nose** - Something that doesn't bother, or negatively affect, me.

Diane was worried that I would be upset about it. She was surprised when I told her it was no skin off my nose.

**It's not rocket science** - It's not difficult to understand.

This furniture is easy to put together. It's not rocket science.

**It's raining cats and dogs** - It's raining heavily outside.

I don't think they'll go for a walk this morning. Have you looked outside?  
It's raining cats and dogs!

**Ivory tower** - To work and exist in a space that is held above the concerns of the rest of society. This phrase is usually applied to professors in a college or university.

He doesn't understand anything about real life. He's spent the last thirty years in an ivory tower.

**Jaywalking** - Crossing the street at a place other than the crosswalk.

You should try not to jaywalk. It could be dangerous. You're probably better off crossing at the crosswalk, instead.

**Johnny-come-lately** - Someone who is new to a place or situation. Tends to be said with sarcasm.

I'm not worried about the competition his new business will pose. He's just a Jonny-come-lately.



**Joined at the hip** - Always, or almost always, with a certain person.

Lynn and Margaret are really close friends. It seems like they're always together. I say that they're joined at the hip.

**Joshing me** - Fooling me about something.

Are you sure it's true? Or are you just joshing me and this is a joke?

**Jump down someone's throat** - To get really angry with someone and express that emotion, perhaps in an aggressive way.

Why are you jumping down my throat like that! There's no need to be so defensive or upset.

**Jump on the bandwagon** - To do what everyone else is doing, or to follow a trend.

Alan tried to give the impression that he really enjoyed his trendy new hobby, but I think he was just jumping on the bandwagon.

**Jump the gun** - To start too quickly, either without adequate preparation or at the wrong time.

Too late, I realized that I had really jumped the gun with submitting my application. I should have spent more time on my resume.

**Jump through hoops** - To do things that don't seem to make much sense (or be strictly necessary), just because they're required

You're required to jump through a lot of hoops in order to get your professional license.

**Junk food** - Unhealthy, usually heavily processed food (such as candy).

Andrea made a resolution to stop eating so much junk food. She was determined to improve her health.

**Jury is still out** - A decision hasn't been made yet.

I've asked my friends what they think I should do about my situation, but no one has answered yet. It seems that the jury is still out.

**Just a moment** - Please wait a moment or two.

Yes, I can put you through to his extension. Just a moment, please.

**Just around the corner** - Very close by.

Don't worry, the store is close enough to walk to. Just around the corner.

**Just now** - Something has recently occurred, perhaps within the last few seconds or minutes.

Oh, I wish you'd come earlier! He was here just now but left really quickly.

**Keep body and soul together** - To earn enough money to stay alive.

It's not the best of jobs, but it's enough to live on and keep body and soul together.

**Keep it under control** - To control a situation.

Don't worry about the problem. We'll keep it under control.

**Keep it under wraps** - To keep something a secret.

Please keep this under wraps until I decide how to handle the situation.

**Keep me posted/Keep me in the loop** - To keep in contact and/or to consistently let someone know what you're doing and/or where you are.

I asked my friend to keep me in the loop about what she's doing this weekend. She promised she'd keep me posted.

**Keep my cool** - To stay calm.

I managed to keep my cool even when everyone criticized me for no reason.

**Keep my head above water** - To manage to survive adversity, especially with regard to finances.

They're having some financial difficulties, but they're managing to keep their heads above water. Though they're paying their bills, they aren't able to save very much, if anything.

**Keep my nose to the grindstone** - To remain focused on hard work.

I'm going to keep my nose to the grindstone today. I've got lots of work to do.

**Keep someone at arm's length** - To keep someone at a distance.

I'd recommend keeping them at arm's length. I'm not sure if they're trustworthy and I think you should keep your distance.

**Keep something at bay** - To keep something at a distance.

Oliver was hoping that his healthy diet would keep the flu at bay like it usually did, but this year his plan failed.

**Keep something under one's hat** - To keep something private or secret.

Please just keep it under your hat for now. I don't want anyone else to know.

**Keep the ball rolling** - To keep something going or to make sure it continues.

Could you please keep the ball rolling on this project for me while I'm away on vacation? If you could, I'd appreciate it!

**Keep up with** - To match someone else in terms of progress or success.  
Maira was careful to try to keep up with her co-workers' achievements.

**Keep you posted** - To keep someone notified of what is happening.  
I'll keep you posted on what happens with the situation.

**Keep your chin up** - To keep a positive and optimistic frame of mind.  
I know things have been difficult lately but you've got to keep your chin up!  
Things will get better soon.

**Keep your head** - Maintain your sense of logic and be sensible.  
I told her it's essential that she keep her head when dealing with all this stress. It will be difficult, but it's necessary.

**Keep your mouth shut** - Stay quiet about something.  
I need you to keep your mouth shut about this situation. Don't tell anyone about it.

**Keep your nose clean** - Behave well and stay out of trouble.  
From now on, you need to stay out of trouble. Keep your nose clean.

**Keep your wits about you** - Stay aware of the situation you are in and be ready to react if you need to.  
I advised them to keep their wits about them when walking through that area. It can be quite dangerous.

**Keeping up with the Joneses** - To try to keep up with other people in terms of wealth and material possessions.

I feel sorry for that family. They spent so much money just trying to keep up with the Joneses, and now they're in a lot of debt. How silly of them to think that they needed to copy their neighbor and have three sports cars!

**Kept in the dark** - To be kept unaware of something.

They kept me in the dark about their real plans for the trip. I thought that was very unfair, as I deserved to know the details.

**Keyed up** - To be tense and anxious, perhaps in anticipation of something.

Justin was a bit keyed up yesterday. He has an interview coming up soon, and he really needs this job.

**Kick up your heels** – Celebrate.

Mia and Ava decided they would have a good time this weekend. They wanted to celebrate, really kick up their heels!

**Kill the mood** - To do something that ruins someone else's mood.

We were having a fun time at the party until Margaret arrived. She really killed the mood.

**Kill two birds with one stone** - To accomplish two tasks with one action.

Elizabeth decided to run another errand while she was in the area. By doing so, she killed two birds with one stone.

**Kit and caboodle** - Everything, or all things, involved in something.

Wow! You packed a lot of luggage for this trip. You seem to have packed the whole kit and caboodle!

**Knee-jerk reaction** - An automatic, unthinking reaction.

I wish Walter would think more about how he responds to things. He always seems to give a knee-jerk reaction.

**Knee-high to a grasshopper** - Extremely young and small.

My grandfather said he was knee-high to a grasshopper when he started to learn how to ride a bike.

**Knock into a cocked hat** - Something that is made useless or debunked.

The scientist knocked their theory into a cocked hat. He totally disproved it.

**Knock it off** - Stop it.

Knock it off! You're being too silly.

**Knock on wood** - To tap your knuckle on wood in an effort to avoid bad luck.

I hope the roof stays okay for the remainder of the winter. Knock on wood!

**Knock someone's socks off** - To surprise and impress someone.

Your presentation knocked our socks off! Everyone was talking about it afterward.

**Know the ins and outs** - To have a detailed understanding of something.

It didn't take long to train her. She seemed to know all the ins and outs of the job within a couple of weeks.

**Know the ropes** - To understand what to do and how to do it.

They made sure the new hire was trained by someone who really knew the ropes in the department.

**Know which way the wind is blowing** - To comprehend a situation (generally negative).

I was thinking about applying to work at that company, but I wanted to wait and see which way the wind was blowing. It seems to be in trouble.

**Know your onions** - To be extremely knowledgeable on a topic.

He's an expert on this topic. Without question, he knows his onions!

**Know zip** - To know nothing.

He knows zip on the subject. There's no need to consider his opinion.

**Knuckle under** - To give in or be defeated.

Unfortunately, Ryan ended up knuckling under with all the pressure. He gave in before the contest was even over.

**Labor of love** - Something one loves to do, especially for the benefit of someone one loves.

Don't worry about all the time I spent knitting this sweater. It was a labor of love.

**Laid off** - To lose one's job.

James found out that he is getting laid off from his job. He's really worried, as he won't have an income and will have to look for a new position.

**Lap of luxury** - To be in an extremely luxurious situation.

The Smith family is extremely wealthy and lives in the lap of luxury. They have a mansion and two summer homes.

**Last but not least** - Something that is saved for last, but is not necessarily less important than whatever has come before it.

We're having a delicious dinner tonight. And, last but not least, we're going to enjoy some lovely ice cream.

**Last straw** - The latest problem in a series of problems. Something that leads someone to finally lose their patience.

Mr. Johnson said that Tom's sloppy work this past week was the last straw. He was going to be fired.

**Last-ditch effort** - A final, perhaps desperate, effort at something.

He decided to make a last-ditch effort to fix the web site. He didn't know if he'd be successful, but he was going to give it his best shot.

**Laugh all the way to the bank** - To gain money, most likely in a dishonest manner, and to feel smug about it.

No wonder the owner of that fraudulent company is so happy. He must be laughing all the way to the bank.

**Lay an egg** - To do something that is embarrassing.

I'm afraid I'll lay an egg during the play tomorrow. I just hope I get my lines right.

**Lay down the law** - To set rules, probably strict ones.

The parents decided they needed to lay down the law when their kids misbehaved too badly.

**Lead someone around by the nose** - To compel someone to do something, especially through manipulation or bullying.



We don't like the way that she leads all her friends around by the nose. She's always bossing them around and telling them what to do.

**Learn by rote** - To memorize something.

In the past, students tended to have to learn most things by rote.

**Learn the ropes** - To learn how to do something—especially, to learn how to do well in a new job

It will take a while for the new trainees to learn the ropes and become full employees.

**Learned my lesson** - To have learned from an experience, probably one caused by a mistake.

Noah learned his lesson about planning ahead when he ran out of time to study for his test.

**Leave me alone** - I want to be alone, so please stop talking to me; please go somewhere else, somewhere out of my sight.

Look, please just leave me alone. I don't want to talk about this right now.

**Leave no stone unturned** - To look in every possible place.

I promise that I'll leave no stone unturned while looking for that book you want.

**Leave someone high and dry** - To leave someone in a difficult position and to take things away from them.

They left him high and dry. It was extremely unfair for them to treat him like that.

**Leave well enough alone** – Don't involve yourself in a situation that already seems stable and decent enough.

Don't bother her with that tonight. Leave well enough alone.

**Left me in the lurch** - To be left in a difficult situation.

I was left in the lurch by my co-workers the other day. They left the entire remainder of the work to me.

**Left out in the cold** - Left out of something pleasant, or excluded from an opportunity.

He wanted to invest in the endeavor but was left out in the cold. He couldn't find the opportunity.

**Left someone behind** - To leave someone somewhere and to go somewhere else.

The group of teenagers acted unpleasantly toward their friend. They even left her behind when they decided to go downtown.

**Lend me your ear** - Please listen to me.

If you'd lend me your ear for a few moments, I'd like to play my newest song for you.

**Lend someone a hand** - To help someone.

Lauren gave Debbie a hand with her homework. She often helped her in this way.

**Let bygones be bygones** - Leave past grievances in the past.

James and Jonathan had argued a lot in the past, but they decided to let bygones be bygones and to focus on the future.

**Let sleeping dogs lie** - Stop talking about an issue.

Jessica told me that she still wants to try to address the issue with Molly. But I said it might be better to let sleeping dogs lie.

**Let someone off the hook** - To refrain from holding someone accountable for something.

He was angry that his friend was late returning his book, but he let him off the hook.

**Let the cat out of the bag** - To reveal a secret.

The release date for the book remained a secret for a long time, but someone finally let the cat out of the bag.

**Let the dust settle** - To wait for circumstances to return to normal after something significant has happened.

Brad's family has just had a major crisis and they're still recovering. I told him to try to wait for the dust to settle before he makes any major decisions.

**Let your hair down** - Let yourself relax.

Don't worry about all the things you need to do tomorrow. Just let your hair down and enjoy yourself.

**Letter perfect** - Precisely correct.

Everything she does is letter perfect. She's a great student and does wonderfully on her tests.

**Level playing field** - Fair and even circumstances, especially when it comes to anything with an element of competition.

I feel that there should be a level playing field in school. Teachers and others should make an effort to ensure that all students have the things they

need to succeed.

**Life of Riley** - A very comfortable, and probably luxurious, life.

They won the lottery last year. That's why they can live the life of Riley now.

**Light of my life** - Someone you love who makes your life more cheerful and that you like to be around.

Brenda said that her daughter is the light of her life. She is always talking about her.

**Like a chicken with its head cut off** - To behave in a frenzied manner.

Marcie acted like a chicken with its head cut off when she heard the news. She got really anxious and ran around in a panic!

**Like a deer in headlights** - To have a stunned or confused look on one's face.

He looked like a deer in headlights when they confronted him about the money.

**Like clockwork** - On a very regular basis.

The event happened every other Friday night, like clockwork.

**Like nailing jello to the wall** - A very difficult or impossible task.

Figuring out what we should do was really difficult. It was like nailing jello to the wall.

**Like pulling teeth** - Extremely difficult; often refers to a difficulty in getting someone to do something.

Trying to make the store manager realize that I deserved a refund was like pulling teeth. I was there for half an hour!

**Like riding a bicycle** - Something you never forget, or stop knowing, how to do.

She was worried that she wouldn't remember how to solve the problem. However, she soon realized that it was a bit like riding a bike. You never forget.

**Like taking candy from a baby** - Extremely easy to do, especially something that involves convincing someone to do, or to give, something. Convincing Paul to give me the information I needed was easy. It was like taking candy from a baby.

**Like there is no tomorrow** - Living in the moment.

They went from store to store yesterday, shopping as if there was no tomorrow.

**Like water off a duck's back** - It doesn't bother me.

The other students thought they were bothering me with their teasing. They didn't realize it was like water off a duck's back.

**Live and learn** - I will learn from a mistake that I have made.

I made a huge mistake the other day. But live and learn.

**Live and let live** - To be non-judgmental of others.

I believe in everyone living the way that they feel is best for them. Live and let live!

**Live it up** - Have lots of fun.

I think it's time to live it up this weekend. We've been working so hard.

**Living the dream** - Living a wonderful life, the type one would dream of. I asked how they felt after they won the lottery. They said they're living the dream!

**Lock, stock, and barrel** - Absolutely everything involved.

Can you believe it? They thought they were going to take everything, lock, stock, and barrel!

**Long face** - A sad facial expression.

Why the long face? I thought you felt happy now.

**Long in the tooth** - Older or elderly.

Bill has been feeling a bit long in the tooth lately. He thinks he's old now.

**Long time no see!** - I haven't seen you in a long time.

Long time no see! I think we last saw each other a couple of years ago.

**Look before you leap** - Think carefully before acting or taking a risk.

Look before you leap! You don't want to leave your job for a new one without first thinking it out properly.

**Look like a million bucks/dollars** - To look very attractive, usually well-dressed.

Tricia took three hours to get ready for the dance. Her family told her she looked like a million bucks!

**Look like the cat that swallowed the canary/got the cream** - To look smugly pleased or satisfied with oneself.

Kathryn was so pleased with herself. She looked like the cat that swallowed the canary!

**Loose cannon** - A person who is unpredictable and difficult to control, and who will probably inadvertently cause problems.

Everyone in the office thought that David was a loose cannon. He was extremely unpredictable and seemed likely to cause problems.

**Lose one's shirt** - To lose a large amount of money, probably one's financial security as a whole.

The businesspeople ended up losing their shirt on the new venture. It was a disaster.

**Lose touch** - To discontinue contact with someone, often unintentionally.

The two friends lost touch over the years. They no longer exchanged letters or holiday cards.

**Lose your marbles** - To go crazy.

He was quite rude about his friend. He said that he thought that he'd lost his marbles and couldn't think rationally anymore.

**Lose your touch** - To lose one's ability or skill in a specific area.

I was worried that I might have lost my touch when I failed to convince my friend of something the other day. I've always been so good at persuading people.

**Lost at sea** - To feel confused about a situation, and to not know what to do.

He said he feels lost at sea right now. He can't decide what path to take.

**Lost my head** - To become overcome with emotion or anger; to act irrationally.

I'm afraid I lost my head the other day when I found out about my friend's betrayal. The news shocked me.

**Low-hanging fruit** - Something that is easy to take advantage of.

It turned out that they saw me as low-hanging fruit. They thought they could take advantage of my kindness.

**Luck out** - To be very lucky.

She lucked out when she won \$1,000 on a scratch card.

**Lucky break** - Something very lucky has happened.

The actress got a lucky break when she found a way to get to the audition and then won the part.

**Lucky dog** - A lucky person.

You lucky dog! I can't believe you won that sports car!

**Mad as a hornet** - Crazy or frantic.

He's as mad as a hornet! Did you see the way he was acting? It was crazy.

**Made for each other** - When a couple is extremely well-suited to each other.

The couple has so much in common that people say they are made for each other.



**Made my hair stand on end** - To be very frightened.

The horror movie was terrifying! It made my hair stand on end.

**Make a beeline for** - To go directly toward.

Whenever his friend comes over, he always makes a beeline for his video game system! They enjoy playing together.

**Make a big stink** - To complain loudly.

The customer made a big stink when he complained about the bad quality of the product.

**Make a long story short** - To recount something in a brief way, leaving out unnecessary details.

Yes, we plan to go there again. To make a long story short, we had an amazing time!

**Make a mountain out of a molehill** - To exaggerate about the significance or severity of circumstances.

Sabrina was really overreacting. She was making a mountain out of a molehill.

**Make a pit stop** - To stop somewhere for a short period of time, usually during a long journey.

We made a lot of pit stops on the road trip, to go to the bathroom and to eat.

**Make a scene** - To create a fuss of some kind that draws the attention of others in a negative way.

Stop talking so loudly! I know you're upset, but you are making a scene. People are looking.

**Make ends meet** - To have enough money for daily expenses over the course of a month.

Kim was finding it difficult to make ends meet because of her limited income.

**Make eyes at someone** - To look at someone in a flirtatious way.

She was making eyes at the guy she had a crush on all evening.

**Make hay while the sun shines** - To make full use of a good situation.

We considered putting off taking advantage of the situation. After a while, though, we realized that we should make hay while the sun was still shining.

**Make no bones about** - To say something in a very definite way that doesn't allow for objections.

Diane made no bones about how she felt. She described it very clearly and no one was about to argue with her.

**Make out like a bandit** - To have success in a venture, especially one involving money or other benefits.

Ethan was an amazing negotiator. It seemed like he was always making out like a bandit in business deals.

**Make out what someone said** - Discern what someone said.

She was at the other end of the room and I couldn't make out what she said; she spoke too softly for me to hear.

**Make the grade** - To be satisfactory or to meet necessary standards.

Lara said she didn't end up making the grade in her evaluation the other day. Her work isn't up to standard, so she has to improve.

**Make tracks** - To promptly or quickly leave.

I think it's time we made tracks. I have an appointment this afternoon and if I don't leave now, I might be late.

**Make waves** - To create any controversy or trouble.

I was thinking about expressing my disagreement on the issue, but I really want to avoid making waves right now.

**Make yourself at home** - An invitation to feel comfortable in someone else's home.

I'll probably have to go out right after you arrive, but I want you to make yourself at home.

**Man's best friend** - A dog.

He loves his dog. Well, you know what they say! A dog is man's best friend.

**Mark time** - To wait out the minimum time you need to put in.

We got the impression that the new employee was just marking time. He didn't seem to be trying very hard, and his gaze kept focusing on the clock.

**Meat and potatoes** - The basics of something or a situation.

Let's not talk about the details of the matter right now. We'll just focus on the meat and potatoes.

**Meet halfway** - To understand one another's positions in an argument or situation, and to make compromises accordingly.

I think it's time for Janet and Ellen to meet halfway on this issue. They are both right in some ways and wrong in others, and they should compromise.

**Mickey mouse job** - A job that is considered insignificant, perhaps even useless.

People said I had a mickey mouse job in customer service. They thought it was unimportant and wouldn't lead to any other opportunities.

**Midas touch** - To be able to make money much more easily than other people.

It seems like everything she touches turns to gold; she makes so much money and doesn't even have to try that hard. She has the Midas touch.

**Middle of the road** - A position (especially political) that is not at either extreme of the spectrum. It is pretty much in the middle.

Ben didn't really have many opinions on politics, but he could say that the ones he had were generally middle of the road.

**Mind your own beeswax** - Mind your own business and refrain from interfering in other people's concerns.

Why are you asking me all of these questions? It's my private business. Mind your own beeswax!

**Miss the boat** - To miss out on an opportunity because you're too late.

I don't want to miss the boat on this investment opportunity.

**Mom-and-pop** - A small family-run business, or a tiny establishment, such as a corner shop.

Have you ever been to the little store around the corner? It's a real classic mom-and-pop shop.

**Money burns a hole in someone's pocket** - When someone feels the need to spend money simply because they have it.

It's hard for Tim to save money. He says that money always burns a hole in his pocket and he wants to spend it right away.

**Money talks** - Money can be used to gain power and leverage; there is a strong implication of corruption.

Many people wondered how he got the contract; it didn't seem so mysterious to me. Money talks.

**Money to burn** - To have large amounts of extra money.

They've apparently got money to burn. They've done a huge number of unnecessary renovations to their house, just to make it more luxurious, and they have four sports cars!

**More bang for your buck** - To get a lot of value for your money.

The saleswoman told Andrea she should go with the other TV because it would give more bang for her buck.

**More than I bargained for** - More than I expected.

The amount of work Douglas was assigned was more than he had bargained for. He felt overwhelmed.

**More than meets the eye** - There is more to it than you think.

Don't underestimate what could happen. There's a lot more than meets the eye here.

**Move some things around** - To make some adjustments.

Let me see if I can move some things around in my schedule so that I can book you an appointment for next week.

**Mumbo jumbo** - Meaningless words or nonsense.

I heard about the theory, but honestly I felt it was really a bunch of mumbo jumbo. It sounded like nonsense to me.

**Mum's the word** - Stay quiet and don't talk about it.

I trusted you when I told you all about my secret yesterday, so please remember that mum's the word. Don't tell anyone else about it.

**My bad** - It was my mistake and I take responsibility for it.

Sorry about that. I thought that what I said about the store I recommended was true. My bad.

**My eyes are bigger than my stomach** - I wanted to eat more than my stomach could handle.

I put way too much on my plate at the buffet. Apparently, my eyes were bigger than my stomach.

**My hands are tied** - I cannot do anything to change the situation because I am not the one who can make the decision.

I'm sorry but I can't change the meeting time. My hands are tied; my boss is the one who makes those decisions.

**My heart is set on** - It means a lot to me to do something.

My heart is set on going to Europe this year. I just hope it will be possible.

**My neck of the woods** - Where one lives.

Ashley couldn't find any fashionable clothing stores near her. She always complained about the limited shopping options in her neck of the woods.

**Nest egg** - Savings that are meant for use in the future.

They had a large nest egg. There wasn't a need to worry about their finances. They'd probably be quite wealthy when they retired.

**Never bite the hand that feeds you** - Don't hurt someone who helps you.

I don't think you should say anything potentially hurtful to him. Remember, it's best not to bite the hand that feeds you.

**New kid on the block** - New person in an area, or a person newly involved in something.

Marie had a hard time when she first started her new job. She felt like the new kid on the block and excluded from the other employees' friendships.

**New York minute** - A minute that seems to pass especially quickly in a hectic environment.

It seemed like less than a New York minute before my book was stolen! I barely had time to blink.

**Night owl** - Someone who tends to stay up very late at night.

I am a bit of a night owl and tend to stay up after everyone else goes to sleep.

**Nip something in the bud** - To prevent something from getting worse by cutting it off at the very beginning.

When we were kids in elementary school, our teachers always said that bad behavior needed to be nipped in the bud.

**Nitty-gritty** - The most fundamental aspects of something. Can have a negative connotation.

Melvin felt awkward about talking about the subject with his co-worker, but eventually he felt the need to get down to the nitty-gritty and address it.

**No big deal** - Not anything of significance.

Don't worry about the issue. It's no big deal. No need to worry.

**No dice** - It's not going to happen.

I hoped to get the time off to go to the Caribbean this year, but no dice. My vacation will have to wait.

**No pain, no gain** - You need to exert yourself to accomplish things.

You should go on morning runs to get fit. No pain, no gain!

**No rhyme or reason** - Without explanation or logic.

With no rhyme or reason, my friend decided to move across the country.

**No-brainer** - Easy and simple.

It was easy for me to help Joey with his math problem. It was a no-brainer. I didn't tell him that, though! He might have been insulted.

**Not a spark of decency** - To have no decency at all, or no manners or consideration.

Hannah was really upset with how her friend reacted to her crisis. She felt he didn't have a spark of decency.

**Not have a leg to stand on** - Lacking the ability to support an argument.

The competitor in the debate doesn't have a leg to stand on with his argument.



**Not one's cup of tea** - Something that doesn't fit one's taste, or that one doesn't enjoy or like.

I never watch football. It's never really been my cup of tea.

**Not playing with a full deck** - Not very intelligent.

James is really difficult to work with. He doesn't seem to know what he's doing. I don't think he's playing with a full deck. He doesn't seem very smart.

**Not what it's cracked up to be** - Something is not as good or impressive as people have implied.

Yes, we went to that amusement park last summer. It's not what it's cracked up to be though. There weren't very many rides.

**Not worth a red cent** - Something that lacks any value.

I wish I could sell my car, but the truth is it's not worth a red cent! Who would buy it?

**Nothing to write home about** - Nothing exciting or extraordinary.

The meal at the famous restaurant was quite good, but it was nothing to write home about. It simply wasn't as special as I thought it would be.

**Number cruncher** - Someone who works with numbers, especially in a tedious way, in accounting or finance.

The accountant knew he was much more than just a number cruncher. For that reason, he got annoyed when people called him that.

**Odd man out** - Person who doesn't fit in or who is somehow left out.

Nathan always felt like he was the odd man out when his friends got together. He just didn't think he really belonged.

**Off-color** - For something to be a little odd or perhaps objectionable in some way.

The comedian's jokes were a little off-color. They made some people feel uncomfortable.

**Off on the wrong foot** - To start something the wrong way or in a way that is disadvantageous to you.

Mike got off on the wrong foot with his interview. He arrived late and was inadvertently rude to the employer about something!

**Off the cuff** - To do something spontaneously, or without much preparation.

She made her speech completely off the cuff, without a single note to refer to. I could never do that.

**Off the hook** - To not be held responsible for something.

I'm so relieved. The teacher is letting me off the hook even though my homework is late. He's not marking down my grade.

**Off the record** - To saying something that you don't want the other person to tell anyone else about.

Can I tell you something off the record? Peggy said that she has decided on a new career, but she isn't sure yet when she'll be handing in her notice at her current job.

**Off the top of my head** - Without any previous consideration.

Off the top of my head, I'd say that red is my favorite color. I've never really thought about it, though.

**Off the wall** - Bizarre or crazy.

We all agreed that his reaction was totally off the wall! It didn't make any sense and defied logic.

**Old school** - To be old-fashioned in some way.

He's kind of old school. He always listens to records and he hates downloading music.

**On a shoestring** - On an extremely limited budget.

They are going on vacation, but it's going to be on a shoestring. They don't have very much money right now.

**On a tear** - A time of emotional reactivity, energy, or heightened emotions. Can also mean a period of drug use or drunkenness.

He was on a tear when we last saw him. That's how upset he was.

**On a treadmill** - Stuck in a routine that is boring and dull.

Grace feels she's on a treadmill with her current routine. She wants to change her life but doesn't know how.

**On cloud nine** - Extremely happy or blissful.

We've all been on cloud nine since hearing the wonderful news.

**On pins and needles** - To be nervous or anxious, especially in anticipation of something.

She's on pins and needles about her interview tomorrow. She's very nervous.

**On the ball** - Being alert and competent when completing a task.

Annabelle is definitely going to win the employee of the year award. She's so on the ball in everything she does.

**On the blink** - Not working as it should. Usually applies to a piece of equipment.

The stove is on the blink! That's why we can't make any soup tonight.

**On the cheap** - For little money and/or on a limited budget.

I'm going, but I'm going to do it on the cheap. I don't want to spend too much money.

**On the dot** - To get somewhere right on time.

I got to the appointment at 3:15 p.m. on the dot. I didn't even have to wait for the receptionist to call my name!

**On the fence** - Having a difficult time making a decision about something.

He's still on the fence about whether he should go to France or Spain.

**On the fly** - Doing something else while on the go.

She just left to go to work, but she said she'd pick up a newspaper on the fly.

**On the fritz** - Something is not working as it should.

It was a tricky day in the office yesterday. It seemed like every piece of equipment was on the fritz! We could hardly get anything done.

**On the house** - Free, at the expense of the restaurant or bar.

The bartender gave us some drinks on the house!

**On the level** - Honest.

I truly feel that the salesperson was on the level when she claimed that this would suit my needs perfectly.

**On the line** - In jeopardy in some way.

They put all their resources on the line with the new business. It ended up being a mistake.

**On the same page** - To think the same way.

We're definitely on the same page when it comes to the office party. We agree on what should be done.

**On the spot** - Right here, at this time.

He made the decision on the spot; He did not need any additional time to consider the alternatives.

**On the spur of the moment** - Spontaneously and without prior planning.

I know I didn't tell you we'd be going for a country drive; we just decided to go there on the spur of the moment!

**On the top of the world** - Feeling very happy and perhaps triumphant.

My brother was feeling on the top of the world when he found out that he got his dream job.

**On the up and up** - Fair and ethical.

We were worried at first that the book might have been dishonest, but now we believe that it is actually on the up and up. The contents seem unbiased and well-researched.

**On the warpath** - Extremely angry and wanting to confront someone.

Watch out for Dan! He's extremely angry about the work you did and is on the warpath. He's such a difficult boss.

**On thin ice** - You have already made several mistakes and if you make another one, you will be in trouble.

My teacher told me that I'm on thin ice. If I do poorly on another assignment, I could get a failing grade.

**Once and for all** - Indicating a permanent answer or solution.

Once and for all, I wish you would admit that you were wrong on that subject.

**Once bitten, twice shy** - Something unpleasant has happened, so now you exercise more cautious to prevent the same thing from happening again.

I don't think I'll shop at that store again. They ripped me off on something a few years ago. Once bitten, twice shy.

**Once in a blue moon** - Something that very rarely happens.

I like ice cream, but I only have it once in a blue moon because it's unhealthy.

**One fell swoop** - In one quick and sweeping effort.

It's true! We got all of this done in one fell swoop this morning.

**One-trick pony** - Someone who is only really good at one thing.

Jeremy is kind of a one-trick pony. He's only good at that one thing and nothing else.

**Open a can of worms** - To open up discussion or contemplation of a new topic, or a new situation, probably a tricky one.

Hannah discouraged us from asking our friends that question. She said it would open up a whole new can of worms.

**Out of date** - Not relevant or applicable today; if in relation to food, no longer safe to eat.

We told her that the skirt she wanted to buy was a bit out of date. It seemed like something that would have been fashionable many years ago.

**Out of left field** - Unrelated to the issue at hand, or whatever is being discussed.

Katie made a really strange comment yesterday. It didn't have anything to do with what we were talking about. It was just so out of left field!

**Out of my hands** - Out of your control.

It's out of my hands now. There's nothing I can do to make changes to the project.

**Out of order** - No longer working or effective; in some contexts, unacceptable.

Don't bother putting your money in that vending machine. It's out of order and won't give you a candy bar.

**Out of the blue** - Something that occurs unexpectedly and abruptly.

That letter really came from out of the blue! I hadn't heard from her in years!

**Out of the frying pan and into the fire** - Things were bad, but now they'll get worse.

He thought his new job would be easier than his previous one, but it isn't. It's actually harder! Out of the frying pan and into the fire.

**Out of the question** - Not possible or acceptable.

It's simply out of the question for him to buy that. He can't afford it.

**Out of the woods** - A difficult situation has improved or become easier to deal with. The most challenging part is over.

The horrible time the Maxwell family has been going through might end soon, but they're not quite out of the woods yet.

**Out of this world** - Extraordinary.

The celebration was out of this world. It was extraordinary and something I'll never forget.

**Out on the town** - To go out and enjoy yourself.

They went out on the town last night, visiting a few nightclubs and just having fun.

**Out to lunch** - Confused or unaware of circumstances or reality, or perhaps absentminded.

I tried to talk to my professor this morning but he seemed very distracted. I've heard of professors being a little absentminded, but this guy is out to lunch!

**Over my dead body** - To forbid something.

You think you're going there by yourself? Over my dead body! You're only twelve years old.

**Packed like sardines** - People in a very crowded and limited space.



It was a nightmare on the subway yesterday. We were packed like sardines!

**Pain in the neck** - Something that is causing you problems.

She decided to stop talking to Jack. She thought he was a pain in the neck.

**Paint the town red** - To go out and enjoy a city's nightlife.

The group of friends are going out for drinks tonight. They said they're determined to paint the town red!

**Paint you a picture** - Explain something in detail.

I painted a picture of the situation for him by describing everything in great detail.

**Pandora's box** - A situation that involves unexpected consequences and problems.

We considered talking about the issue, but we changed our minds when we decided that it would be like opening Pandora's box.

**Par for the course** - To be expected.

That was nothing out of the ordinary. It was all par for the course.

**Party animal** - Someone who goes to parties frequently and acts wildly, perhaps binge drinking and/or being loud.

Some of the college students were party animals. They spent too much time drinking and not enough time studying.

**Pass the buck** - To put the blame or responsibility on someone else.

Max felt too frustrated to call and lodge a complaint with the company. He said it would be a waste of time; they always seem to find a way to pass the

buck.

**Passed the course** - Did all the work necessary for a course and earned an acceptable final grade.

I passed the course! I'm so relieved—I needed to get a “C” or better in order to take the next math class.

**Pay a pretty penny** - Pay a lot of money for something.

Emily paid a pretty penny for her new living room set. It was quite expensive.

**Pay an arm and a leg** - To pay a huge amount of money for something.

He loves luxurious cars and has always wanted a Mercedes, but he realized that he'd have to pay an arm and a leg to get one.

**Pay the piper** - Deal with the consequences of one's actions and pay for one's mistakes.

It's time to pay the piper. You've made a lot of mistakes lately and there are going to be consequences.

**Pay through the nose** - To pay a large amount of money that is too much for what is gained.

We were excited about the idea of getting the new car until we realized that we'd have to pay through the nose to own it. It was so overpriced!

**Pedal to the metal** - To go really fast, probably while driving a vehicle.

He really put the pedal to the metal, didn't he? I think he drove too fast. He was probably over the speed limit.

**Peg out** - To die. Used humorously and never in reference to someone who has actually died, as that would be insensitive.

They both love to travel. There are many places they want to go before they finally peg out!

**Pencil/paper pusher** - Someone who works in an office (for example, a bureaucrat) who mainly does paperwork and probably doesn't care about advancing in his or her career.

We aren't very concerned about his opinion. He's just a pencil pusher in the office.

**Peter out** - To slowly fade in importance or significance.

The sound we heard coming from outside finally started to peter out. We hoped it would end soon.

**Pick up the tab** - Pay for things (such as meals or drinks) that other people have consumed, for example, in a restaurant.

My friend is always very generous. She always offers to pick up the tab for both us when we go out for something to eat.

**Pick up your ears** - To listen more closely and carefully.

No, you're not listening properly. Pick up your ears!

**Pie in the sky** - An unrealistic dream.

Mandy had always wanted to be famous for something. As she got older, though, she realized that her dream was just a pie in the sky.

**Pig out** - To eat too much food in one sitting.

We pigged out on junk food last night while watching movies! We ate three large bags of chips, lots of chocolates, and popcorn!

**Pigheaded** - Ridiculously stubborn.

Tom is so pigheaded! It's really frustrating to deal with him because he'll never change his mind about anything.

**Pipe down** - To be more quiet or to stop talking completely.

Look, you need to pipe down! You've been speaking far too loudly.

**Pipe dream** - An unrealistic dream.

Robert loved football and wanted to play it professionally some day. As he grew older though, he came to realize that this was just a pipe dream.

**Pitch dark** - Extremely dark outside.

The group was too nervous to go outside because it was pitch dark and they could hardly see anything.

**Pitch in** - To help with an endeavor.

Adam felt bad watching everyone else do all the work. He decided that he should pitch in.

**Play by ear** - To deal with things as they come.

We haven't decided yet whether we'll go to the beach tomorrow or go shopping. I think we'll play it by ear.

**Play devil's advocate** - To argue for the opposite side, simply for argument's sake.

I didn't really believe what I said when we were debating. I was just playing devil's advocate.

**Play hardball** - To act or work in a competitive and aggressive, or even ruthless, way (especially in business or politics).

The businessperson really played hardball in that meeting yesterday. She was tough!

**Play second fiddle** - To come second to someone else in something.

I had to play second fiddle to Jonathan in running the office.

**Playing dumb** - Pretending that you don't know or understand something.

Stop playing dumb! I know you heard about what happened. Why are you pretending that you didn't?

**Playing with fire** - To be do something or to act in a way (especially in a careless way) that could lead to a worrisome or even dangerous situation.

She advised me to stop challenging my boss on the matter, saying that I was probably playing with fire and that I could end up losing my job as a result.

**Poker face** - A face without any sort of expression; others find it difficult or impossible to figure out the person's mood or thoughts.

Mark had an excellent poker face. If he wanted to hide it, no one could tell what he was thinking or how he felt.

**Pound the pavement** - To look for a job by walking the pavement, going from place to place.

Hannah had been looking for a job for a very long time and was trying to think of new approaches. A friend suggested just pounding the pavement for a while and seeing what she could find.

**Power dressing** - To dress in a highly professional way.

I always recommend power dressing when you start work in any sort of formal office. It will help get you noticed and recognized.

**Pride comes before a fall** - Being too arrogant can lead to significant problems, perhaps even your downfall.

I tried to warn her; I told her to remember that pride comes before a fall. She wouldn't listen. I think she's just too arrogant.

**Pull his/her own weight** - Do the work needed to support oneself and fulfill one's needs.

Noah was a very hard worker. He always pulled his weight.

**Pull it off** - To achieve something that had seemed very difficult to do.

Tim's essay is due tomorrow and he hasn't even started. I don't think he'll be able to pull it off in time.

**Pull out all the stops** - To do everything possible to accomplish a goal. This might involve sparing no expense and using every resource.

I decided to pull out all the stops when I bought my new outfit. I wanted to be the best-dressed person at the upcoming event.

**Pull rank** - To take advantage of the superior position that one holds.

Don't pull rank with me. You're not above me in this organization.

**Pull someone's leg** - To make a joke and momentarily fool or trick someone.

I didn't actually go skydiving last weekend. I was just pulling your leg!

**Pull strings** - To use one's influence to make something happen that probably wouldn't have taken place otherwise.

It turned out that he pulled strings to get his brother the job. That's really unfair.

**Pull the plug** - To end something or put a stop to it.

They pulled the plug on our team's project. They said they lost the funding.

**Pull the wool over your eyes** - When someone sets out to deceive you.

I was frustrated and upset with Arthur for hiding the truth from me. He really pulled the wool over my eyes and now it's caused me problems.

**Pull up stakes** - To gather up your household and move somewhere else.

They expected everyone to just pull up stakes and move to the other side of the country for the sake of the company. This seems very unreasonable.

**Pull your chain** - To annoy you in some way, or to be unfair to you.

I decided to cut down on the amount of time I spent with Sydney. She was constantly pulling my chain and I couldn't relax with her.

**Pull yourself together** - To calm yourself and become focused again.

Beth was really upset after the phone call, but it didn't take long for her to pull herself together.

**Pulled a rabbit out of one's hat** - To do something amazing and unexpected.

Ruth rendered us speechless the other day. She pulled a rabbit out of her hat and found money for the trip.

**Pulled the rug out from under me** - Someone does or says something that makes you feel disoriented and confused about what to do next.

The company president's announcement about job losses pulled the rug out from under me. I'm really worried now.

**Pulling my leg** - Joking with me or playing a joke on me.

I don't believe what you said about going scuba diving. You were pulling me leg, weren't you?

**Puppy love** - Love between two young and innocent people.

Everyone said her feelings for her first boyfriend were just puppy love.

**Pushing your luck** - Doing something that could cause you to get into trouble.

You're pushing your luck right now. You should start acting more sensibly.

**Put a sock in it** - Be quiet; stop making noise.

They told Paul to put a sock in it! He was being too noisy.

**Put in their place** - To rebuke someone and/or make them feel more humble.

Natalie put Lisa in her place for insinuating that she wasn't very smart. She asked how it could be possible that Lisa was more intelligent when she had earned better marks in every course.

**Put it on the back burner** - To make something a lower priority for a while.

I have so much to do that I think I'll need to put this task on the back burner for a while; I'll get back to it later.

**Put my foot down** - To assert one's authority about something.



The parents put their foot down with their son; they declared that he wasn't allowed to have any more new toys this month.

**Put on my thinking cap** - To try to think more intensely and carefully about something.

It's time for us to put our thinking caps on, so that we can come up with some new ideas for the class trip.

**Put our heads together** - Two people share thoughts and try to come up with new ideas or a solution to something.

Let's put our heads together and come up with a solution to this problem.

**Put someone on the spot** - To put someone in a tricky situation and/or to embarrass him or her.

It's wasn't fair for Katie to put me on the spot like she did yesterday. How was I supposed to know that she'd suddenly ask me to travel with her next week, and that she'd expect me to give her an answer right away?

**Put something down in black and white** - To put something in writing.

They were glad to have the contract. It was good to have everything in black and white.

**Put something into practice** - To act on the basis of some kind of idea or principle.

She's all talk. Why doesn't she put any of her ideas into practice?

**Put something on ice** - To put something on hold with the plan to resume it later.

The project was going well but other more pressing things came up, so we put it on ice.

**Put the squeeze/screws on someone** - To put intense pressure on someone to carry out a task, or to coerce or force someone to make something happen.

I don't like it when people unfairly put the squeeze on me. If I can't do it, I can't do it!

**Put your finger on it** - To properly identify and comprehend something. You really put your finger on it when you said that he needs to go back to school. He won't progress in his career unless he upgrades his qualifications.

**Put your money where your mouth is** - To actually invest in something that you claim to believe in.

I think he's all talk when he describes his business plans. He needs to put his money where his mouth is.

**Quality time** - Time spent with someone you care about.

The parents were worried that they weren't spending enough quality time with their kids. They decided to take them out to an amusement park that weekend, an activity that they could all enjoy together.

**Racking my brain** - Thinking intensely, trying to recall or remember something.

I've been racking my brain for hours, but I just can't seem to remember where I left that notebook.

**Rain on someone's parade** - To ruin someone's enthusiasm for something, especially with a negative opinion.

I don't mean to rain on your parade, but one person on the committee didn't like your work.

**Rain or shine** - No matter what.

Don't worry! The mail will surely be delivered, rain or shine.

**Raise Cain** - Make a disturbance or a huge public conflict.

Zack was always really difficult. It seemed like the slightest little thing ended up with him raising Cain and making a gigantic fuss!

**Read someone the riot act** - To exert authority over someone who is behaving in a way that is out of line.

They read their son the riot act when he had a huge party in the house and caused lots of damage.

**Real McCoy** - A genuine thing.

Yes, that's the real McCoy. It's definitely a genuine bottle of that perfume.

**Red flag** - A sign that acts as a warning of some kind.

When I look back, I see there were quite a few red flags that should have made me reconsider my decision.

**Red herring** - A clue that is meant to distract or mislead.

It took us a while to figure out that the clue was just a red herring. We had to start all over with our investigation.

**Red in the face** - Bashful or embarrassed and blushing as a result.

Joseph tripped on his way to the podium. That's why he was so red in the face.

**Red letter day** - A memorable day, probably a pleasant one.

They knew that the day of their upcoming meeting was sure to be a red letter day. They felt certain that it would go wonderfully and help progress their careers.

**Rest on one's laurels** - To rely on the prestige brought about by previous accomplishments, and not bothering to do any more.

The artist was accused of resting on his laurels; he did not try to create any other great achievements.

**Right this way** - Please come in this direction.

I'll bring you to the correct area. Just follow me. Right this way.

**Ring a bell** - Recognition of something.

Someone I recently met said they know you. Her name is Deanna. Does that ring a bell?

**Rinky-dink** - Cheap and low-quality.

We thought it was a rinky-dink sort of bike. It didn't even come with a basket!.

**Roll out the red carpet** - To welcome someone (usually a prominent person or celebrity) in a very grand way.

The red carpet was rolled out for all the celebrities when they arrived at the awards ceremony.

**Rolling in it** - Very wealthy.

That family owns property on every continent. They're rolling in it.

**Rome wasn't built in a day** - You can't accomplish a big task in too short a period of time.

I felt bad about not finishing the project in time, but then my friends reminded me that Rome wasn't built in a day.

**Rub elbows with someone** - To socially interact with someone who has prestige and a higher social position.

We were really excited about the party. We expected to rub elbows with lots of prominent people.

**Ruffle feathers** - To cause annoyance or irritation.

The article was very entertaining, but it certainly ruffled some feathers.

**Rule of thumb** - A general rule or convention.

The teacher told her students that it was a good rule of thumb to regularly wash the chalkboard.

**Run amok** - To behave in a very disorderly or frenzied manner.

They were really ran amok last night outside. They made so much noise that the neighbors called the police!

**Run circles around someone** - To be more knowledgeable or skilled than someone, and to make them confused and unable to keep up as a consequence.

They ran circles around the other students in their knowledge of math. They were incredibly skilled for their age.

**Run errands** - To go out and do things you need to do.

I've got to run some errands this morning. They're all really important, but quite boring.

**Run its course** - To let something proceed as it would without intervention.

We think that the best thing would be to let the situation run its course. Intervening wouldn't really accomplish anything.

**Run like the wind** - To run really quickly.

I'm determined to run like the wind during the next track and field meet.

**Run-of-the-mill** - Common and ordinary.

I liked the sweater that Amy pointed out, but I honestly felt that it was a bit run-of-the-mill. I could probably find one like it anywhere.

**Run one's mouth off** - To speak too much on something that you shouldn't.

I don't want to run my mouth off, but I don't think you should go there tomorrow—and here's why.

**Run out of steam** - To run out of energy.

I tried to finish rearranging the furniture yesterday, but I ran out of steam and had to get some sleep.

**Run the show** - To be in charge of something.

The manager was determined to run the show in his office.

**Running on fumes** - To stay awake even when you're exhausted.

The student had stayed up for hours studying and felt like he needed to go to sleep soon. He was running on fumes.

**Sail close to the wind** - To push boundaries or act in a way that is just within the limits of social and legal acceptability.

Jacob decided that one of his employees had been sailing close to the wind with how much she had been slacking off. He thought he might have to fire

her.

**Sales pitch** - A presentation or speech made in an attempt to persuade someone to purchase a product.

His sales pitches were pretty weak. I don't think they'd convince anyone to buy anything. He probably shouldn't dream of a career as a salesperson.

**Salt of the earth** - To be highly moral and honest.

The people of the village were really the salt of the earth. They were so very good and modest.

**Saved by the bell** - To get somewhere at the last possible moment.

I was almost late for class yesterday morning but was saved by the bell! I sat down in my seat just as the clock struck ten.

**Saved someone's skin** - Saved someone from having to deal with some kind of disaster.

Erin saved my skin. She got me out of a lot of trouble.

**Saving for a rainy day** - To save money, especially keeping in mind that you might need it to address any future difficulties.

He won \$500 in a contest, but he's not spending the money. He's going to save it for a rainy day.

**Say uncle** - To admit that you have been defeated.

I know you're too out of breath to race me again. If you insist, I bet you'll say uncle before we're done!

**Say your piece** - Say what you want to say; give your opinion.

Okay, I have some time to listen to you now. Go ahead and say your piece.

**Scapegoat** - Someone who is blamed for things that they're not actually responsible for.

They weren't very nice to her. They seemed to make her the scapegoat all the time, blaming her for everything they did wrong.

**Scare the pants off someone** - To frighten someone.

The haunted house ride scared the pants off everyone who went on it.

**School of thought** - A way of thinking, especially with regard to an academic subject.

The professor explained that he belonged to a different school of thought on the subject than many other academics.

**School someone in something** - To make someone more informed in an area.

Chloe really schooled her brother in manners yesterday! She told him that he's rude and needs to shape up.

**Scot-free** - To get away with something without facing any consequences.

Everyone was very surprised and disappointed to see them get off scot-free; their actions had hurt a lot of people.

**Screw up** - To make a mistake.

We screwed up on the project. That's why we got a failing grade.



**Sea legs** - Having sea legs means to maintain your balance and not get sea sickness on a ship, but it can also refer to someone becoming good at a job or task without feeling overwhelmed or lacking confidence.

It took quite a while for me to get my sea legs on this job.

**Second-rate (or third- or fourth-rate)** - Of a lower quality or standard.

Noah got upset when people said that he was a second-rate actor.

**Security blanket** - Something that makes you feel safe and secure.

Elise realized that she was using certain things as a security blanket. They made her feel safe and secure, but they were holding her back. She decided to try to be more confident.

**See eye to eye** - To perceive and think about something in the same way as someone else.

After Ava and Emily discussed it for a while, they finally came to an agreement. Now they see eye to eye on the issue.

**See someone's true colors** - To see a person's real character.

I used to think that Ethan was a nice guy, but after knowing him for a while I saw his true colors. He's selfish and can be rude sometimes.

**See the big picture/look at the big picture** - To understand the larger context.

Don't worry about all the little things right now. Try to focus on the big picture.

**See the light** - To finally recognize the truth or reality of something.

A few weeks passed before we were able to make Mandy see the light about her boyfriend. Now she realizes that he is a bit of a jerk.

**See through someone/something** - To have the perceptiveness needed to not be fooled by a disguise or false appearance of some kind.

Judy is always trying to give the impression that she is much more successful than I am, but I see through her. She exaggerates and is not as successful as she seems.

**Sell like hotcakes** - To sell extremely quickly.

The copies of his new book sold like hotcakes! They almost sold out the very first day.

**Sell someone short** - To underestimate someone, especially their capabilities or potential.

You shouldn't sell him short. He's much more talented than you think.

**Set my teeth on edge** - Something makes you feel extremely annoyed, perhaps to the point that you almost lose your patience or temper.

No, I didn't like the movie last night. The actors set my teeth on edge with their cartoonish expressions.

**Shake a leg** - Move more quickly and hurry, especially in the context of getting ready to go somewhere or do something.

We'd better start shaking a leg! I just checked the time and it's much later than I thought. If we don't leave soon, we'll be late for the appointment.

**Shape up or ship out** - Do better or leave.

Ron hasn't been doing very well at his job. His boss told him he needs to shape up or ship out.

**Sharp as a tack** - Very clever and quick-thinking.

Melissa is sharp as a tack. She always knows the answers to every question in class.

**Ships passing in the night** - Two individuals who meet and perhaps spend time together for a very brief period of time; especially used in a romantic context.

The love story was about two people who were like ships passing in the night. They were only able to spend a few hours together before they went their separate ways.

**Shoestring budget** - A very limited budget.

It was hard to organize the formal event on a shoestring budget.

**Shoot from the hip** - To say something in a very direct and honest way.

My best friend, Anna, is really honest and direct. She likes to shoot from the hip on most occasions.

**Shoot hoops** - To play basketball, usually in an unstructured way.

The kids were outside, shooting hoops in the driveway with my basketball.

**Shoot off one's mouth** - To speak in an unwarranted or offensive way.

No need to shoot off your mouth like that! I don't think it's necessary to be so aggressive.

**Shoot the breeze** - To chat in a friendly and inconsequential way.

We had a good time at lunch. We spent our time shooting the breeze and showing each other pictures of our pets!

**Shot in the arm** - Something that suddenly energizes someone or renews their interest in, or concern about, something.

Learning about their expenses last month was definitely a shot in the arm. They realized they'd been spending too much and needed to make some changes.

**Shot in the dark** - To make a guess based on limited information.

She asked me to guess where she was going this weekend, so I took a shot in the dark and said New York. I was wrong. It was San Francisco.

**Show of hands** - To ask people to raise their hand if they are present or if they agree on something.

The teacher wanted to know how many students agreed with the argument, so she asked for a show of hands.

**Sick as a dog** - To be extremely ill with a cold or the flu.

I missed classes last week because I was as sick as a dog. I had a terrible bout of the flu.

**Sit tight** - Wait patiently, try not to worry, and don't act until you hear that you should.

Erin felt really anxious as she waited for the results of her university applications. But she knew she just had to sit tight and hope for the best.

**Sitting like a bump on a log** - Sitting around inactive, especially when other people are busy working.

One student sat like a bump on a log while everyone else ran around the library, looking for the books they needed.

**Sitting pretty** - Doing well and feeling content because of it.

Ethan is doing well financially. He's certainly sitting pretty with his bank account.

**Sixth sense** - A sense of things or a source of perception that isn't based on any of the five senses; often refers to some sort of psychic ability or insight.

She must have used her sixth sense to find her friend's missing earring; it blended completely with the pebbles on the ground.

**Skeleton in the closet** - An event or fact from someone's past that is embarrassing or disgraceful in some way and that he or she tries to keep private. This could refer to an entire family, too.

Mary certainly has some skeletons in the closet. There are lots of things from her past that she likes to hide.

**Skelton crew** - The minimum number of people necessary for something to operate.

Quite a few people called in sick today. We're running the shop with a skeleton crew.

**Skip class/cut class** - To not go to a class that you're supposed to attend.

The kids got in trouble with their parents when it was revealed that they had been skipping class.

**Slap on the wrist** - A very minor punishment, usually too minor for the crime or offence.

I didn't think the punishment was severe enough for what he did. It was a mere slap on the wrist.

**Sleep like a log** - To sleep very soundly.

I slept like a log last night. It had been a really tiring day and I needed my rest.

**Slim chance** - Very unlikely to happen.

There's only a slim chance that you'll get that job. There's a lot of competition and your qualifications aren't the best.

**Slip of the tongue** - To say something you didn't mean to say.

I'm sorry I said that. I didn't mean to! It was a slip of the tongue.

**Slow and steady wins the race** - In the end, being persistent is more important than having speed.

She felt bad that she wasn't as good at sports as some of her classmates, but she decided that she should keep trying. Slow and steady wins the race.

**Small world** - A statement expressing the idea that the world seems so small when you discover that you have mutual connections with others.

It's such a small world! I found out that Mary knows my old friend, Jill, from across the country.

**Smell a rat** - To have the intuition that someone or something isn't quite right.

I think I smell a rat. I'm sure that Daniel is up to something that he shouldn't be.

**Smoke and mirrors** - The use of illusion.

Don't believe everything Mary says about her lifestyle. A lot of it is just smoke and mirrors. She likes to impress people.

**Smoke like a chimney** - To smoke too many cigarettes.

The elderly man had a lot of health problems, mainly because he'd smoked like a chimney since his youth.

**Snowed under** - Busy or overwhelmed with tasks.

He wanted to take part in a fun day with his friends but he was snowed under with work.

**So far so good** - Things have gone well so far.

Luke is happy about how things are going at his new job. So far so good.

**Sold me out** - To tell someone's secret without permission or to report something they did.

Annabelle was extremely upset with her friend for telling her secret. She couldn't believe that she'd sold her out.

**Something is killing me** - Something hurts or adversely affects you.

Amy had a terrible headache yesterday. Several times, she said that her head was killing her.

**Something sucks** - Something is terrible or disappointing.

The movie I saw last night sucked. Don't go to see it.

**Something to crow about** - An accomplishment that you are proud of and that you can boast about.

I don't like to boast, but I do think my accomplishments at work this year have given me a little something to crow about.

**Sour grapes** - When someone criticizes someone or something because they are jealous of them.

Jim complained that Jonathan cheated in the race, but there was no evidence of it and everyone said it must just be sour grapes.

**Speak of the devil** - Someone whom you (or someone else) just spoke about suddenly appears.

Have you spoken to Andy lately? Oh, speak of the devil! He's right over there.

**Spice things up** - To make something more exciting or interesting.

They have always served the same kinds of things at their dinner parties, so they decided to spice things up and try something new.

**Spill the beans** - To reveal a secret.

I don't understand why Rebecca won't tell me what's going on. Why won't she just spill the beans?

**Spin doctor** - Someone who manipulates the communication of information to give a desired impression.

The politician had lots of spin doctors working for him, to help maintain the image he wished to convey.

**Spineless** - To lack courage.

Everyone exclaimed that the leader was spineless when he refused to do what was needed to ensure success. He didn't have the necessary courage.

**Spitting image** - To look just like someone else.

We thought that Louise was the spitting image of her favorite actress.

**Splitting hairs** - To engage in an argument about an insignificant detail.



It was always so tiresome to debate anything with Melissa. She was always splitting hairs, focusing on things that didn't matter.

**Spread too thin** - To have too many responsibilities or tasks at once, and to therefore be unable to properly focus on any of them.

Do you know what the problem was? I was spread too thin. That's why I couldn't fully focus on the project.

**Square meal** - A meal that includes all the food groups, to ensure health. Norah was feeling very hungry. She'd only had snacks throughout the day and felt like it had been ages since she'd had a square meal.

**Squeaky clean** - Extremely clean.

Don't worry about the floor. It's squeaky clean.

**Stab someone in the back** - To betray someone.

Molly told me she was very upset the other day. She'd just found out that her best friend had stabbed her in the back by spreading rumors about her.

**Stand my ground** - To be firm in defending yourself, your interests, and/or your opinions.

She was always trying to dismiss my opinions, but this time I decided to stand my ground and to try to persuade her that I was right.

**Stay in touch** - To keep in regular contact.

I'll miss you while you're away. Make sure to stay in touch.

**Stay on budget** - To maintain costs within the limits of the budget.

We have to make sure that we stay on budget with this venture. We can't afford to do otherwise.

**Steal someone's thunder** - To steal credit for something or to take attention away from someone else.

Her sister had just announced her excellent exam marks to their parents, so Alexis decided to wait a few days before sharing her own good news. She didn't want to steal her sister's thunder.

**Step up your game** - To start to do better at a task.

Danny decided he really needed to step up his game at school. He wasn't doing very well.

**Stew in your own juices** - To feel annoyed, frustrated, or upset and unable to do anything about it.

Joe and Melinda got into an argument. Melinda felt that she was in the right and left Joe to stew in his own juices; she refused to talk to him.

**Stick out like a sore thumb** - To not fit in within a specific group or context.

No matter how hard I tried, I never seemed to fit in at their parties. I always stood out like a sore thumb.

**Stick to your guns** - To retain your position on something in spite of what others say.

I think you need to follow your own ideas and stick to your guns in this situation.

**Sticking points** - Areas of contention.

There were many sticking points in our discussion. That's why it was difficult for us to reach a final agreement.

**Stick-in-the-mud** - Old-fashioned and inflexible.

Mr. Robinson is extremely old-fashioned. He's definitely a stick-in-the-mud.

**Sticky fingers** - The propensity to steal.

They didn't trust him to deal with money because he was known to have sticky fingers. He's a thief.

**Stop on a dime** - To stop accurately and promptly.

Marie was an amazing driver. She almost got into an accident once because of someone else's carelessness, but she was able to stop on a dime and avoid it.

**Street-smart** - To understand the dangers and realities of the streets (especially in more questionable areas) and to act in a cautious manner.

They raised their kids to be street-smart and to know how to avoid getting into dangerous situations.

**Stretch the truth** - To say something that might be partially true but that also has elements of exaggeration in it.

Laura stretched the truth when she told us about her new job. She exaggerated quite a bit about her responsibilities.

**Strike it rich** - To suddenly gain a large amount of money and become wealthy.

During our history course, we learned about an historical figure who struck it rich during the gold rush of the nineteenth century.

**String someone along** - To give someone the false impression that something is going to happen.

Don't string them along. If it's not going to happen, you need to tell them.

**Stuffed shirt** - A person who is pompous and frustrating to deal with.

The businessman was a stuffed shirt. He was conceited and also didn't seem to know what he was talking about.

**Swallow your pride** - To accept and endure something you find humiliating in some way.

I think it's time for you to swallow your pride and accept that job. I know it wasn't what you wanted, but it's better than nothing right now.

**Sweat blood** - To work extremely hard.

We sweated blood working on that project, so we were extremely annoyed when it was criticized.

**Sweating bullets** - To be extremely anxious.

Chris was really anxious about his upcoming math exam. He was sweating bullets about it!

**Take a rain check** - To postpone something.

He received an invitation to meet up with some friends, but he had to take a rain check because he was busy with work.

**Take a shine to something/someone** - To instantly like someone or something.

The teacher took a shine to her new group of students. They all seemed to enthusiastic and polite, and she really liked them.

**Take it easy** - Relax and take care of yourself, or good-bye.

You need to start taking it easy. Your health is suffering because you don't relax enough.

**Take it with a grain of salt/a pinch of salt** - Don't assume that something must be true.

My friend, who is very competitive, told me all about her recent vacation. She said it was incredibly luxurious. I took her story with a grain of salt.

**Take someone at their word** - To believe what someone says without verification or proof.

They took the man at his word when he said that the store was closing.

**Take something by storm** - To overwhelm something or someone.

The new play took the city by storm. Everyone loved it, making it wildly successful.

**Take something in stride** - To accept some sort of trouble or difficulty, and adjust to it as needed.

Joseph was a relaxed guy who tended to take things in stride. Whenever a difficulty arose, he stayed calm and figured out how to deal with it.

**Take the cake** - Amazing (probably in a negative way).

Tim told you that I said I didn't want to play in the game. Well, that really takes the cake! He's the one who pressured me not to participate.

**Take the floor** - To become the center of focus in a room; it usually involves public speaking of some kind.

The main speaker will take the floor at 6 p.m.

**Take the plunge** - To decide to proceed with something, suddenly and perhaps with apprehension.

We weren't sure whether we should make the purchase, but we decided to take the plunge anyway.

**Take the wind out of your sails** - Feeling of disappointment.

Missing out on the trip really took the wind out of my sails.

**Taken for a ride** - Taken advantage of in some way.

My friend lied to me and took advantage of my kindness several times. He really took me for a ride.

**Talk a blue streak** - To talk quickly and for a long time.

The presenter talked a blue streak! He talked so quickly we could barely tell when one sentence ended and a new one began. And his speech seemed to last for hours!

**Talk of the town** - Someone or something a large number of people are talking (probably gossiping) about.

The new movie is the talk of the town everywhere.

**Talk someone's ear off** - To talk to someone excessively, especially about something insignificant.

They talked my ear off this morning. It seemed like they would never stop!

**Talk through one's hat** - To speak ignorantly or foolishly.

I think Kim is just speaking through her hat. What she's saying couldn't be true. I don't think she's deliberately lying, but she's certainly being foolish.

**Talk to someone like a Dutch uncle** - To speak to someone as if they are a close relative, offering (perhaps stern) advice.

My math teacher talked to me like a Dutch uncle today. He gave me study tips and told me I had to start trying harder if I wanted to do well.

**Talk to the hand** - Don't talk to me because I'm not listening (often done while holding up the palm of one's hand).

You want to know what I said to Ken when he spoke to me the other day? I said just one thing: talk to the hand!

**Talk turkey** - To talk in a serious way, most often with regard to a business deal.

The two businesspeople were at dinner, talking turkey about a possible business deal.

**Talking shop** - Talking about one's trade or occupation with another person in the same trade or occupation.

Two electricians were talking shop in the corner of the café.

**Tall order** - Something that is difficult to do or achieve.

Wow! Well, I'll try to do what you're asking but it's a tall order.

**Tall story** - An unlikely story.

The kid tells a lot of tall stories that are full of exaggerations and even lies.

**Tar someone with the same brush** - To assume or say that someone has the same bad characteristics as someone else, probably in the same group.

They always assumed that because Zoe was friends with some people who got in trouble at school, that she must be bad, too. But she wasn't. They

were just tarring her with the same brush.

**Tell me about it** - I already know and/or agree.

Tell me about it! I couldn't agree more with what you said about James being annoyed with Jonathan.

**Test the waters** - To test a situation in some way.

He decided to test the waters a bit before trying to resume his friendship with Mark.

**That hit the spot** - That was exactly what was desired or needed, especially with regard to food or drink.

I find a bowl of hot chicken soup always hits the spot on a winter evening.

**That is to say** - What I mean is.

She doesn't eat very much. That is to say, she has a very small appetite.

**That ship has sailed** - You have missed an opportunity.

No, I'm afraid they're no longer taking applications for the job. Unfortunately, that ship has sailed.

**That's all she wrote** - That is all the person in question has to say about something.

I'm telling you the truth. I've given you all the information that Maxine gave me. That's all she wrote!

**That's the last straw** - This last circumstance/occurrence has caused me to lose patience/give up.

I've had enough of all this. That was the last straw!



**That's wicked** - That's cool, neat, trendy, or impressive. (It depends on the context of the sentence, as wicked can also mean "evil.")

I just love your new sports car. It's wicked!

**The apple of my eye** - Someone who is cherished more than any other person.

Abigail's niece is the apple of her eye. She really loves her and spends lots of time with her.

**The ball is in your court** - It's up to you to make the next decision.

She decided not to contact him again; the ball was in his court now.

**The bee's knees** - The best.

My cousin is so happy with the beautiful dress she bought for the upcoming dance. She thinks it's the bee's knees!

**The best of both worlds** - A situation that incorporates the best elements of different things.

Ben loved chemistry and thought about becoming a chemist, but he also thought he'd be a good teacher. Ultimately, he became a chemistry teacher. It was the best of both worlds.

**The best thing since sliced bread** - An excellent invention.

They decided that the new tech gadget was the best thing since sliced bread.

**The Big Apple** - New York City.

Are you going to the Big Apple this summer? New York City is so exciting!

**The Big Easy** - New Orleans, Louisiana.

The Big Easy is a fascinating city. Everyone should learn about the history of New Orleans.

**The bottom line** - A company or other business's profit.

The CEO was worried about the company's bottom line. It wasn't doing very well.

**The boys in blue** - Police officers.

There are many boys in blue at the festival; obviously, they're there to keep the peace.

**The brush-off/brushed me off** - To dismiss someone or to be dismissed.

I couldn't believe it when they brushed me off. I thought they were my friends, but apparently they're not.

**The burning question** - The most important or significant question.

Sarah said that this was the burning question, but I didn't agree. I thought the other issues were more pressing.

**The cat's meow** - Very nice and impressive.

Wow! That sports car is the cat's meow. Don't you think so?

**The devil is in the details** - Something might appear good when viewed from a distance. Upon closer inspection, however, problems become apparent.

Overall, it sounds like it would be a good contract. But remember, the devil is in the details.

**The early bird gets the worm** - To be ready and to get somewhere or do something early will give you the chance to reap the best results.

Greg thought I was crazy for getting up at five thirty in the morning every day, but I always say that the early bird gets the worm.

**The elephant in the room** - A huge issue that people are trying to ignore and avoid.

The meeting seemed to go well, with everyone giving their input on a variety of issues, but the one thing that wasn't addressed was the elephant in the room: our paychecks!

**The eleventh hour** - At a very late moment in some kind of situation or cycle.

It happened at the eleventh hour. Everyone had thought the contest was over, but then a new contestant suddenly jumped onto the stage.

**The gift of the gab** - The talent of speaking and getting people's attention. The salesperson certainly loved to talk and was good at persuading people! Without a doubt, he had the gift of the gab.

**The last minute** - During the final period of time available before a decision or action is required.

Sinead made her decision at the very last minute. Everyone was worried that she wouldn't make any kind of decision in time.

**The lion's share** - The largest portion of something.

Everyone was annoyed because it seemed like Brandon always got the lion's share of praise from our boss, even though we all worked equally hard.

**The long and short of it** - The point or the outcome.

It's a long story. The long and short of it, though, is that he's coming with us tomorrow. That's what really matters here.

**The munchies** - Desire to eat, usually snacks or junk food.

I have the munchies! I think I'll have some pretzels.

**The other day** - On a day quite recently.

It felt like I'd seen her just the other day, but then I realized that it had been two weeks ago.

**The patience of Job** - To be willing to patiently deal with hardship or to generally have a lot of patience.

She was a wonderful teacher. She really seemed to have the patience of Job when dealing with difficult students.

**The pits** - A negative, disappointing circumstance or circumstances.

Oh, no! You're not going on the trip after all because you're sick? I'm sorry. That's really the pits!

**The pot calling the kettle black** - Someone with the same (or more) faults criticizing someone else.

Can you believe it? She actually had the nerve to criticize me for being too difficult. Talk about the pot calling the kettle black!

**The road less travelled** - A path in life that most other people don't usually take.

People told me they couldn't understand the decision I had made. I smiled and told them I was taking the road less travelled.

**The same wavelength** - To think in the same way as someone else.

Liz and Meg always got along very well. They seemed to be on the same wavelength about everything, and almost always agreed on various issues.

**The school of hard knocks** - Life experience (especially difficult life experiences).

He explained that, while he hadn't gone to university, he had graduated from the school of hard knocks.

**The shoe is on the other foot** - A person is in the same situation as someone else, possibly someone whom they had judged unfairly.

The shoe is on the other foot now. Maybe you can finally understand what I was going through.

**The short end of the stick** - The lesser amount of benefit or reward, or having to do something unpleasant while other people involved do not.

Wow! Judith definitely got the short end of the stick when she was assigned bathroom cleaning duty.

**The squeaky wheel gets the grease** - You have to try to get attention if you need it. You can't just wait and hope that people will help.

Lily was always very assertive; she never hesitated to ask for help when she needed it. After all, she said, the squeaky wheel gets the grease.

**The straight and narrow** - A path of good behavior and morality.

She was a very cautious and moral person, always sticking to the straight and narrow course.

**The tide has turned** - Things have changed.

That actor was once extremely popular. The tide has turned on his career though, and he no longer gets many parts in high-profile movies.

**The tip of the iceberg** - Only a tiny bit of something much larger.

Christopher said that this was only the tip of the iceberg; the company faced even worse problems.

**The whole nine yards** - To go all the way in completing a task.

Their employer demanded that they go the whole nine yards with every project.

**There are clouds on the horizon** - Trouble is going to arrive.

She was feeling really worried. Her friends said that everything was fine, but she was certain that there were clouds on the horizon.

**There are other fish in the sea** - Don't worry if you miss out on the current opportunity. There will be others. Often used with respect to a potential relationship partner.

Don't worry, Patricia. I know you really liked that guy, but there are other fish in the sea.

**There's a method to his madness** - It may seem like a person is crazy, but there are actually clever reasons behind his or her actions.

I know you think I'm crazy for buying so many groceries at once. But there's a method to my madness.

**There's no such thing as a free lunch** - Nothing in life is ever free.

My family often told me that there's no such thing as a free lunch. Everything comes with a price tag.

**They were thrown together** - Brought together unexpectedly.

The friends were first thrown together when they had to team up for a project at school. They've been inseparable ever since.

**Think outside the box** - To think in a unique way.

I think one of the reasons that she is so effective at this job is that she thinks outside the box. She's always coming up with new and unique ideas.

**Third time's a charm** - If you don't succeed with the first two tries, perhaps the third one will prove lucky.

I didn't do very well the last couple of times I played baseball. But you never know, third time's a charm!

**This is the life** - This is a wonderful or luxurious way to live.

Wow, this is the life! I love staying in this luxurious resort.

**Those who live in glass houses shouldn't throw stones** - People with lots of faults should refrain from criticizing others.

Lara was always criticizing her friends for various things, but I say that people in glass houses shouldn't throw stones.

**Three sheets to the wind** - Extremely drunk.

Adam was three sheets to the wind on the first night of his vacation. He had way too much to drink!

**Threw me for a loop** - Something catches you off guard and confuses you.

Wow! That announcement yesterday really threw me for a loop. I wasn't expecting it and I'm still feeling a bit disoriented.

**Through thick and thin** - In both good and bad times.

Janet was experiencing a stressful situation, and I was determined to help her. After all, she had stood by me through thick and thin over the years.

**Throw a curveball/Throw a curve** - To abruptly present something to someone that they will have difficulty dealing with.

Marlene really surprised me with the news the other day. It's definitely going to affect me, too. She threw me a real curveball.

**Throw a monkey wrench into the works** - Doing something that causes problems for an endeavor and can cause it to fail.

He caused a lot of problems for our assignment the other day. What he did really threw a monkey wrench into the works.

**Throw caution to the wind** - Go ahead and take a risk.

I was worried about the cost of the vacation. But I decided that I could find a way to afford it and that I should throw caution to the wind.

**Thrown to the wolves** - Abandoned to deal with a difficult situation.

The executive was thrown to the wolves when he made that mistake. No one would give him any more help.

**Tickled pink** - Happy and excited.

My sister was tickled pink by all the wonderful things people said about her accomplishments.

**Tighten your belt (or belt-tightening)** - To start spending less money than you used to; to be more frugal.

Their income is less than it used to be, so they've decided to do the wise thing and tighten their belts.



**Tilt at windmills** - To fight in opposition of overwhelming odds—in an attempt to accomplish something good and moral—to the point of denying reality.

I tried to tell him that he's just tilting at windmills. Even if he works around-the-clock, he won't be able to accomplish his goals.

**Time flies when you're having fun** - You're less likely to notice time passing when you're having a good time.

Is it really already five o'clock? Time flies when you're having fun!

**Time is money** - Wasting time amounts to wasting money.

He decided he shouldn't go on two vacations this year. There are always many expenses to deal with, and time is money.

**To be a chicken/to chicken out** - To be too afraid.

The kids called their friends chickens for not wanting to climb on the gym equipment. They knew they were too scared.

**To be beside yourself** - To feel extremely emotional with worry, anxiety, or sadness.

My friend was just beside herself with worry about her son. He had to go to the doctor because of a health concern.

**To be closefisted** - Someone who is stingy with money.

Mike is so closefisted! He wouldn't even contribute ten bucks for the upcoming office party.

**To be loaded** - To have a lot money; to be wealthy.

Tim's family never has to worry about money; they're loaded.

**To be named after** - To be named in honor, or in memory, of someone else.  
Melissa was named after her aunt, Melissa Smith.

**To be out of the question** - To be impossible or unacceptable.

They told their kids that going to the new amusement park that weekend was out of the question. After all, they would have lots of homework to do and it would probably be rain, too.

**To be tied up with something or someone** - To be completely occupied with someone or on something.

Francis apologized for not being able to reply to my email. He explained that he'd been tied up all day long with meetings.

**To be up to something** - To be doing something, or planning to do something, that other people aren't expecting or that you perhaps shouldn't.  
Do you think he's up to something? Lately, he's been acting in kind of sneaky way.

**To beat the band** - To do something in an exaggerated or extreme way.

They bought enough soda yesterday to beat the band! Yes, I know we're having a picnic, but it seemed like they bought enough drinks for an entire army.

**To bend someone's ear** - To speak to someone eagerly, especially in order to ask for a favor.

I thought Jake just wanted to chat, but it turned out he wanted to bend my ear; he spent the entire conversation trying to convince me to join his team.

**To black out** - To lose consciousness.

It's very foolish and dangerous to drink so much alcohol that you black out.

**To blow your own horn** - To outwardly praise yourself for something.

I don't mean to blow my own horn, but I think I did really well with that task the other day.

**To bomb** - To fail something.

Cindy bombed her exam. She didn't even get close to a passing grade.

**To box someone in** - To trap someone in a situation, or to put them in circumstances where their options are limited.

I felt boxed in by what they did. My options were so limited and I felt I had to do what they wanted.

**To bug someone** - To annoy someone.

They were really bugging me. It seemed like they were deliberately trying to be annoying.

**To butt in** - To interrupt in a rude manner.

I don't mean to butt in, but I couldn't help but hear what you guys were talking about and I wanted to give my opinion.

**To call it a day** - To stop working for the day.

After we finished writing notes for the next meeting, we decided to call it a day and go home.

**To call someone on the carpet** - To confront someone with whom you're having a conflict.

My boss was tired of dealing with Henry's sloppy ways. He finally called him on the carpet yesterday.

**To carry a torch for someone** - To continue to have an infatuation with someone.

Henrietta claimed that she didn't like her ex-boyfriend anymore, but her friends knew that she still carried a torch for him.

**To come out flat-footed** - To have been unprepared.

Daniel and Matthew came out flat-footed in their presentation. They stumbled over their lines and didn't do well.

**To come out swinging** - To strongly defend oneself as a confrontation or debate begins.

We all assumed that Chris would win the debate, but Mandy really came out swinging.

**To corner the market** - To become the most dominant (or the only dominant) player in a specific area of the market.

That company really cornered the market with that product they released last year. No one else can compete!

**To cry wolf** - To deliberately raise an alarm for no real reason.

He warned his nephew to never cry wolf. Raising an alarm over a fake situation now would result in people being less likely to believe him in the future if he encountered real trouble.

**To do a number on something** - To hurt or severely damage something.

All that time on the beach without sunscreen many years ago did a number on my skin. That's why I have so much sun damage now and I worry about

skin cancer.

**To draw a blank** - To forget something you specifically wanted to remember.

I was excited to tell them about it, but I ended up drawing a blank when I got the opportunity. I just couldn't remember what I wanted to say!

**To drink like a fish** - To drink a lot of alcohol on a regular basis.

They were worried about their friend because he drank like a fish every time they saw him.

**To drop by** - To visit unexpectedly.

Rose didn't like it when people just dropped by her house. She was embarrassed that it might be untidy.

**To find fault with** - To look for faults in someone or something.

She was so frustrated; it seemed like people at school were always finding fault with her hair and the way she dressed.

**To follow up on something** - To check up on someone or something.

Nicole told me that she went to an interview a few days ago. She thinks she did really well on it and that she has a good chance of getting the job. She is wondering, though, whether or not she should follow up on it by sending a polite email.

**To get bent out of shape** - To become upset.

Don't get cry about it! There's really no reason to get so bent out of shape over a simple disagreement.

**To get in touch with** - To contact.

It's strange that they haven't heard from Patricia this week. She promised that she'd get in touch with them.

**To get rid of** - To do away with something.

I think I'll get rid of all those old video tapes. After all, there's not much I can do with them now.

**To get your walking papers** - To get fired from your job.

I have terrible news. Darren got his walking papers today. He's going to have to look for a new job.

**To give in** - To decide to go along with something, usually as a result of some sort of pressure.

Their parents eventually gave in and said that they were allowed to go on a summer vacation with their friends.

**To give someone the heads-up** - To notify someone of something and to keep them up-to-date.

Beth sent an email to all of her friends, detailing her events for the big event. They really appreciated her giving them the heads-up.

**To go down like a lead balloon** - To be terribly received by an audience.

The new play did really badly. The audience hated it, and it went down like a lead balloon.

**To go Dutch** - For every individual to pay for their own bill in a restaurant.

We decided to go Dutch at dinner. After all, it's so much easier when each person just pays for what they've eaten.

**To go for broke** - To gamble all of your resources.

Maggie decided to go for broke with her new endeavor. She has almost no money left. I hope it works out for her, but it seems pretty risky!

**To go off the deep end** - To get extremely upset and/or emotional.

Linda went off the deep end when she heard the bad news. I don't think I've ever seen anyone so upset.

**To have another thing coming** - To have something else that will happen in the near future that you didn't expect or think would happen.

Melinda thinks that her plan will work, but I say that she has another thing coming.

**To have one's back to the wall** - To feel trapped, with no real options to deal with the situation.

Jayden felt that his back was to the wall. He couldn't figure out how to get out of the situation; he didn't feel like he had any options to deal with it either.

**To hold out an olive branch** - To offer a gesture of peace or to ask for forgiveness or a truce.

Judy and Adelaide had been friends for years but they didn't speak for a few months after they had an argument. Finally, Adelaide decided to hold out an olive branch.

**To hold your own** - To be confident and politely assertive with other people and in various situations.

Don't worry about my sister. She can hold her own in any situation. It's because she's so confident.

**To keep an eye on** - To closely watch and/or monitor.

Thomas is a very careful investor. He's always keeping an eye on the stock market.

**To know by sight** - To know someone when you look at them.

Dan couldn't remember her face, but he knew her on sight.

**To live beyond your means** - To live in a manner that requires more money than you can afford.

I told them that it's very unwise to live beyond one's means. It can lead you into a lot of debt.

**To live hand-to-mouth** - To live with very little money.

They lived pretty much hand-to-mouth after they both lost their jobs.

**To look down one's nose** - To feel superior to someone else.

Juliana always looked down her nose at me and my friends. She was quite conceited and always thought she was above us.

**To make a long story short** - To tell someone something in a brief and simple way.

Lots of things happened yesterday. To make a long story short, we had a terrible time.

**To make a mountain out of a molehill** - To overreact and overstate a situation.

You're blowing this out of proportion! Stop making a mountain out of a molehill. It's really not a very serious situation.

**To make matters worse** - To worsen a problem.



We were late for the party. And to make matters worse, we couldn't find a parking space.

**To nix something** - To cancel a plan or dismiss an idea, or to forbid something.

She decided to nix their plans to go away this winter. It was no longer possible.

**To outdo oneself** - To do better at something that one has done before.

Sophie was proud of herself last week. She outdid her previous achievements at the gym.

**To paddle your own canoe** - To be self-sufficient and think independently.

Josh has always been one to paddle his own canoe. He's very independent and does what he thinks is best, without seeking help from others.

**To pony up** - To pay money that is owed or that you need to pay for some other reason.

Come on and pony up! You know you still owe me that ten dollars I lent you a month ago.

**To run/blow hot and cold** - To sometimes seem enthusiastic and other times seem the opposite.

He was worried that his girlfriend didn't like him anymore. She seemed to blow hot and cold. Sometimes she seemed to like him a lot, while other times she didn't.

**To see the light** - To finally see something clearly and understand it.

I was so happy to hear that Victoria had seen the light about her boyfriend. He isn't very nice and she finally realizes that now.

**To serve one right** - It was a just consequence or punishment.

It serves him right! He did some really careless things; he deserves to suffer the consequences.

**To smooth things over** - To restore peace to a situation or to resolve conflict.

Denise was good at helping her friends resolve arguments. She liked to help smooth things over.

**To stand up for** - To help defend someone.

Jill always stood up for me when others tried to bully me at school.

**To start over from scratch** - To start over again from the very beginning.

The birthday cake I made yesterday was a total disaster. I had to start over from scratch.

**To stonewall** - To be intentionally vague or to make insignificant statements in response to a question, specifically to avoid answering it.

They tried to ask him questions but he was always stonewalling, finding ways to avoid giving real answers.

**To take a load off someone's back** - To relieve someone of a specific burden or a potential burden.

My friends really showed they cared when they took that load off my back. I would have had a terrible time without their help.

**To take it easy** - To relax and/or rest.

Belle just finished a busy week at school. She's looking forward to taking it easy this weekend.

**To take something for granted** - To assume that you would have had, or will have, something no matter what.

People accused Adrian of taking his friends for granted. He always just assumed that they'd be there for him, without giving them any consideration.

**To the hilt** - To do something in an extremely thorough way.

They went shopping for new summer wardrobes yesterday. They did it to the hilt, I have to say.

**Tongue-in-cheek** - In a humorous spirit.

I couldn't figure out why she took what I said seriously. It was obvious that I meant it in a tongue-in-cheek way; I even laughed afterward.

**Too big for one's boots** - Conceited and arrogant.

Don't you agree that Ben is too big for his boots? I think he is. He's very conceited.

**Too many irons in the fire** - To have an excessive number of activities taking up your time.

She was having a hard time concentrating on her work. After speaking to her, I realized that she has too many irons in the fire. Having so many things to worry about makes it hard to focus.

**Top dog** - The person in charge.

Our boss is the top dog in this office.

**Top-notch** - Top quality.

The perfume he bought me for my birthday is top-notch. It's a designer brand and extremely expensive. I love it.

**Touch and go** - An uncertain or otherwise precarious situation.

The situation was touch and go for a while. We had no way of knowing what would happen. Would everything be okay in the end?

**Touch base** - To get in contact with someone.

Could you please touch base with me next week, to let me know how the project is progressing?

**Track record** - A history of doing something.

He has an excellent track record when it comes to academics. Have you seen his grades? They're great!

**Train of thought** - Ideas that come one after the other and are connected.

The alarm interrupted my train of thought. Now I can't remember what I had decided about the presentation.

**Train wreck** - Someone who has a chaotic and probably unsuccessful life.

She was upset when her old friend called her a train wreck.

**Travel light** - To travel with very little luggage.

They decided to travel light for their trip to Europe, as they planned to do some backpacking.

**Treat someone to something** - To buy something for someone.

They treated the kids to ice cream yesterday.

**Treat/handle someone with kid gloves** - To treat someone or something with extreme gentleness and respect.

They realized that, since their boss was so sensitive about his ideas, they would need to treat his pet project with kid gloves.

**Troubled waters** - A difficult and unstable situation, and/or emotionally difficult times.

My friend helped me overcome troubled waters last year. I was scared because my situation at home seemed too unsettled and precarious.

**True blue** - Loyal and trustworthy.

Amy was true blue as a friend. I could always count on her to be there for me.

**Tuckered out** - Very tired.

I had thought about going out tonight after work, but I'm just too tuckered out.

**Turn a blind eye** - To refuse to acknowledge the reality of something.

We couldn't get Tommy to believe us about what had happened. He just wanted to turn a blind eye to it.

**Turn a place upside down** - To search for something, probably an item one has lost, in a frantic way.

I couldn't find it, even though I turned my living room upside down while searching for it.

**Turn over a new leaf** - To change your life in order to make it (and probably your behavior) better.

Sarah said that she was going to turn over a new leaf in her life. She had made some bad decisions in the past, but she was determined to make better ones in the future.

**Turn the other cheek** - To refrain from retaliating against something that offends you.

Olivia was always so patient and forgiving with everyone. If anyone did something that upset her, she would often turn the other cheek.

**Turn the tables** - To switch places someone, putting them in the same sort of position you once occupied.

He turned the tables on the bully by standing up for himself; he showed everyone that the bully was really the one people should ignore.

**Turn up the heat** - To increase the amount of pressure on a person or situation.

The lawyer turned up the heat in his questioning of the witness.

**Twist someone's arm** - To try to coerce someone into doing something.

Sally didn't want to go to the amusement park at first, but her friends twisted her arm.

**Two peas in a pod** - Extremely similar and probably close.

The little girl and her best friend were very much alike. They were like two peas in a pod.

**Under a cloud** - Being under some kind of suspicion.

Mike said that people thought he had done something wrong even though he hadn't. He found it hard to interact with them under that cloud.

**Under someone's thumb** - To be under the control of someone else.

Jesse was under Alex's thumb. He looked up to Alex and wanted to be like him, but this ended up meaning that his friend could control him.

**Under the table/counter** - Illegally or secretly (especially with regard to being paid in such a way).

They received payments under the table. They didn't want to claim the money on their income taxes.

**Under the weather** - Not feeling well.

Kristen wanted to come with us to the party, but she's feeling really under the weather. We think she might have flu.

**Under the wire** - To finish something just before it has to be completed.

Abby will probably get her paper done right under the wire. You know what she's like! She left it to the last minute.

**Until the cows come home** - A very long time.

I think they'll be arguing about this until the cows come home! I can't see them ever stopping.

**Up a blind alley** - Taking a course of action that will lead to a negative outcome.

I tried to convince him that he was going up a blind alley with his new plan, but he wouldn't believe me. I think things will turn out badly.

**Up a gum tree** - In a very difficult situation that might be impossible to extricate oneself from.

I've been looking at the situation and, honestly, I think we're up a gum tree. I don't know how we can get ourselves out of this.

**Up for grabs** - Available to obtain.

There is a lot of money up for grabs in the raffle. Let's hope we win!

**Up in arms** - To be very upset or angry about something specific.

The protestors were up in arms about the new law. They thought it was oppressive and wanted it to be changed.

**Up in the air** - Not yet decided.

Plans for our vacation this year are pretty much up in the air. There are so many options and we just can't decide among them.

**Up the creek without a paddle** - To be in a bad situation and not be able to find a way to solve it.

Maisie doesn't know what to do about the situation. She feels like she's up the creek without a paddle.

**Up to snuff** - Meeting the standard of quality required.

My brother got a disappointing grade on his essay. The teacher said it just wasn't up to snuff.

**Upset the apple cart** - To disturb the current situation or status quo in some way.

The employees didn't like the new changes their boss had made to their terms of employment, so they all decided to upset the apple cart and object.

**Use your loaf** - Use your brain and think.

How could you not realize that you would need to do that? It's common sense. You really need to use your loaf!



**Veg out** - To relax and not think about anything that stresses you out.

Let's not do much this afternoon. We can just veg out and enjoy some television.

**Walk in someone's shoes** - To imagine yourself in someone else's position.

Janet was a very empathetic person. She always tried to imagine herself in the other person's shoes before making any sort of judgment or offering advice.

**Walk in the park** - An easy and pleasant time.

The new job was certainly no walk in the park. It was quite challenging and difficult.

**Walking on air** - Happy or joyous.

Laura called me to say how happy she is about the prize she won. She seems to be walking on air.

**Wallflower** - Someone (usually a girl or woman) who is shy and doesn't receive any attention, especially at a dance.

Marjorie was sad that she was always such a wallflower at dances. No one ever asked her to dance. Marie, on the other hand, was the opposite of a wallflower. She was very popular and everyone wanted to talk to her.

**Washing my hands of something/someone** - To completely stop caring about, and dealing with, someone.

I wanted to convince her that we could be friends. She has kept on being rude though, so I think I'll need to wash my hands of her.

**Waste not, want not** - If you refrain from wasting things, you won't have to go without.

Their grandmother was very good at saving and reusing things. Waste not, want not was her motto.

**Watch out for** - To keep alert and look around for something.

Watch out for bugs when you go for your hike next week.

**Water under the bridge** - Something that is now in the past and that isn't important anymore.

I can't understand why Melissa is still so worried about what happened. It really wasn't very important, and now it's water under the bridge. It's in the past.

**Watering hole** - A bar (where alcohol is served).

My friends headed to a local watering hole for a few drinks.

**Wave of the future** - Something that will be extremely prevalent in the future.

The company said that the new technology they invested in is sure to be the wave of the future.

**We see eye to eye** - We see things the same way and agree.

Many of her friends had disagreed with her on the issue, so she was glad to find that I agreed with her; we see eye to eye on other topics as well.

**Wear many different hats** - To have several different distinct roles.

Lindsay wears many different hats at her company. She works in at least three departments.

**Wear your heart on your sleeve** - To let your emotions be very obvious.

Chelsea is always very open about things. She really wears her heart on her sleeve; you can always tell what kind of mood she's in.

**Weasel out of something** - To get out of doing something or taking responsibility for something.

Jane managed to weasel out of having to take her little brother to her appointment yesterday.

**Weather the storm** - Successfully come through some sort of difficulty.

There were lots of problems that we had to deal with and some people were afraid that they could not endure it. I was sure that we would weather the storm, though.

**Well begun is half done** - It's important to get a good start.

Megan was worried that she wouldn't do a good job on the project, but I thought she'd made a really good start. I reassured her and reminded her that well begun is half done.

**We'll cross that bridge when we come to it** - We will deal with that problem when we have to.

Don't worry about that problem right now. We'll cross that bridge when we come to it.

**Well-heeled** - Wealthy and well-dressed.

Chloe started working at an upscale boutique this week. She told me a bit about all of her well-heeled customers.

**Went the extra mile** - To do even more than is required.

The group went the extra mile with their class project. They did more than was required and ended up with an A+.

**Wet behind the ears** - Inexperienced and probably young.

The new guy in the office is really young and wet behind the ears. He hardly has any experience in this field.

**Wet blanket** - An individual who others feel ruins a fun or enjoyable experience.

Dan is such a wet blanket. He always tries to ruin the fun when we're having a party.

**Wet my whistle** - Have a drink of something when thirsty.

Could you hold on a second? I need a few sips of water, just to wet my whistle.

**What are you up to?** - What are you doing? (Often there is an implication the person in question is doing something they shouldn't; this can be playful in meaning.)

What are you up to? Are you eating candy even though lunch is in an hour?

**When it rains, it pours** - Lots of things are causing difficulties or going wrong at the same time.

First the photocopier broke, and now her desk chair is wobbling. Everything seems to be going wrong this morning! When it rains, it pours!

**When pigs fly** - Something that will never happen.

Are you serious? That's never going to happen. Maybe when pigs fly!

**When push comes to shove** - When it becomes necessary to act.

My brother might seem a bit flaky sometimes, but he's always there for me when push comes to shove.

**When the chips are down** - When things aren't going well.

Helen is always there for her friends when the chips are down. She never fails them in difficult situations.

**Where the rubber meets the road** - A critical moment or turning point in an endeavor.

Ben had been nervous about the basketball championships for months. Tomorrow was the day. It was time for the rubber to meet the road.

**Where were we?** - What were we talking about/doing?

Where we were in our conversation before we were interrupted?

**White elephant** - A possession that is costly but fundamentally useless.

The family's new gazebo ended up being something of a white elephant. They spent a fortune on it and they never use it.

**White lie** - A slight lie or exaggeration, or a lie that doesn't do any harm.

Though Anna didn't tell the truth, she claimed it was only a white lie. What she said hadn't hurt anyone.

**Whitewash** - To try to cover up something bad.

Everything seemed okay at first, but then we discovered that the real situation had been whitewashed.

**Who asked you?** - No one asked you, so why are you offering an opinion?

Who asked you? I don't want your opinion on my jacket.

**Who do you think you are?** - Why do you think you're entitled to say/do that?

I can't believe you would say something so arrogant. Who do you think you are?

**Whole ball of wax** – Everything, or all things, involved in something.

She took part in all kinds of extracurricular activities at college. Debate society, basketball, track and field. The whole ball of wax.

**Wild and woolly** - Untamed and wild.

Did you see Adam today? He was looking a bit wild and woolly, wasn't he?

**Will take place** - Will occur.

The awards ceremony will take place two weeks from today.

**Wine and dine** - To treat someone to an expensive meal.

David had a crush on Deanna. He wanted to take her out so that he could wine and dine her.

**Winging it** - Doing something in the absence of preparation, planning, or some special knowledge.

It doesn't seem like he's completely sure of what he's doing. He seems to be winging it while he tries to figure it out.

**With bated breath** - To feel a great sense of anticipation or expectation (could be positive or negative).

She waited for her exam results with bated breath.

**With bells on** - With enthusiasm, usually when attending an event.

Anthony said that he was really excited about the upcoming festival and that he'd be there with bells on!

**With flying colors** - To do something extremely well.

Adam passed the exam with flying colors! He got an A+.

**Wolf in sheep's clothing** - Someone who has the appearance of being good but who actually has negative or bad intentions.

They thought that he would be a good business partner, but he turned out to be a wolf in sheep's clothing.

**Work against the clock** - To work on something that you probably won't get done in time.

We were working against the clock to get the project done on time.

**Worth one's salt** - Competent at what one does.

It took a while for the boss to decide whether or not his new employee was worth his salt.

**Wouldn't be caught dead** - Would never want to do something, probably because it would cause embarrassment.

Maria hated the new blue sweater that her parents had bought her. She thought it looked terrible on her and told her friends that she wouldn't be caught dead in it.

**Wouldn't hurt a fly** - Very gentle and unable, or unlikely, to ever hurt anyone or anything.

Don't worry about her. She wouldn't hurt a fly; she's very gentle.

**Wouldn't touch it with a ten-foot pole** - Would never even think about coming anywhere close to it or becoming involved with it.

Frank and Ashley agreed about the open position at the company down the road. They wouldn't touch it with a ten-foot pole. Neither would be applying.

**Wrap your head around something** - To understand a complex subject.

I didn't understand how to solve the math problem. I just couldn't seem to wrap my head around it.

**X marks the spot** - To have found what one was looking for.

Here it is! The notebook I was looking for. X marks the spot!

**You bet** - That's right, I will, or I agree.

You bet! I'd love to come with you tomorrow.

**You can bet your boots** - I think it's definitely true.

You can bet your boots that it's true! I'm absolutely sure of it.

**You can bet your bottom dollar** - You can be certain.

You can bet your bottom dollar that Ethan's new business will do well. He's an incredibly hard worker and there is demand in the area for his services.

**You can lead a horse to water, but you can't make him drink** - You cannot compel another person to make the right decision.

I tried to convince Brooke that she would do better in the other course, but she wouldn't listen. It's true, you know. You can lead a horse to water, but you can't make him drink.



**You can say that again** - I agree or that is true.

You can say that again! I agree that the weather was terrible.

**You can't have your cake and eat it too** - It's impossible to have everything.

Margaret was frustrated that she couldn't afford to buy both tops at once, but she realized that you can't have your cake and eat it too.

**You can't judge a book by its cover** - You shouldn't try to judge someone or something just by how it looks.

He thought that his teacher looked like she might be mean, but people told him that he shouldn't judge a book by its cover.

**You can't make an omelet without breaking some eggs** - There are always costs involved when accomplishing something.

Some people were upset about the costs of the endeavor. We just had to remind them that you can't make an omelet without breaking some eggs.

**You can't squeeze blood out of a turnip** - You cannot get something out of nothing.

Matt was really frustrated at how people were demanding that he pay the money he owed. He told them that he didn't have the funds, and that you can't squeeze blood out of a turnip.

**You can't take it with you** - No matter how much money or how many material possessions you have, you can't take them with you when you die.

The couple decided to go on a world cruise. It was very expensive, but they didn't mind. After all, you can't take it with you.

**You can't teach an old dog new tricks** - It's harder for an older person to learn new information.

He was nervous about going back to school because of people telling him that you can't teach an old dog new tricks. He did really well, though!

**You get what you pay for** - If you buy something very cheap, you cannot complain about it being low quality.

I know you're frustrated about the stitches coming loose on your new top, but you get what you pay for. It was very cheap.

**You'll catch more flies with honey than with vinegar** - Being nice will make it easier to get what you want.

Some people wonder why I'm always so nice to Jack, when he's so difficult and uncooperative. But I always say that you'll catch more flies with honey than with vinegar.

**Your guess is as good as mine** - I don't have the information needed to know the answer.

Did you ask what the weather will be like tomorrow? Your guess is as good as mine.

**You're telling me** - That's obviously true.

You're telling me! There's no way that huge diamond is real.

**You've sold me** - You have convinced me.

Okay, I'll go to the concert with you. You've sold me on it. It sounds like it will be a lot of fun.

**Zero tolerance** - Refusal to tolerate something at all.

The school has a zero tolerance policy when it comes to any sort of violence.

**Zip it** - Be quiet.

Our teacher lost his patience. He told one of the loudest students to zip it.

# Conclusion

Congratulations! You've reached the very last item on this extensive list of **idioms, sayings, and expressions**, and you probably feel like you've scaled a massive mountain like few others you've had to climb. The adrenaline is still probably pumping, and you already feel your brain processing the knowledge that will give you a whole new understanding of English. In fact, your vocabulary has already grown, and you should feel more confident with yourself and your skills. Nothing can stop you now.

But what if we told you that this is only the beginning of your studies, and that you're still going to need to put in 110 percent effort to make the most of this resource? "*No biggie*," right? Of course not – you're a fighter, and any additional work is just another step you need to take that will bring you closer to speaking English like a native!

And let's face it, you're going to need a bit of help to process everything you've just read. Sure, it was

straightforward from beginning to end, but there is always room for improvement.

Before we go, we'll provide you with some final tips so that you can become an English expert through this (and other) language-learning books!

- 1) Pay attention to the language aspects (grammatical rules, spelling, pronunciation, reading comprehension) with which you're having the most trouble. Sometimes, students tend to ignore these pain points; they continue to move forward without addressing their weaknesses. This only leads to learning the language poorly and it will show when you go for an interview, communicate with a friend, or speak in public. Identify your weaknesses and hit them hard! You *won't* regret it.
- 2) Don't work endlessly – find time to rest and take a step away from your studies. Even the best students make the mistake of believing that the more time they spend studying, the more they'll learn. This is false – it's all about using your time *efficiently* and making the most out of what

you're reading and practicing. This is the kind of strategy that won't exhaust you.

- 3) Find that study partner (or even better, a group) that we recommended in the introduction. Studying alongside somebody is much more efficient, inspires a healthy competitive spirit, and fosters an atmosphere for hard work which you simply cannot experience if you study alone. Even if you're not fond of studying in the company of others, try it out and see how it goes!
  
- 4) Write your own examples for **idioms, sayings, and expressions!** Don't be content with what you've found in our book: take these examples and change them around, add more to them, or transform them completely. You'll be practicing *and* having fun at the same time, without a worry in the world!

Thanks for reading... see you soon in the next book!

**THE END**