



WEBSTER'S WORD POWER



Essential English Phrases

EVERYDAY PHRASES EXPLAINED

- Over 6,000 idiomatic, important and key phrases
- Meanings and origins
- A–Z format, concise and clear entries
- Examples of phrases in use

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Essential English Phrases

ESSENTIAL ENGLISH PHRASES PROVIDES THE USER WITH A WIDE RANGE OF PHRASES INFLUENCED BY THE MEDIA, WE LIVE IN A WORLD OF INSTANT, WIDE-SPREAD COMMUNICATION, AS TO HIT IS NOW MORNING THAT REGULARLY PHRASES ARE NOW PLACED IN A COMMON CREATOR'S SKILLS. THERE ARE FIVE VOLUMES, IN MANY DIFFERENT SEASONS OF COMMUNICATION. SOME INVOLVE A LANGUAGE EXCHANGE OF INFORMATION WITH THIS SCENARIO OF SIMPLE, CONCISE ENGLISH WRITERS, HOWEVER, INVOLVEMENT FOR CREATIVE USE OF LANGUAGE AND THAT AS WHERE IDIOMS ON THE TAKE THAT PREVENTS A PIECE OF PROSE FROM BEING UNINTERESTING AND PEDESTRIAN TO THE WRITER. BY BROWSING THROUGH THIS BOOK MANY WRITERS WILL FIND MATERIAL WITH WHICH TO ENRICH THEIR WRITING. THE ONLY PROBLEM IS THAT THEY MAY BE DIVERTED FROM THEIR WRITING TO BROWSE FURTHER, FOR THIS IS A VERY BROWSABLE BOOK. PEOPLE WITH A GENERAL INTEREST IN LANGUAGE AND NO GREAT DESIRE TO WRITE WILL FIND IT SO AS WELL.

With the reader in mind, the dictionary gives the meaning of a host of idiomatic expressions in easily understood plain English. As an added dimension for the writer it includes example sentences (in italic type) showing the idioms in use. These examples capture the flavour of the expressions and indicate the contexts in which they are usually found.

The example sentences will be particularly useful to learners of English as a foreign language as they provide a model for them to follow and prevent them from making mistakes. Understanding and reproducing idiomatic expressions is one of the most difficult aspects of mastering a foreign language, and this dictionary will help many learners avoid the pitfalls.

Many idiomatic expressions in English have interesting origins. Sometimes these are lost in the mists of time and sometimes they are open to dispute but those that have been established have been included (within angle brackets).

Locating words in a conventional English dictionary is comparatively easy. As long as you know roughly how to spell the word you can find it with reasonable ease. This is not the case in a dictionary of phrases or idioms. In an entry of several words it is not always obvious which word in the phrase the entry should come under. The first word is not necessarily the most important, and opinions can vary as to which word is the most important. For speed of reference we have added a good many cross-references to the text of *Essential English*. For example, 'lock the stable door after the horse has bolted' is under 'stable', and at 'lock' and 'horse' there are cross-references to 'stable'.

Clarity and ease of reference are the keynotes of *Essential English*. The language used in the definitions is easy to understand and the example sentences represent the language of everyday English. We hope that you will find the book both instructive and entertaining.

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Betty Kirkpatrick, a graduate of Edinburgh University, has a long career in reference publishing. She has edited *Chambers Twentieth Century Dictionary*, *Roget's Thesaurus*, the concise edition of *Brewer's Phrase and Fable*, and was language consultant to the *Encarta World English Dictionary*. She has compiled various other reference books, including the *Oxford Paperback Thesaurus* and the *Bloomsbury Dictionary of Cliches*. She acts as a consultant to the

Bloomsbury Good Word Guide. Betty is author of an extensive list of publications on various aspects of the English language for learners of English.



A

A

first class, of the highest quality: *The produce must be The firm has an A1* is the highest rating given to the condition of ships for Lloyd's Register, Lloyds of London being a major insurance company.>

basic knowledge: *The book sets out the ABC of easy as ABC* very simple: *Getting them to agree was as easy as A to Z* thoroughly, comprehensively: *They have studied the facts from A to*

aback

aback surprised, disconcerted: *She was taken aback when she discovered that he was her sailing ship was said to be taken aback when the sails were blown against the mast, causing the ship to stop suddenly.>*

above

board open, honest and without trickery: *His negotiations to get planning permission were all above* cheats tend to keep their cards under the table, or board.>

(someone's) head too difficult to understand: *Computers are way above his*

suspicion too highly respected or thought to be too honourable to be suspected of doing wrong: *The police must be above*

a bit above oneself to become very vain or conceited: *Since his promotion he has got a bit above*

above one's weight see

accident

will happen things go wrong at some time in everyone's life: *It's a pity he broke the vase, but accidents will*

chapter of accidents a series of misfortunes: *Their holiday seems to have been a chapter of*

accord

to one's lights in keeping with one's beliefs or attitudes: *I*

disapprove of his actions, but he acted according to his

one's own accord of one's own free will, without being forced: He left his job of his own

one accord together, in unison: With one accord the audience

account

all accounts in the opinion of most people: By all accounts he is not very

a good account of oneself to do well: *They didn't win the match, but they gave a good account of*

my or your or his or her, etc, account because of me, etc, for my, etc, sake: Don't leave early on my

no account not for any reason whatsoever: He told his daughter on no account to accept a lift from a

ace

ace in the hole something kept in reserve for emergencies: The hostages were regarded by the terrorists as their ace in the the game of stud poker.>

one's ace to do something clever and unexpected which will bring you an advantage over others: *The boss had just told Jenny yet again that he wanted her to do more work for less money when she played her ace and told him that she was leaving to go to another an ace of very close to: He came within an ace of winning the the game of dice, ace being the term for the side of a die with one spot.>*

Achilles

heel the one weak spot in a person. *The boy is a good student, but maths is his Achilles'* the legendary Greek hero, is said to have been dipped in the River Styx by his mother at birth to make him invulnerable but his heel, by which she was holding him, remained unprotected and he was killed by an arrow through his heel.>

acid

test a test that will prove or disprove something conclusively: *He claims to be a good golfer but playing against the professional will be the acid* the use of nitric acid to ascertain whether a metal was gold or not. If it was not gold the acid decomposed it.>

acorn

oaks from little acorns grow see

acquaintance

a nodding acquaintance with (someone or something) see

acquire

taste something that one comes to like gradually, often after an original dislike: *To some people very dry wine is an acquired*

across

the board applying to everyone or to all cases: *The pay increase was across the*

one across on (someone) to deceive or trick (someone): *I really thought he was He certainly put one across on*

act

of faith an action that demonstrates one's trust in someone or something: *Lending the young man such a large sum of money was a real act of*

of God a happening, usually sudden and unexpected, for which no human can be held responsible: *It is difficult to obtain insurance coverage against acts of God such as*

of war an act of violence or other hostile act for which only war is thought to be a suitable response: *Invading Belgium was an act of*

up to behave badly, to act badly or wrongly: *The child acts up whenever her father is* *The car is acting up*

[\(someone\) in the act](#) see

class act someone who is exceptionally good at something: *The new striker is a real class act and one of the best footballers we've ever had in the*

up one's act to begin behaving in a way that is more acceptable, after behaving badly or irresponsibly in some way: *The pupils were told to clean up their act or they would be expelled from* refers to an act by a comedian, etc, which is too vulgar or indecent to be acceptable to most audiences.>

[a vanishing/disappearing act](#) to go away or go out of sight

suddenly so that other people are unable to find you: *Police called round at the suspect's house this morning but he had done a vanishing act sometime in the middle of the* *Jane was here a minute ago but she seems to have done a disappearing*

in on the act to become involved in some profitable or advantageous activity, especially an activity related to someone else's success: *Now that her fashion business is making a profit her sister wants to get in on the act and become a*

one's act together to get organized: *If you are hoping to pass the exams you had better get your act together and allow some time for*

[hard act to follow](#) to indicate that someone has been so good or successful at something that it will be difficult for anyone else to do it so well: *I feel quite sorry for the head teacher who's replacing Mrs Brown because she's a very hard act to*

action

stations indicates a state of preparedness for some activity: *Action stations! The guests are beginning to positions taken up by soldiers in readiness for battle.*>

a piece/slice of the action to be involved in something, get a share of something: *He's setting up a new If you want a piece of the action you had better go and see him*

actress

the actress said to the bishop an expression added to a seemingly ordinary statement to draw attention to its possible sexual double meaning: *You can't have it both ways at once, as the actress said to the*

ad

hoc for a particular (usually exclusive) purpose: *This is an ad hoc It will not be an annual* for "to this".>

infinitum without limit or end: *This road seems to go on ad*

to speak without preparation, to improvise: *I have forgotten my I shall have to ad* "according to pleasure".>

nauseam to an excessive degree, seemingly endlessly: *He talks ad nauseam about his* "to sickness".>

Adam

ale water: *We have no beer or It will have to be Adam's*

to know (someone) from Adam not to recognize (someone): *He said he was my neighbour's son, but I didn't know him from*

old Adam in us the sin or evil that is in everyone: *I was surprised that he had an affair, but I suppose it was just the old Adam in to the biblical Adam.*>

add

fuel to the fire to to make a difficult situation worse: *Making excuses for being late will just add fuel to the*

insult to injury to make matters worse: *Having given his first play a bad review, the critic added insult to injury by ignoring his next*

up to seem logical: *No one understands why he left so It just doesn't add*

Adonis

Adonis a very attractive young man: The advert for suntan lotion showed a bronzed Greek legend Adonis was a beautiful young man who was loved by Aphrodite, the goddess of love, and who was killed by a boar while hunting.>

advantage

the advantage of (someone) to recognize (someone) without oneself being recognized by that person: She looked in puzzlement at the woman who spoke to her and said, "I am afraid that you have the advantage of

advantage of (someone) to exploit or make use of (someone) for one's own ends: The young mother takes advantage of her neighbour by asking her to babysit practically every

advantage of (something) to make use of (something), to put (something) to good use: You should take advantage of that holiday advantage favourably, so that the good points are emphasized: She rarely wears dresses that show her figure to

aegis

the aegis of (someone) with the support or backing of (someone): The project is under the aegis of the local Greek legend aegis was the shield of the god Zeus.>

after

a fashion in a manner that is barely adequate: She cleaned the silver after a fashion, but it was not very

something that happens after, or as a result of, an important, often disastrous, event: Housing was scarce in the aftermath of the "math" was a crop of grass and an "aftermath" was a second crop of grass mowed in the same season.>

(someone's) own heart to one's liking; liked or admired by (someone): *My son-in-law is a man after my own* We are both avid football

the fact after something, especially a crime, has taken place: *His wife was an accessory after the*

against

the clock in a hurry to get something done before a certain time: *The staff are working against the clock to finish the order on*

up against it to be in a difficult or dangerous situation: *The family have really been up against it since the father lost his*

age

golden age a time of great achievement: *The reign of Elizabeth Tudor is often regarded as a golden*

ripe old age to a very old age: *Despite her injury she lived to a ripe old*

a certain age no longer young: *Women of a certain age sometimes feel jealous of younger*

of age to reach the age when one is legally considered an adult (18 in Britain): *The boy will receive his inheritance when he comes of age on his eighteenth*

age of consent the age someone must be before he or she can legally have sexual intercourse: *She looks quite old but she is below the age of*

age under the legal age for something, too young: *The teenagers won't be served at the They're under*

agenda

hidden agenda things which someone secretly wants to achieve from a situation while pretending to have another goal: *Sara says that she is doing a lot of campaigning so that Jack will be elected club president, but I think she has a hidden agenda – I think she wants to be elected president*

agony

agony aunt/uncle a woman or man who gives advice on personal problems either in a newspaper or magazine column, or on television or radio: *The battered wife wrote to the agony aunt in her local paper for*

column a newspaper or magazine column in which readers write in with their problems, which are answered by an agony aunt or uncle: *She was responsible for the paper's agony* a newspaper column containing advertisements for missing relatives and friends.>

on the agony to make a difficult or unpleasant situation even worse or to make it seem worse: *John failed his exams and his parents piled on the agony by saying it was all his fault for not studying*

ahead

of the game in an advantageous position; in front of one's rivals: *Their firm always seems to be ahead of the They keep getting most of the*

of time early, before the appointed time: *It's as well to get to the theatre ahead of time if you want a good*

[ahead of the game](#) see

[ahead of \(someone/ something\)](#) much better than (someone or something): *His brother's golf is streets ahead of The local firm's furniture is streets ahead of the chain*

[of the pack](#) see

aid

and abet (someone) to help and encourage (someone), especially in something wrong or illegal: *He was the thief but his sister aided and abetted She was aided and abetted by her legal term.>*

is (something) in aid of? what is (something) for? Why has (something) been done?: *What are those labels in aid of? What's*

all this formality in aid of?

air

one's dirty linen in public to to discuss private or personal matters in public: When they were quarrelling in the restaurant, they really aired their dirty linen in public by making all those comments about their

one's grievances to make public one's complaints: After suffering in silence for a long time, she suddenly aired her grievances about her place of

the air to make a situation less tense: If you discuss your disagreement you will at least clear the

air boasting; empty or meaningless words: He says he's going to climb Everest but it's just hot

the air current; around; in circulation: There's hostility in the

thin air seemingly into nowhere: One minute she was there, the next she had disappeared into thin

the air on radio or television: The programme presenter was on the air when he lost his

on airs to behave as though one were superior to others, to act in a conceited way: She's really put on airs since she got

*the air go for a walk or a drive in the fresh air: It's such a nice
Let's take some*

in the air uncertain, undecided: She didn't get the job so her career plans are still up in the

on air to be very happy: They've been walking on air since they got

aisle

rolling in the aisles see

Aladdin

cave a place full of valuable or desirable objects: The local toyshop is an Aladdin's cave to the the tale of Aladdin in the Arabian who gained access to such a cave.>

alarm

false alarm a warning about some danger or difficulty which does not happen: *Someone told him that he might lose his job but it proved to be a false*

and excursions confused and noisy activity: *There were alarums and excursions when they thought they heard a Shakespeare's history plays, the expression "alarms and excursions" was used as a stage direction calling for activity typical of the scene at the edge of a battle.>*

alive

and kicking in a good or healthy condition: *His old mother is still alive and Some ancient New Year customs are alive and with full of, covered in: During the summer months the stately home was alive with*

all

and sundry everybody, one and all: *They invited all and sundry from the village to the*

ears listening intently: *Tell me all the I'm all*

for (someone or something) completely in favour of (someone or something): I'm all for having an extra

hours for long periods of time, from early in the morning until late at night: *The shop is open all*

in exhausted: The marathon runners are all

in a day's work see

in all taking everything into consideration: *We had some rain but all in all it was a good*

in one piece safely, undamaged: *I was glad to see the children back all in one piece after their bike ride through the busy village*

my eye (and Betty Martin) see

out with as much effort as possible: *He's going all out to win the over at an end: Their romance is all*

over bar the shouting at an end to all intents and purposes: There is no way the other competitors can overtake him It's all over bar the

set ready to go, prepared: Now that everything is packed, we're all set for the

all-dancing of a machine or system, very advanced with a great many modern features, sometimes not all necessary: The firm has just bought one of those all-singing, all-dancing computer systems, but a much simpler one would have originally of a stage show to indicate how lavish it was.>

systems go see

the best best wishes, good luck: All the best with your

the rage see

there having all one's faculties, alert and intelligent: She is not academically clever, but she's all there when it comes to dealing with told altogether, including everything or everyone: There were 20 cars and 60 people all

all things to all men to try constantly to agree with or fit in with whomever one is with at the time: The young man seems to have no opinions of his own but is trying to be all things to all

is all up with (someone) there is no hope left for (someone): It is all up with the He has been identified by an eye

all fours on one's hands and knees: He got down on all fours to look for the contact lens under the

alley

cat a wild or promiscuous person: The woman he married is respectable now but she used to be a real alley

alley an action or situation that cannot be advantageous: His present job is just a blind There's no hope of

alliance

unholy alliance used of an association or partnership between two people or organizations that have nothing in common and would not normally work together, especially when this association has a bad purpose: *The government is facing defeat because of an unholy alliance between the extreme right and the extreme left of the*
allowance

allowances for (someone) to expect a less high standard from (someone) because of particular circumstances: The teacher should make allowances for the pupil as he has been

alma mater

—one's old university, college or school: *They are going to a reunion at their alma* “bountiful mother”.>

alpha

and omega the beginning and the end: *We witnessed the alpha and omega of their* first and last letters of the Greek alphabet.>

also

an unsuccessful person: *He will never get He's an* horse-racing term for a horse that is not one of the first three horses in a race.>

altar

sacrificed on the altar of (something) to be destroyed or suffer harm or damage so that something can be achieved or prosper: *We all felt that the daughters in the family were sacrificed on the altar of the son's expensive*

alter

ego a person who is very close or dear to someone: *The girl next door is our daughter's alter* They're never “other self”.>

alternative

medicine the treatment of diseases or disorders that uses techniques other than those of conventional medicine, including homeopathy, osteopathy, acupuncture, aromatherapy, etc: *She is*

reluctant to take drugs and is turning to alternative medicine for herbal

no alternative to be forced to take a certain course of action because it is the only possible one: He does not wish to resign but after his quarrel with management he has no

altogether

the altogether in the nude: You can't answer the door—you're in the

Amazon

—a very strong or well-built woman: He expected the women's rugby team to be Greek legend the Amazons were a race of female warriors.>

American

American as apple pie typical of the traditional American way of life or culture: *Rod thinks that having a gun in the house to defend oneself is as American as apple*

American dream the hope of achieving success and prosperity through hard work, from the dreams which immigrants had when they landed in America to start a new life: *Bill was full of the American dream when he started his own gardening business, but he went bankrupt because of the*

amiss

(something) amiss to take offence or be upset at (something): They took it amiss that they were not invited to the wedding although they could not have gone to

angel

angel of mercy a person who gives help and comfort, especially one who appears unexpectedly: *When he collapsed in the street an unknown angel of mercy took him to*

visits visits that are rare and short but very pleasant: Her son lives far away but he pays his mother a series of angels'

fallen angel a person who had formerly a good reputation for being virtuous or successful but no longer does so: *Everyone admired the local MP but after he was involved in a financial scandal he became rather a fallen*

an angel unawares to meet and talk to someone whose worth or fame one is unaware of: *The winner of the literary prize was at the party but we were entertaining an angel* No one told us who he

the side of the angels supporting or agreeing with what is regarded as being the good or the right side: *The teacher has to pretend to be on the side of the angels and support his colleagues although he has some sympathy with the*

rush in where angels fear to tread see

like an angel to write well and movingly: *I cannot wait for her next* *She writes like an* the term referred to handwriting rather than to style of writing, being derived from the name of Angelo Vergece, who was a famous 16th-century calligrapher at the court of Francis I of France.>

anger

in sorrow than in anger see

angry

young man a person who expresses angry dissatisfaction with established social, political and intellectual values: *Justin's politically provocative paintings showed him to be the angry young man of his* term applied to British dramatist, John Osborne, author of the play *Look Back in*

answer

all the answers to have all the information that is required to deal successfully with a situation, especially when one is conceited about this: *She won't listen to any* *She acts as if she knows all the* *to take no for an answer* to urge very strongly that one's request, invitation or suggestion is accepted: *Of course you must stay and*

have I won't take no for an answer to a maiden's prayer exactly what one desires and is looking for: She's found the perfect job—the answer to a maiden's answer to a maiden's prayer was once thought to be an eligible bachelor.>

ant

ants in one's pants to be restless or agitated: She's got ants in her pants waiting to hear the results of the

ante

or raise the ante to increase the amount of money required or offered for something: If you want to buy that house you'll have to up the ante to increasing the money one bets in a game of cards, the other player having to match this amount in order to stay in the game.>

any

guess something which no one can be certain about: *How they make their money is anybody's*

day whatever the circumstances: I would rather read a book than watch television any

old how in an untidy and careless way: *The books in the bookcase were arranged any old*

but not at all, the complete opposite: He doesn't dislike her – anything

goes any kind of behaviour, dress, etc, is acceptable: It's not a formal party – anything

anything very much, hard, fast, energetically, etc: He tried like anything to get a

apart

poles or worlds apart to be completely different: *They are poles apart in their attitudes to bringing up*

(someone) *apart* to scold or criticize (someone) severely: *Your mother will take you apart if you break the*

ape

ape to become extremely angry or excited: *Fred's father went ape when he heard that he had crashed his*

apology

apology for (something) a very poor example of (something): *The restaurant served us up an apology for a*

appearance

or *to all appearances* judging only from what can be seen:

Apparently they are going to divorce but to all appearances they made the perfect

up appearances to behave in public in such a way as to hide what is going on in private: *He has lost his job but he keeps up*

appearances by leaving the house at his usual time every

in an appearance at (something) to attend a meeting, function, etc, especially for a short time or because it is one's duty to do so:

All the teachers are expected to put in an appearance at the school's annual

apple

American as apple pie see

bed a bed made up, as a practical joke, in such a way that it is impossible to get into: *She was so tired that she didn't notice that the children had made her an apple-pie*

apple-pie order with everything tidy and correctly arranged: *She always leaves the office files in apple-pie* French *nappe* "folded linen", linen neatly laid out.>

and oranges two things which are completely different and so should not be compared: *Public services like the health service and private companies are apples and oranges when it comes to judging*

their the impossibility of comparing two such dissimilar fruits as apples and oranges.>

apple a person who is bad or unsatisfactory and will have a bad influence on others: *The class is mostly well-behaved, but there are one or two rotten apples who cause*

apple of (someone's) eye a favourite, a person who is greatly loved by (someone): *There are five girls in the family but the only boy is the apple of his father's* refers to the pupil of the eye.>

the apple-cart to spoil plans or arrangements: *The teenagers were going to have a party but their parents upset the apple-cart by coming home* the practice of selling fruit from carts in street markets.>

apron

to (someone's) apron-strings completely dependent on a woman, especially one's mother or wife: *He's so tied to his mother's apron-strings that I cannot see him getting*

ark

something out of the ark very old-fashioned looking: *She wears clothes that are like something out of the Noah's ark* in the Bible.>

arm

to the hilt or *teeth* *to* provided with all the equipment that one could possibly need: *The enemy soldiers were armed to the The tourists were armed to the teeth with guide books and*

shot in the arm see

up in arms to protest angrily: *The residents are up in arms about the proposed shopping*

one's arm to take a risk: *You're really chancing your arm by asking for more time* We're so

an arm and a leg to cost a great deal of money: *His new car must have cost him an arm and a*

one's right arm for (something) to to be willing to go to any lengths to get something: *He'd give his right arm to get a job as a*
(someone) at arm's length to avoid becoming too close to or too friendly with someone: *As the boss he has to keep everyone at arm's length or he risks being accused of*
down one's arms to stop fighting or opposing: *We lost our appeal against the new Now we will just have to lay down our military reference to soldiers laying down their weapons or arms when they surrender.>*

long arm of the law to the power or authority of the police: *The crook thought he had got away with the bank robbery, but the long arm of the law caught up with him as he was leaving the*

the arm on (someone) to try to force someone to do what you want: *The other kids are afraid of Len and he puts the arm on them to give him*

arm chief source of help and support: *His secretary is his right arm, and he can't cope without*

up arms to become actively involved in a quarrel or dispute: *The whole village took up arms when the post office was threatened with military reference to soldiers taking up weapons or arms to go into battle.>*

(someone's) arm to force (someone) to do (something), to persuade (someone) to do (something): *If you want to get him to cut the grass you'll have to twist his arm—he hates doing I don't really want another drink but you could twist my*
one arm tied behind one's back very easily: *She could beat him at tennis with one arm tied behind her*

open arms welcomingly: *They will receive your offer of help with open*

armour

in (someone's) armour a weak or vulnerable spot in someone who is otherwise very strong and difficult to get through to or attack: *The old man is very stern but his granddaughter has found the chink in his armour. The Opposition are always trying to find a chink in the government's armour. A knight in armour could be injured only through a flaw or opening (chink) in his protective armour.>*

in shining armour a person who it is hoped will save a situation or come to one's aid: *A knight in shining armour helped her to change the wheel of her medieval legends in which knights in armour came to the aid of damsels in distress.>*

around

been around (1) to have had a lot of experience of life: *She's not as innocent as she is. She's been around a long time.* (2) to have been alive: *He said that he had been around so long he could remember Queen Elizabeth II.*

arrow

straight arrow a person who is completely honest, moral and trustworthy: *You can trust Bert to pay back the money which you lent him; he's a straight arrow.*

art

(something) down to a fine art see

Arthur

to know if one is Arthur or Martha to be very confused because one has too much to do: *I had all the family to stay for Christmas and had so much cooking and organizing to do that I didn't know whether I was Arthur or Martha.*

article

genuine article used to emphasize that something is real and not a copy: *Mark thought that the gold watch he'd bought was the genuine article, but the watchmaker said that it was a fake.*

ashes

over the ashes to discuss things that are past, especially things that are best forgotten: *There's no point in raking over the ashes of their They're divorced, and that's*

from the ashes to to develop and flourish out of ruin and destruction: *The firm had to close last year but a new one has risen from the Greek legend the phoenix, a mythical bird, would after a certain number of years of life set fire to itself and then be reborn from its ashes.>*

and ashes see

Ashes the trophy, originally mythical, contended for in the cricket test matches between Britain and Australia: *The winner of the Ashes will be decided by the third test* England was beaten by Australia in 1882 the *Sporting Times* published a humorous epitaph on English cricket saying, "The body will be cremated and the ashes taken back to Australia".>

ask

for the moon see

asking for it to behave in such a way as to invite something unpleasant, such as a beating: *You shouldn't have hit that young man even if he was asking for it by making nasty (someone's) for the asking* for something to be available to someone without payment: *I don't want any money for the They're yours for the*

attendance

attendance on (someone) to stay close to (someone) in order to carry out all his or her wishes and so gain favour: *The new girl in the office has all the men dancing attendance on*

auld for

lang syne times that are past, especially times remembered with fondness: *The two men who had been at school together were*

enjoying a drink for auld lang Scots phrase meaning “old long since”.>

ant

Sally a person or thing that is being subjected to general abuse, mockery and criticism: *Whenever people are angry about the high cost of living they treat the government like an Aunt Sally* at a fair was a wooden model of a woman's head, mounted on a pole, at which people threw sticks or balls in order to win a prize.>

automatic

on automatic pilot see

avail

no avail of no use, without effect: *All our efforts to revive him were of no*

no avail without success: *We tried to dissuade her from leaving but to no*

avoid

(someone or something) like the plague see

awakening

a rude awakening suddenly to become aware that a situation is not as good or pleasant as one thinks it is: *The young couple thought, when they married, that two could live as cheaply as one but they soon had a rude*

away

away with (someone or something) to get rid of something, to abolish something: *They've done away with all the old*

away from it all to escape from the problems of daily life, usually by taking a holiday: *He's going to a small island in Scotland to get away from it*

away with you! I don't believe you!: *Get away with you!* You can't have seen a

one that got away a chance of success which one either did not or could not take advantage of at the time but which one always remembers: *He talks frequently of his first girlfriend as the one that got to a supposedly large fish which an angler fails to catch but about which he tells many stories.>*

axe

the axe to be dismissed: With so few orders some of the workers are bound to get the

an axe hanging over one to be threatened with some difficulty or danger, often with the loss of one's job: *The landlord is thinking of selling this flat and so we have an axe hanging over us at the*

an axe to grind to have a personal, often selfish, reason for being involved in something: *She is being very kind to her old uncle but she has an axe to She hopes he will leave her some money in his* a story told by Benjamin Franklin, the American politician, about how a man had once asked him in his boyhood to demonstrate the working of his father's grindstone and had sharpened his own axe on it while it was working.>

B

babe

in arms an inexperienced or naive person: *He'll never succeed in arms*
He's just a babe in arms

in the wood people who are naïve, inexperienced and too trusting:
Tim and Joe tried to set up their own music business in the city but they were babes in the woods and let themselves be

[of the mouths of babes and sucklings](#) see

baby

(someone's) baby to be the responsibility or special interest of someone: *I'm not getting involved with organizing the school trip; that's Mr Smart's*

left holding the baby to be left to cope with a difficult situation that has been abandoned by the person who is really responsible for it: *They were meant to be organizing the birthday party but I was left holding the*

out the baby with the bath water accidentally to get rid of something desirable or essential when trying to get rid of undesirable or unnecessary things: *We must try to salvage some of the best of the old methods when we* *Let's not throw out the baby with the bath*

[the baby's head](#) to have a drink to celebrate the birth of a baby: *Peter and his wife have just has a baby and we're taking him down to the pub to wet the baby's*

back

the back of (something) responsible for something, usually something bad: *You should have guessed that he was at the back of the smear*

compliment a supposed compliment that sounds more like criticism: *It's a backhanded compliment for him to tell the girl that she is as attractive as her mother since he thoroughly dislikes her*
number a person or thing that is no longer of importance or use: *He used to be a famous comedian but he is a back number to an out-of-date or back copy of a newspaper or magazine.>*

doing favours for someone so that he or she will return the favour: *A lot of backscratching goes on in the financial*
driver (1) a passenger in a car who gives unasked-for and unwanted advice: *His mother doesn't drive but she's a real backseat driver who's always shouting out directions when she's in the* (2) a person who is not directly involved in some activity but who offers unwanted advice: *It's his wife who's our accountant but he's a backseat driver who tells us what to do about our tax*

to the drawing board it will be necessary to start again on a project or activity: *Our holiday tour's been cancelled, so it's back to the drawing to the board on which plans of buildings, etc, are drawn before being built.>*

to the grindstone back to work: *Now that we've finished lunch, it's back to the*
an isolated place unaffected by what is happening in the world outside: *How can he bear to live in such a backwater where nothing ever happens?*

someone's back without the knowledge or permission of the person concerned: *She married him behind her father's*
over backwards to to go to great trouble: *We bent over backwards to be nice to the shy new*
one's back to put in a great deal of effort: *The salesman really broke his back to get that*
the back of (something) to complete the largest or most difficult part: *He hasn't finished the essay but at least he's broken the back*

of

one's back to do something now which will protect from future blame or criticism: *My boss denied emailing me a memo telling me to destroy the correspondence but, fortunately, I had covered my back and kept a copy of the*

on one's back ill in bed: *He's been flat on his back since the*
off (someone's) back to stop harassing or bothering (someone): *The teacher should get off Tom's back or he'll leave*

one's own back to take one's revenge: *He is determined to get his own back on the person who damaged his*

one's back or eye teeth see

back a long way see

a monkey on your back see

(someone or something) at one's back have (someone or something) as a help or support: *Although she is a single parent she manages very well thanks to having her parents at her*

one's back to the wall to be in a very difficult or desperate situation: *They had their backs to the wall so they had no choice but to accept his being pursued has to face his or her pursuers or be captured when a wall prevents retreat.>*

a broad back to be able to deal with a great deal of responsibility or with a great many problems: *The manager must think I've got a broad back because he's always giving me other people's work to do as well as my*

(something) backwards or like the back of one's hand to know all there is to know about (something): *The professor knows his subject (someone or something) like the back of one's hand to know*

(someone or something) very well indeed: *She can always tell when her husband is* She knows him like the back of her hand.

in my backyard (often abbreviated to "Nimby") used to indicate that someone does not want something which may be unpleasant

or dangerous in some way to be located anywhere near where he/she lives, even although this may be something which is useful to others or to society: *Jane said, "I have no objection, in principle, to the council building a new unit for young offenders, but not in my one's back into (something) to put the greatest possible effort into (something): They're really putting their backs into their new (someone's) back up to annoy (someone): My friend always puts my back up when she's cat's back arches up when it is angry.>*
the back of (someone or something) to get rid of (someone or something), not to see (someone or something) again: He'll be glad to see the back of his

a back seat to take an unimportant or minor role: The older children have taken a back seat with the arrival of the new through the back of one's head to to talk nonsense: If she said that he's married she's talking through the back of her back of beyond a very remote place: We hardly ever visit them because they live in the back of one's back on (someone or something) to ignore (someone or something) and refuse to offer assistance or be involved: Jeff has become a drug addict and his whole family have turned their backs on

your back to be careful in case someone is trying to harm you or cause trouble for you: *Now that Pam has joined your department you should watch your back; she's very ambitious and ruthless and would love to have your*

(someone's) back is turned when (someone) is either not present or is not noticing what is happening: The children steal money from their mother's purse when her back is

bacon

home the bacon (1) to earn money to support one's family: *She regards her husband just as someone who brings home the (2) to*

succeed in doing (something): *Mending the table's a difficult task but that carpenter will bring home the from the winning of a greased pig as a prize at a country fair.>*

(someone's) *bacon* to save someone from a danger or difficulty: *If you hadn't saved my bacon by giving me a lift I would have been bad*

egg a worthless or law-breaking person: *Her husband was a bad egg who ended up in*

off without much money: *They're too badly off to go on to the bad* to become immoral or criminal: *Her parents are afraid of her coming to the city in case she goes to the*

it bad/have got it bad to be very much in love with someone: *Mick has a new girlfriend and he's really got it bad; he can't concentrate on his*

a bad patch to to encounter difficulties or a difficult period: *You've hit a bad patch but things will*

bad odour in disfavour: *He's been in bad odour with her parents since he brought her home*

(someone's) *bad* or *black books* to out of favour with (someone): *They're in the teacher's bad books for being to an account book where bad debts are noted.>*

half bad quite good, very good: *This cake's not half*

bad unfortunate: *It's too bad you have to leave*

a bad grace in an unwilling and bad-tempered way: *They eventually came with us but with a bad*

bag

and baggage all one's belongings, or equipment: *They had to get out of the house bag and baggage when the new tenant*

lady a homeless woman who carries all her belongings with her in shopping bags: *During the recession more and more bag ladies appeared on the*

of bones a person or animal who is extremely thin: *The overworked donkey was a bag of*

[of nerves](#) a very nervous or anxious person: *She worries about She's just a bag of*

[of tricks](#) the equipment necessary to do something: *The joiner arrived with his bag of tricks to start work on her new kitchen*

punch one's way out of a paper bag to be totally lacking in ability or power: *He won't succeed in He couldn't punch his way out of a paper*

[fight/find/organize, etc., one's way out of a paper bag](#) see

the bag certain to be obtained: *He came home from his interview thinking the job was in the bag but unfortunately he was the bag used in hunting to carry what one has shot or caught.>*

[the cat out of the bag](#) see

[bag](#) a very varied mixture: *This new set of pupils is a mixed*

[one's bags](#) to leave somewhere, sometimes suddenly: *The athlete was found guilty of cheating for taking performance-enhancing drugs and was told to pack her*

bait

[to the bait](#) to do what someone has been trying to get one to do: *She knew that he was trying to get her to lose her temper but she refused to rise to the to fish rising to the surface to get the bait on an angler's line.>*

the bait to accept completely an offer, proposal, etc, that has been made purely to tempt one: *They swallowed the bait and took the money from the company without realizing that they had actually sold their houses to above.>*

baker

[dozen](#) thirteen: *His cousins made up a baker's* the former custom of bakers adding an extra bun or loaf to a dozen in order to be

sure of not giving short weight.>

balance

the balance undecided, uncertain: *The fate of the old building is in the balance although we have worked hard to preserve balance is a pair of hanging scales.>*

balance considering everything: *There are good points on each side but on balance I think the older man is the better*

a balance to reach an acceptable compromise: *Try to strike a balance between going out every night and never going out at (someone) off balance to cause (someone) to be disconcerted or confused: The lecturer was thrown off balance by some of the questions from the*

the balance to exert an influence which, although slight, is enough to alter the outcome of something: *There was very little to choose between the candidates but one of them lived locally, which tipped the*

bald

as a coot extremely bald. coot is a bird with a spot of white feathers on its head.>

a ball to have a very enjoyable time: *The children had a ball at the birthday*

ball and chain someone or something that restricts your freedom to do what you want: *James doesn't seem to care at all about his elderly parents, but regards them as a ball and chain which prevents him from moving away from where once shackled by a ball and chain.>*

whole new ball game to used to emphasize how much a situation has changed: *Your father doesn't realize how much the computer business has changed since he went into it, but it's a whole new ball game*

in the right ballpark to be reasonably close to the amount which is required or wanted: *The price which you mention is lower than the price which I want for the property but it's in the right*

the ball to make a mistake or fail to do something: *The export manager said that the French firm would definitely place an order with us, but he dropped the ball during the negotiations and the deal is*

the ball at one's feet to be in a position to be successful: *The young graduate thought he had the ball at his feet when he got his football.>*

the ball alert, quick-witted, attentive to what is going on around one: *If he had been on the ball he would have sold his shares to a football player who watches the ball carefully in order to be prepared if it comes to him.>*

up/take the ball and run with it to take an idea, project, etc, which someone else has started and try to make it successful: *Your predecessor began research on this new drug before she left; now it's up to you to pick up the ball and run with*

ball to act in accordance with someone else's wishes: *We had hoped that he would play ball and leave*

ball with (someone) to cooperate with (someone): *He's decided to play ball with the police and tell them all he*

or start the ball rolling to start off an activity of some kind, often a discussion: *Now that we are all present for the staff meeting perhaps someone will set the ball*

ball is in (someone's) court see

whole ball of wax to (especially American English) used to emphasize that you are referring to absolutely all of something:

He didn't want just part of the firm; he wanted the whole ball of ballistic

ballistic suddenly to become extremely angry: *The children's mother went ballistic when she saw their torn*

balloon

down like a lead balloon of a suggestion, idea, joke, etc, to be very badly received: *The idea that we should have a street party to celebrate the new millennium went down like a lead*

the balloon goes up when something serious, usually something that is expected and feared, happens: *The real trouble-makers had run away before the balloon went up and the headmaster discovered the broken balloons sent up to undertake military observation in World War I, signifying that action was about to start.>*

banana

bananas to go mad, to get extremely angry: *Her mother will go bananas if she comes home*

on a banana skin to do something that causes one humiliation or public embarrassment: *The politician thought that her speech was going very well until she slipped on a banana skin and got the name of the town* often show people literally slipping on banana skins.>

band

one-man band an organization which is run by one person only: *There's a local garage where you might get your car fixed, but it's a one-man* an entertainer who plays several musical instruments at once.>

on the bandwagon to show an interest in, or become involved in, something simply because it is fashionable or financially advantageous: *When blue denim became popular a lot of manufacturers jumped on the* to a brightly coloured wagon for carrying the band at the head of a procession.>

as though one has stepped out of a bandbox looking very neat and elegant: *Even after the long journey she still looked as though she*

had stepped out of a to a lightweight box formerly used for holding small articles of clothing such as hats.>

[beat the band](#) see

bang

goes (something) that puts a sudden end to (something): I have extra work to do, so bang goes my

one's head against a brick wall to to do (something) in vain: You're banging your head against a brick wall if you try to get him to change his

on exactly, precisely: He was bang on

[with a bang](#) to be very successful: *The jumble sale went with a bang—we made a lot of*

bank

[the bank](#) to leave (oneself or someone) without any money: *If he buys a cup of coffee it won't exactly break the gambling terms, to win all the money that a casino is prepared to pay out in one night.>*

baptism

[of fire](#) a first, usually difficult or unpleasant, experience of something: *She had a real baptism of fire when she had to represent her new company at an international Christian baptism.>*

bar

bars in prison: The victim's family want to see the accused behind

bare

one's soul to tell (someone) one's private feelings or thoughts: She bared her soul to her best friend after the break-up of her

[bare bones of \(something\)](#) the essential and basic details of (something): *Tell me the bare bones of the*

one's bare hands using one's hands rather than tools or weapons: He tried to dig the dog's grave with his own

bargain

more than one bargained for to encounter more difficulty than one had expected or was prepared for: *Jill thought that she would defeat the young tennis player easily, but she got more than she bargained for and won by a very narrow*

the bargain in addition, as well: *We bought their house and their car into the*

a hard bargain to try to get a deal that is very favourable to oneself: *We're going to refuse his offer to buy the firm because he's trying to drive too hard a*

a bargain to reach a settlement or agreement: *They struck a bargain that one firm would do the production work and the other the*

barge

touch (someone or something) with a bargepole to wish to have absolutely no contact with (someone or something): *I'm not considering him for the job—I wouldn't touch him with a*

bark

up the wrong tree to have the wrong idea or impression about (something), to approach (something) in the wrong way: *You are barking up the wrong tree if you're asking Timothy Johnson for help because he is notoriously raccoon-hunting, in which dogs were used to locate trees that had raccoons in them.>*

bark is worse than his or her bite a person is not as dangerous or as harmful as he or she appears to be: *His father shouts a lot but his bark is worse than his* *He never hits his* to a barking dog that is often quite friendly.>

barrel

(someone) over a barrel to get (someone) into such a position that one can get him or her to do anything that one wants: *Since she owes the landlord a lot of money he has her over a holding*

someone over a barrel of boiling oil, etc, where the alternatives for the victim are to agree to demands or be dropped in the barrel.>

shooting fish in a barrel see

the (bottom of the) barrel to to have to use someone or something of poor or inferior quality because that is all that is available: *They are really scraping the bottom of the barrel if they have appointed him to the job since he has absolutely no to the fact that people will only scrape out the bottom of an empty barrel if they have no more full ones.>*

both barrels forcefully and fiercely: *The local newspaper criticized the new play with both barrels so I'm not surprised that the audience numbers are to the two barrels of a shotgun.>*

base

to or make or reach first base to complete the important first stage of a process: *He has some good ideas but none of his projects ever gets to first base*, to complete the first section of a run.>

base with (someone) to be in contact with (someone), to talk to someone: *Julie and James are at university in different towns and they only manage to touch base when they're both home for*

to bat for (someone) to offer someone help or support: *Grace has been wrongly accused of cheating by the teacher and we should all go in to bat for*

to bat an eyelid see

one's own bat by oneself, without the help or permission of anyone else: *Her mother didn't tell her to write to She did it off her own the game of cricket.>*

a straight bat to to act in an honest and fair way: *You can rely on Will to divide the winnings equally among us; he always plays a straight*

as a bat having very poor eyesight: *Her aunt can't look up the number in the telephone directory since she's blind as a bat to the fact that bats live their lives in darkness.>*

a bat out of hell very quickly: *When he saw the police he ran away like a bat out of*

bate

bated breath anxiously: *They waited with bated breath for the results of the*

battle

half the battle used to indicate that an important or difficult part of something is over and that the rest will be easier: *Greg has admitted that he has a drink problem and that's half the*

battle lines are drawn used to indicate that two sides which are opposed to each other for some reason are ready to begin the fight, argument, competition, etc and that their aims have been declared and made clear: *Two people are standing for election as local councillor and the battle lines have been*

a losing battle to keep trying to achieve something, although with no chance of success: *The protesters against the new road are fighting a losing*

running battle an argument or fight which has lasted for a long time: *The local residents have been having a running battle with the council for years over the parking restrictions in their*

the battle, but lose the war to to get some of the things which you wanted from an argument, discussion, etc, but to lose your most important goal: *The workers feel that their union representatives won the battle but lost the war when they accepted the management's offer of a few better working conditions but no increase in*

bay

(someone or something) *at bay* to keep (someone or something) from coming too close: *She tries to keep her inquisitive neighbours at*

[for blood](#) see

be

be-all and end-all the most important aim or purpose: *Making a lot of money is the be-all and end-all of her* Shakespeare's Act 1, scene vii.>

beam

[in the beam](#) wide in the hips or buttocks: *She really is too broad in the beam to wear those* of a ship to mean wide in relation to its length.>

beam (1) on the wrong course: *The police are looking for the criminal in the wrong place—they are way off* (2) inaccurate: *The results of your calculations are completely off* the radio beam that is used to bring aircraft to land in poor visibility.>

one's beam ends very short of money: *Neither of them can get a job and they're now on their beam* a nautical term used to describe a ship lying on its side and in danger of capsizing completely.>

bean

[of beans](#) very lively, in good spirits: *She was ill and depressed but now she's full of beans after her* referring to a horse fed on beans, a high-energy food.>

[how many beans make five](#) to be experienced in the ways of the world: *The new barmaid will be able to cope with the difficult* She knows how many beans make

have a bean to have no money whatsoever: *The rent is due and they haven't a bean between*

know beans about (something) to know nothing whatsoever about (something): *He's bought a pub but he knows beans about running*

a

to amount to a hill of beans to be of very little worth or significance: *The opinion of the local people won't amount to a hill of beans compared with the needs of big*

amount to a row of beans same as not amount to a hill of beans
to

the beans to reveal a secret or confidential information: *His mother asked him not to tell anyone her age, but he spilled the beans to his down on (someone) to come towards (someone) in a determined and often threatening way: The child saw his angry mother bearing down on him waving the letter from the*

fruit to produce results: *Our fashion ideas are beginning to bear fruit—we've sold a lot more clothes and made a profit this*

in mind to remember: *Bear in mind that Monday is a public (something) out to confirm (something): The evidence at the scene of the crime bore out the witnesses' account of the up to keep cheerful or strong under strain or stress: I know you've a lot of worries but you must try to bear*

and bear it see

a cross to bear see

garden a noisy, rowdy place: *With all those kids around, their house is a bear* referred to a public place used for bear-baiting, in which dogs were made to attack bears and get them angry, for public amusement.>

a bear with a sore head extremely bad-tempered: *When the boss has a hangover he's like a bear with a sore*

beard

the lion in its den to confront or face (someone) openly and boldly: *If you want to get a rise you'll have to go the boss's office and beard the lion in his*

beast

nature of the beast see

beat

about the bush to approach (something) in an indirect way: *If you want her to leave, tell her Don't beat about the game-bird hunting, bushes are beaten to make the birds appear.>*

a (hasty) retreat to run away: *The boys beat a hasty retreat when they saw the orders, such as "retreat", used to be conveyed by a series of different drum signals.>*

(someone) hollow to defeat (someone) soundly: *He beat his father hollow at*

it to run away: When the old man saw the children in his garden he told them to beat

the drum to try to attract public attention: *They're beating the drum for their new perfume at the noise of a drum makes people stop and listen.>*

the pants off (someone) see

(someone) to it to succeed in doing something before someone else can: He was going to pay the restaurant bill but his friend beat him to

(someone) to the punch see

you can't beat them or 'em, join them or 'em if you cannot persuade other people to think and act like you, the most sensible course of action is for you to begin to think and act like them: *Go on, take the money from the After all, if you can't beat 'em, join*

the beaten track in an isolated position, away from towns or cities: *She likes to live somewhere quiet that is off the beaten*

stick to beat (someone) with see

some or a lot of beating to be of such high quality that it is difficult to improve on: His performance will take some The food at that restaurant takes a lot of

beat the band with great force or vigour: *The child is yelling to beat the to a sound that is louder than that produced by a band.*>

missing a beat without hesitating or reacting to something surprising, unexpectedly difficult, etc: *The first exam was a great deal harder than Jess thought it would be, but without missing a beat she went on to sit the rest of*

beauty

is in the eye of the beholder different people have different ideas of what is beautiful: *Beauty is certainly in the eye of the He said his new wife is wildly attractive, but to me she's quite*

is only skin deep people have more important qualities than how they look: *Beauty is only skin His sister may be very pretty but she is also very*

beaver

beaver a very enthusiastic and hard-working person: *The new employee is a real eager beaver who works late every like a beaver to work very industriously and enthusiastically: They're working like beavers to decorate the are small animals that build dams, etc, with great speed and skill.*>

beck

(someone's) *beck and call* having to be always available to carry out (someone's) orders or wishes: *She isn't as much of an invalid as she makes out—she just likes having everyone in the house at her beck and is a form of "beckon".*>

bed

of nails or thorns a very unpleasant or difficult situation: *His early life in the slums was an absolute bed of*

of roses an easy, comfortable or happy situation: *He says that being a travel writer is not a bed of*

into bed with (someone) to start working closely or cooperating with (someone): *Their organization should support the Conservatives but I hear they've got into bed with*
out of bed on the wrong side to start the day in a very bad-tempered mood: *The boss is criticizing He must have got out of bed on the wrong side*
(something) to bed to complete (something), to finish dealing with (something): *The discussions have proved very successful and we can now put the agreement to used of getting a newspaper ready for printing.>*

bee

a bee in one's bonnet to have an idea that one cannot stop thinking or talking about, to have an obsession: *The old lady has got a bee in her bonnet about going on a cruise but she is not fit to bee trapped under one's hat cannot escape.>*

bee a person who is very active and industrious: *Her mother's such a busy bee that she never seems to are reputed to be very hard-working creatures.>*

a beeline for (someone or something) to go directly and quickly to (someone or something): *The children made a beeline for the table where the food are reputed to fly back to their hives in straight lines.>*

birds and the bees see

one or someone is the bee's knees to consider oneself or someone else to be very special and important: *She think she's the bee's knees because her uncle is the*

beer

all beer and skittles not consisting just of pleasant or enjoyable things: *He's discovered that being a travel courier is definitely not all beer and*

beer something unimportant: *His present job is very small beer compared with his last*

beetroot

beetroot to blush deeply: *The girl went beetroot when he paid her a*

before

one can say Jack Robinson very rapidly, in an instant: The waiter brought the food before we could say Jack

one knows where one is very quickly, before one can grasp the situation: Before we knew where we were he had booked the tickets for the

the flood a very long time ago: They've known each other since before the to the flood described in the Bible in Genesis 7:9.>

beg

description to be such that words cannot describe it: *The richness of the furnishings beggars Shakespeare's Antony and Act 2, scene ii.>*

the question in an argument, to take for granted the very point that requires to be proved; to fail to deal effectively with the point being discussed: *Politicians are noted for their ability to beg the a-begging* unclaimed or unsold: *At the end of the sale several articles were going*

bell

the cat to be the person in a group who undertakes something dangerous for the good of the group: *Someone has to bell the cat and tell the boss that we want more* to a story about some mice who wanted to put a bell on the neck of the cat so that they would hear it coming and who needed a volunteer to do this.>

a bell to bring back vague memories: *His name rings a bell but I can't think where I've heard*

by the bell rescued from an unpleasant situation by something suddenly bringing that situation to an end: *The teacher asked him for his homework, which he hadn't* He was saved by the bell when she was called out of the classroom by the head the bell that marks the end of a round in boxing.>

belly

belly-up to fail, to go bankrupt: *The firm's gone belly-up and we've all lost our*

a bellyful of (something) to have too much of (something) so that you are bored with it: *I've had a bellyful of Meg's complaints; it's your turn to listen to her*

belt

the belt unfair: *To refer in public to the fact that his father was in prison was below the boxing, a blow below the belt is against the rules.>*

and braces used to describe extra precautions taken to make sure that all is well: *Alec has got several people standing by just in case he can't drive us to the station tomorrow morning; he always takes a belt and braces approach to*

(something) under one's belt to have already done or achieved something worthwhile: *You should get your degree under your belt before you start looking for acting roles and then you'll always be able to get a*

one's belt to reduce one's expenditure: *In the recession most firms had to tighten their* have to be tightened if one loses weight—in this case from spending less on food.>

one's belt achieved or accomplished: *We've got 200 miles under our*

bend

over backwards see

(someone's) ear see

bended knee very humbly or earnestly: *On bended knee I ask you not to sack*

the bend mad: The children are driving their father round the bend with their

berth

(someone) a wide berth to keep well away from (someone): Give that man a wide berth. He looks to a ship that keeps a good distance away from other ships.>

beside

beside oneself to be in a state of great emotion: The child was beside himself with joy at receiving the

the point not directly concerned with the issue being discussed: *She has to stay. The fact that she wants to go abroad is beside the*

best

one's level best to to try as hard as one can: We'll do our level best to get there on

the best of both worlds to to benefit from the advantages of two sets of circumstances: She thinks she has the best of both worlds by working at. She earns some money but can look after the children

one's best foot forward to make the best attempt possible: *If you want to pass the exam you had better put your best foot best part of (something) most of (something), nearly all of (something): They spent the best part of £3000 on plane the best of them as well as other people who are more experienced, better qualified, etc: She has only been skating for a short time but already she can skate with the best of the best will in the world* to no matter how much one wants to do something: *With the best will in the world I couldn't get there in*
bet

bets are off used to indicate that it is impossible to predict what might happen in a particular situation: *A few months ago it was thought that the government would easily be re-elected with an increased majority, but in the middle of the present financial crisis all bets are*

one's bets to try to protect oneself from possible loss, failure, disappointment, etc: *We decided to hedge our bets and book seats for both performances in case we missed the first to the laying off of a bet by taking out smaller bets with other lenders to avoid being unable to pay out on the original larger bet.>*

better

off (1) happier: *She says that she's better off without her* (2) richer: *Her husband's family is much better off than one better than (someone) to improve on something that someone has done: She won three prizes but her sister went one better and won*

the better of (someone) to overcome or defeat (someone): His son always gets the better of him at

seen better days to be no longer new or fresh: *This coat has seen better I need a new*

better part of (something) a large part of (something), most of (something): *They stayed for the better part of four*
[better of \(something\)](#) to reconsider (something), to change one's mind about (something): *They should think better of buying such an expensive house when money is*

between

[Scylla and Charybdis](#) see

beyond

[compare](#) unrivalled, without equal: *The queen's beauty was beyond one's ken* see

[the pale](#) beyond normal or acceptable limits: *When he drinks too much his behaviour is completely beyond the Pale* was an area in Ireland governed by England in the 16th century.>

bide

[one's time](#) to wait for a suitable opportunity: *They haven't given up their plan to climb the They're biding their time until the weather*

bicycle

[a fish needs a bicycle](#) see

big

[big fish in a small pond](#) a person who seems better, more important, etc, than he or she actually is, because he or she operates in a small, limited area: *In the village school he was a big fish in a small pond, but when he went to a large city school he was just an ordinary*

big of (someone) to be generous of (someone): *It was big of them to give us a day's*

Big Apple New York: *He's excited about flying to the Big*

[Brother](#) see

[guns](#) the most important people in an organization: *The big guns are having a board*

the big time to to be become extremely successful and famous:
He hoped one day to hit the big time, but he spent all his life singing in local

big_picture see

Big Smoke London: They would hate to live in the Big
bill

clean bill of health verification that someone is well and fit: *The footballer has been given a clean bill of health after treatment for his*
were given clean bills of health and allowed to sail when it was certified that no one aboard had an infectious disease.>

the bill to be exactly what is required: *They're looking for peace and*
At last they've found a cottage that fits the originally to a handbill or public notice.>

the bill to pay for something, usually something expensive: *He had to foot the bill for the repairs to his own car and the other*

the bill to be the most important performer in a show: *A world-famous pianist topped the*
theatrical advertising bills or posters the star performer's name is at the top.>

bird

bird in the hand is worth two in the bush something that one already has is much more valuable than things that one might or might not acquire: *Keep that old car. It has never let you down and*
a bird in the hand is worth two in the bush might fly away.>

bird of passage a person who never stays in one place for long: *We'd like Rob to stay with the firm, but he's a bird of passage and*
he's already talking of moving to another

little bird told me I found out by a means which I do not wish to reveal: *A little bird told me that she is having a*

of a feather flock together people who share the same interests, ideas, etc, usually form friendships. *Football fans are like birds of a*

feather, they flock

like a bird to eat very small amounts of food: Mary is so afraid of putting on weight that she eats like a bird and is very (someone) the bird of an audience, to express disapproval of a performer by hissing or booing so that he or she leaves the stage: The comic was so bad that they gave him the bird after five the resemblance of the noise of the audience to the hissing of geese.>

like a bird to go very well or very easily: The car goes like a bird with the new

two birds with one stone to fulfil two purposes with one action: *By spending the weekend there we were able to kill two birds with one We did some business and we were able to visit my*

for the birds acceptable only to people who are not very clever, fashionable, etc: You can't tell me the moon is made of green cheese. That's strictly for the

birds and the bees the basic facts of human sexual behaviour and reproduction: *The mother explained to her young daughter about the birds and the*

early bird catches the worm a person who arrives early or acts promptly is in a position to gain advantage over others: *It was a case of the early bird catches the worm when she was first in line on the first day of the shop's*

biscuit

the biscuit to be much worse than anything that has happened so far: He is always rude but his latest insults take the

bit

bit on the side a person with whom someone is having a sexual relationship, even although he/she is already married or has a regular partner: *Helen's not only Frank's secretary, but his bit on the side*

at the bit very impatient: *The children are champing at the bit to open their horse chews at its bit when it is impatient.>*

the bit between one's teeth to act on one's own and cease to follow other people's instructions or advice: *He dismissed his advisers, took the bit between his teeth and ruled the country on his own to a horse escaping from the control of its rider by holding the bit between its teeth.>*

bite

off more than one can chew to try to do more than one can comfortably do: *When she took over the running of both firms she bit off more than she could*

the bullet to do something unpleasant but unavoidable with courage: *He can't afford to take a reduction in salary but he's just going to have to bite the bullet and agree to*

the dust to die or cease to operate or function: *The society bit the dust for lack of*

the hand that feeds one to treat badly someone who is trying to help: *He got the girl her first job but she won't even speak to him now—a real case of biting the hand that feeds*

more than one bite at the cherry to have more than one opportunity to succeed at something: *You can always take the exam You have more than one bite at the*

biter bit used to indicate a situation in which someone who has tried to harm or do wrong to someone has suffered in some way as a consequence of this action: *Fred tried to get Tim into trouble with the boss by telling him that Tim had been late that morning, but it was a case of the biter bit; the boss realized that Fred was leaving work*

bitter

bitter pill to swallow something unpleasant or difficult that one has to accept: *When he got engaged to someone else it was a bitter pill*

for her to

the bitter end right to the very end, however unpleasant that is:
We had to stay at the boring concert to the bitter bitt is a post on a ship's deck for tying cable or rope to and the part of the cable fastened round it is the bitter end. When the cable is let out to the bitter end, no further adjustment is possible.>

black

black as one is painted as bad as everyone says one is: *She can be very helpful, not nearly as black as she is*

sheep a member of a family or group who is not up to the standard of the rest of the group: *They never talk about the youngest son. He was the black sheep of the*

black and white in writing or in print: *We must have the details of the agreement in black and*

(someone's) black books same as in (someone's) bad books see

the black showing a profit, not in debt: *His bank account is rarely in the the use of black ink to make entries on the credit side of a ledger.>*

pot calling the kettle black see

blank

cheque permission to do exactly what one wants: *The manager has been given a blank cheque in the reorganization of the* to a cheque made out to someone with the amount left blank.>

a blank to fail to find out anything after much searching or research.

blanket

the wrong side of the blanket illegitimate: *The prince fathered many children who were born on the wrong side of the*

blanket a dull person who makes other people feel depressed: *We were all enjoying the party until the host's girlfriend started asking everyone to She's such a wet*

blast

[blast from the past](#) someone or something that you have known in the past and is seen, heard about or suddenly brought to mind, bringing memories of that period: *I met my first boyfriend in the street yesterday; he's been abroad for years and so it was a real blast from the*

blaze

[all guns blazing](#) see

bleed

[red ink](#) see

blessing

blessing in disguise something that turns out to advantage after at first seeming unfortunate: *Getting the sack was a blessing in He got a much better job after*

[mixed blessing](#) something that has disadvantages as well as advantages: *Renting out one of their rooms was a mixed The extra income was useful but it interfered with their*

blind

[alley](#) see

[as a bat](#) see

[\(someone\) with science](#) see

[blind](#) to do something without enough information and without guidance: *I've been asked to organize the annual charity ball, but I'm flying blind because I can't find any information about the previous*

[blind](#) to insist that one is telling the truth about something: *The police questioned Jack about the stolen car but he swore blind that he knew nothing about*

blind leading the blind referring to a situation in which the person who is in charge of others knows as little as they do: *He's*

supposed to be a skiing instructor but he's only a beginner It's an obvious case of the blind leading the

block

[new kid on the block](#) see

blood

blood hostile feelings: There has been bad blood between the two [for \(someone's\) blood](#) to demand that someone is punished or held

responsible for something: The tabloids think that the police should have caught the murderer by now and they are baying for

[a rush of blood to the head](#) see

[cold blood](#) deliberately and calmly: She killed her husband in cold blood, showing no emotion for what was a carefully planned

getting blood out of a stone very difficult, almost impossible:

Getting him to say anything is like getting blood out of a

[blood](#) new members of an organization: Most of the members of the club are old and it desperately needs some new

[blood](#) to put a great deal of effort into something: She sweated blood to save the

blow

[away the cobwebs](#) see

[hot and cold](#) to keep changing one's mind or attitude: Sometimes he's friendly, sometimes he's He keeps blowing hot and

over to cease and be forgotten: Their disagreement soon blew

one's own trumpet to boast about one's achievements: We're tired of her blowing her own trumpet since she won the

[one's stack](#) see

[\(someone\) out of the water](#) see

[smoke in \(someone's\) face](#) see

[the gaff](#) to tell something secret, often something illegal, to someone, often the police: He blew the gaff on his neighbour who was later arrested for dealing from "gaff", meaning mouth.>

the whistle on (someone) to reveal or report someone's wrongdoing so that it will be stopped: *He blew the whistle on his manager for his bullying* the practice of blowing a whistle to indicate a foul in some ball games.>

which way the wind blows to to wait and find out how a situation is developing before making a decision: *He's going to wait and see which way the wind blows before asking for sailing.*>

blue

boy a person who is someone's favourite: *The young clerk will soon be He's the manager's blue-eyed*

an educated, intellectual woman: *He calls any intelligent woman a* a group of women in the 18th century who met in London to discuss intellectual and philosophical issues and some of whom wore blue stockings.>

in a blue moon to hardly ever: *Once in a blue moon he sends her*

of the blue without warning: *The news of his death came out of the* blue murder see

a blue streak see

bluff

(someone's) bluff to make (someone) prove that what he or she says is true is really genuine: *He kept telling his colleagues that he wanted to leave until the boss called his bluff and asked him if he really wanted to to poker, the card game.*>

board

board see

the board see

by the board to be abandoned: *His dreams of going to university have gone by the board with the death of his* board here is a ship's board or side, and to go by the board literally was to vanish overboard.>

the board to win all the prizes: *The young tennis player has swept the board at all the local board* referred to is the surface on which card games are played and on which the bets are placed.>

boat

one's boats to to do something that makes it impossible to go back to one's previous position: *You've sold your house, given up your job, you'll have to go* *You've burned your*
the same boat in the same situation: *Both of them are in the same boat—they're both single*

the boat to fail to take advantage of a opportunity: *The application forms had to be in yesterday —so you've missed the*

the boat out to spend money in an extravagant way in order to celebrate something in a lavish way: *George really pushed the boat out for his daughter's wedding*

the boat to do something to endanger or spoil a comfortable or happy situation: *You have a good job here—so don't rock the boat by calling a*

boil

the pot boiling see

bolt

bolt from the blue something very sudden and unexpected: *His transfer to another branch was a bolt from the*
one's bolt to make one's final effort, have no other possible course of action: *When he reported the teacher to the headteacher he shot his bolt because the head rejected the*

bone

bone of contention a cause of dispute: *The state of her bedroom is a bone of contention between her and her fight over bones.>*

a bone to pick with (someone) to have something one wants to quarrel about with (someone): *He said to the other man that he*

had a bone to pick with him for going out with his dogs fighting over a bone.>

no bones about (something) to have no hesitation or restraint about (saying or doing something openly): She made no bones about the fact that she disliked a reference to finding no bones in one's soup, which was therefore easier to eat.>

the bone (1) referring too closely to something that should not be mentioned; tactless: *Some of the guests' remarks about adultery were a bit near the bone when you consider that the host was having an*
(2) slightly indecent or crude: *Some of the comedian's jokes were a bit near the*

bare bones (of something) see

your fingers to the bone see

boo

not say boo to a goose to be extremely timid: *She's very aggressive but her husband wouldn't say boo to a*

book

closed book something about which one knows nothing, something that one does not understand: *The new technology is a closed book to older members of*

open book something that is easily understood: *His motives were an open book to all of*

(someone) to book to make (someone) explain or be punished for his or her actions: They thought they could cause the damage and walk away but they were soon brought to referring to a book where a police officer keeps a note of crimes.>

the book strictly according to the rules: The headteacher won't give us a day He does everything by the

the books illegally to alter accounts or financial records: *He had been cooking the books and so they did not know money had gone*
someone's black books see

(someone) *like a book* to understand (someone) completely, not to be deceived by someone: *I know that he's planning something I can read him like a*

(someone's) *book* to be advantageous to (someone): *It doesn't suit her book for him* to referring to a bookmaker who accepts bets only if he thinks he will not lose too much money on them.>

[a leaf out of \(someone's\) book](#) see

the book at (someone) to criticize or punish (someone) severely, to charge (someone) with several crimes at once: *The judge threw the book at He's got a ten-year* to charge someone with every crime listed in a book.>

boot

the boot to be dismissed or discharged from one's job: *The woman got the boot for*

(someone) *the boot* to dismiss or discharge (someone): *They're giving all the older workers the*

up one's boots to retire from work, to cease doing an activity: *The elderly man has played bowls for years but he is hanging up his boots* hanging up football boots after a game.>

(someone's) *boots* to flatter (someone) and do every-thing he or she wants: *The new employee is licking the boss's boots to get oneself up by one's bootstraps* to become successful through one's own efforts: *He now owns several stores but he started as an errand boy and pulled himself up by his*

the boot in (someone) (1) to kick (someone) when he or she is already lying on the ground injured: *The bullies put the boot in and kicked their victim* to (2) to treat (someone) cruelly or harshly after he or she has suffered already: *He lost his job and his wife put the boot in and left*

boot is on the other foot the situation has been completely turned round: *She begged him to stay but now the boot is on the other foot and he is pleading to be allowed*

big for one's boots conceited or self-important: *Since she won the beauty contest she has been too big for her*

bottle

a bottle to open a bottle: *Let's crack a bottle of wine to the bottle to drink a great deal of alcohol: Since his wife died he's been hitting the*

the genie out of the bottle see

one's bottle not to have the courage to do something or to go on with something: *Allan said that he was going to ask Rose for a date but lost his bottle at the last*

the bottle drinking a great deal of alcohol regularly: *He's been on the bottle since he lost his*

bottom

the bottom of (something) the cause of (something): *I might have known that he was at the bottom of the rumours that were going*

drawer a collection of items for the home, which young women used to gather together before marriage: *She's keen to get married so she's already started collecting linen and cutlery for her bottom*

to the bottom of (something) to find out the exact cause of (something) or the true nature of (something): *The doctors cannot get to the bottom of her chest*

rock bottom to reach the lowest possible level: *Share prices hit rock bottom last Her spirits have hit rock bottom since her boyfriend*

the (bottom of the) barrel see

bottom line (1) the most important point or part of something:

The bottom line in the negotiations with the kidnappers is the safety of the (2) The result or outcome: *After prolonged negotiations the*

bottom line was that both sides agreed to a to the bottom line in a

financial statement which indicates the extent of the profit or loss.>

and scrape to behave in a very humble and respectful way: *The hotel staff are expected to bow and scrape to the rich*

out to leave or cease to take part in a project, organization, etc: *She's been secretary for three years but she's bowing out* performers bowing to the audience at the end of a show.>

a bow to accept acknowledgement of one's achievements: *Everyone thinks you've done a good job, so take a bow*.>

the long bow to to exaggerate: *He said that she was absolutely penniless but he was drawing the long bow* to a large, powerful hand bow.>

another or more than one string to one's bow to have another possibility, plan, etc, available to one: *He's applied for other jobs as well as that one because it's as well to have more than one string to your*

boy

for the boys see

braces

and braces see

brain

or rack one's brains to to think very hard: *I racked my brains to remember her*

(something) on the or one's brain to think or worry about

(something) continuously: *She's got marriage on the*

(someone's) brains to find out ideas and knowledge about a subject from someone who knows a lot about the subject so that one can put them to one's own use: *Stop picking my brains and use an*

brass

down to brass tacks to consider the basic facts or issues of something: *We must get down to brass tacks and discuss how much*

rent we can

top brass the most important people in an organization, especially originally in the army: *The top brass have individual offices but the staff all work in one* the metal decoration on military uniforms.>

bread

and butter one's basic living: *How does he earn his bread and butter?*

which side one's bread is buttered to to know the course of action that is to one's greatest advantage: *He certainly won't leave his He knows which side his bread is*

the breadline with scarcely enough money to live on: *Since the father lost his job the family has been on the*

greatest thing since sliced bread a person or thing that is greatly admired and appreciated: *He is a careless worker but he thinks he is the greatest thing since sliced*

break

a leg see

even to have one's losses balanced by one's gains, to make neither a loss nor a profit: *I didn't make any money on my investment but at least I broke*

of day dawn: *The first train to the city leaves at break of*

the bank see

the ice see

the mould see

the news see

a break for it to attempt to escape: *The prisoner made a break for it when he was being led into*

breath

one's breath (1) to breathe in sharply in fear, surprise or pain: *She caught her breath when she saw the huge dark* (2) to rest for a short time: *I'll have to catch my breath after climbing the*

one's breath to wait anxiously for something: *We held our breath as the child walked along the roof*

one's breath to stop talking since one's words are having no effect: *Save your He'll leave school if he wants*

(someone's) breath away to surprise (someone) greatly: *They took her parents' breath away when they announced that they were*

one's breath very quietly, in a whisper: *He asked what time it was under his*

one's breath to say something that is not taken heed of: *I tried to persuade them to stay but I was wasting my*

breathe

able to breathe again to be able to relax after a period of anxiety, etc: *You can breathe again! The police have*

down (someone's) neck (1) to be very close behind (someone): *He was in the lead but there were several runners breathing down his*

(2) to be waiting impatiently for something from (someone): *The boss is breathing down her neck for the letters she is*

one's last to die: *He breathed his last just before*

brick

one's head against a brick wall see

a brick to to say something tactless or undiplomatic: *She certainly dropped a brick when she introduced the boss's wife as the*

a cat on hot bricks to very nervous or restless: *He was like a cat on hot bricks when waiting for his exam*

a ton of bricks to to treat or punish (someone) severely: *The headmaster came down on the boys like a ton of bricks for playing*

to make bricks without straw to try to do something without the necessary materials or equipment: *She has so few supplies in her kitchen that trying to make a meal there is like trying to make*

bricks without biblical reference, from Pharaoh's command concerning the Israelites in Exodus 5:7.>

bridge

bridges to do something to help people who are in some kind of opposition to each other to understand each other so that they will establish a relationship or co-operate with each other: *The two branches of the family have not spoken to each other for years but Mark is now trying to build*

one's bridges same as burn one's boats see

a bridge when one comes to it or *cross that bridge when you come to it* to worry about or deal with a problem only when it actually arises: *She keeps worrying about what will happen when she leaves home but she'll have to cross that bridge when she comes to*

under the bridge see

brief

no brief for (someone or something) not to support or defend (someone or something): *I hold no brief for these new*

bright

and bushy-tailed very cheerful and lively: *They were both bright-eyed and bushy-tailed when they came back from*

on the bright side to be optimistic, to see the advantages of one's situation: *You might not like your present job but look on the bright side—at least it's well*

bring

down to earth see

home the bacon see

home to see

(someone) round (1) to bring (someone) back from unconsciousness: *The doctor brought him round with the kiss of* (2) to persuade (someone) to do something: *He was reluctant to participate but we brought him round*

(something) to the party see

to a head see

broad

in the beam see

a broad back see

broad shoulders to be able to accept a great deal of responsibility, criticism, etc: *I don't mind them blaming I've got broad
broad daylight* during the day when anyone can see: *He was
attacked in broad*

broken

reed see

brother

I my brother's keeper? the actions or affairs of other people are not my responsibility: *So my colleague was rude to Am I my brother's keeper?* the biblical story of Cain and Abel, Genesis 4:9.>
Brother a powerful person or organization thought to be constantly monitoring and controlling people's actions: *I prefer to work for a small In a big organization I get a feeling that Big Brother is watching* the dictator in George Orwell's novel

brown

a brown study deep in thought: *She won't hear She's in a brown*

brush

up on (something) to refresh one's knowledge of (something): *You should brush up on your French before you go on
the brush-off* to be rejected or refused abruptly: *He asked her to the cinema but he got the brush-off when she said*

bucket

drop in the bucket to a very small part of what is needed: *Our contribution to the famine fund is only a drop in the
down in buckets* to rain heavily: *As usual in August, it's coming down in*

the bucket to die: *They were just waiting for the old man to kick the here is perhaps a beam from which pigs were hung after being killed.>*

buckets to cry a great deal: *She wept buckets at the sad*

Buggins

turn one's turn to be promoted, according to some automatic or routine system, not according to merit: *He got the job because it's Buggins's turn, not because he's*

build

bridges see

like a tank see

bull

the bull's eye to do or say something that is very appropriate or relevant: *You hit the bull's eye when you said you thought she was to the exact centre of a dart board.>*

a bull at a gate in a very unsubtle, unthinking way: *The people who had been involved in the train crash were still in a state of shock but the young reporter rushed in like a bull at a gate asking a bull in a china shop in a very clumsy way: She went charging off like a bull in a china shop and knocked my papers to the*

a red rag to a bull see

the bull by the horns to tackle (something) boldly: *If you want them to stop the noise you'll have to take the bull by the horns and*

bullet

the bullet see

the bullet to be dismissed or discharged: *Half the firm have got the*

(someone) the bullet to dismiss or discharge (someone): *The boss will give you the bullet if you don't turn*

bum

[bums on seats](#) to get people to go to see a play, concert, etc: *We need to get a lot more bums on seats for every production if the theatre is to remain*

burden

burden of proof the responsibility for proving something: *The burden of proof lies with the legal term.*>

burn

[one's boats or bridges](#) see

[one's fingers](#) see

[the candle at both ends](#) see

[the midnight oil](#) see

burning question a question of great interest to many people: *The burning question is who is our new owner?*

burst

[bursting at the seams](#) see

Burton

for a Burton dead, ruined, broken, etc: *The old car's gone for a a military term from Burton, a kind of ale.*>

bus

holiday a holiday spent doing much the same as one does when one is at work: *The house-painter's wife expects him to take a busman's holiday and redecorate their to a bus driver who drives a bus while on holiday.*>

bush

[about the bush](#) see

telegraph the fast spreading of information by word of mouth: *I heard on the bush telegraph that he had reference to the Australian bush.*>

bushel

[one's light under a bushel](#) see

business

business to be determined (to do something), to be serious: *He was not joking about the He means*

[one's own business](#) to concern oneself with one's own affairs and not interfere in those of other people: *When he tried to give advice to the girl she asked him to mind his own*

bust

[a gut](#) see

[bust](#) to fail, to be financially ruined: *During the recession many firms went*

butter

a person who often drops things: *She's such a She dropped the tray full of*

(someone) up to flatter (someone) a great deal, usually in order to get him or her to do something: *He doesn't really like the boss, but he's buttering him up to get a pay*

[which side of one's bread is buttered](#) see

[a \(hot\) knife through butter](#) see

as though butter wouldn't melt in one's mouth to appear very innocent, respectable, etc: *The girl looks as though butter wouldn't melt in her mouth but she actually behaves very*

butterfly

butterflies in one's stomach to have a fluttering sensation in one's stomach as a sign of nervousness: *Every night she has butterflies in her stomach before she goes on*

button

(someone) to catch (someone's) attention and engage him or her in conversation: *The minister buttonholed me as I came out of the "button hold", to hold by the button.>*

C

cabbage

as green as one is cabbage-looking not as foolish or inexperienced as one appears to be: *He won't accept a reduction in He's not as green as he is*

cahoots

cahoots with (someone) forming a secret partnership with (someone), especially to do something dishonest or illegal: *The police think that the bank clerk was in cahoots with the a partnership, perhaps from French, "a cabin".>*

Cain

Cain to make a great deal of noise or fuss: *He will raise Cain when he sees the damage to his to Cain in the Bible who killed his brother Abel, Genesis 4.>*

cake

piece of cake something easy to do: *Winning the race was a piece of*

slice or share of the cake a share of something desirable or valuable: *You should invest some money in the firm and get a slice of the*

and ale pleasant or enjoyable activity: *A student's life is not all cakes and You have to do some Shakespeare's Twelfth Act 2, scene iii.>*

one's cake and eat it or *eat one's cake and have it* to have the advantages of two things or situations when doing, possessing, etc, one of them would normally make the other one impossible: *He's engaged to one of the sisters but he would like to have his cake and eat it and go out with the other one as*

on the cake see

or go like hot cakes to sell very quickly: *That computer game is selling like hot cakes since it was advertised on the cake* same as *take the*

call

wake-up call see

off the dogs see *dog*

cage

(someone's) cage to annoy or agitate (someone): *George is in a very bad temper this morning—who rattled his cage?* visitors to a zoo rattling the cages of the animals to get them to react.>

calf

love love felt by a very young, inexperienced person: *He is unhappy that she has gone away but calf love soon*

the fattened calf to to provide a lavish meal, especially to mark a celebration of someone's arrival or return: *Our daughter's coming home from Canada, so we're killing the fattened* the parable of the prodigal son in the Bible, Luke 15:23.>

call

close call same as a close shave see

or obey the call of nature to go to the toilet: *Where is the nearest public toilet? I need to answer the call of*

a spade a spade see

it a day see

it quits see

the shots see

a call to go to the toilet: *Excuse me, I have to pay a*

camel

straw that breaks the camel's back see

a camel to regard something as being acceptable, true, fair, etc, when it is quite clearly not so: *How can they swallow the camel of*

their colleague's unfair dismissal?

camp

a foot in both camps to have associations with two groups who have opposing and conflicting views and attitudes: *He is a member of staff but he has shares in the company, so he has a foot in both*

can

[can of worms](#) see

[the can](#) to accept blame or responsibility, usually for something that someone else has done: *Several of the pupils set fire to the school but the one who was caught carried the*

the can certain, agreed or decided upon: *He had a good interview so the job's in the* to a completed cinema film that is stored in large metal containers or cans.>

candle

[the candle at both ends](#) to work and/or to play during too many hours of the day: *He has a full-time job and studies at He is certainly burning the candle at both*

hold a candle to (someone) to be not nearly as good or as talented as (someone): *The rest of the football team cannot hold a candle to the new* someone who is not good enough even to hold a light while someone else does the work.>

[game is not worth the candle](#) something that is not worth the effort that has to be spent on it: *She's well paid but she works such long hours that she has decided that the game is not worth the* the translation of the French phrase *le jeu n'en vaut la* referring to a gambling session in which the amount of money at stake was not enough to pay for the candles required to give light at the game.>

canoe

one's own canoe to control one's own affairs without help from anyone else: *Now her father's dead she'll have to paddle her own cap*

feather in one's cap see

in hand humbly: *He has gone cap in hand to ask for his job* one's cap in someone's presence is a sign of respect.>

the cap fits, wear it if what has been said applies to you, then you should take note of it: *I simply said that honesty was not common these days, but if the cap fits, wear*

one's thinking cap on to think very carefully about a problem: *If we put our thinking caps on I am sure we can find our way out of the*

one's cap at (someone) to try to attract (someone of the opposite sex): *She was so anxious to get married that she set her cap at every man in a mistranslation of French *mettre le* "to head towards".>*

cap it all on top of everything else, finally: *I was late and then to cap it all I missed the*

capital

capital out of (something) to make use of (something) for one's own advantage: *The counsel for the defence made capital out of the witness's*

a capital A, B, C, etc used to emphasize that the person or thing described is an extreme example of his, her or its kind: *They are certainly villains with a capital*

card

one's cards to be dismissed or discharged: *The clerk got his cards for stealing*

a card up one's sleeve to have an idea, plan of action, etc, in reserve to be used if necessary: *They think that they have won but their opponent has a card up his cheating at cards.>*

the cards likely: Their dismissal is very much on the reading the cards in fortune-telling.>

one's cards close to one's chest to be secretive or non-communicative about one's plans or intentions: *I think that they are moving overseas but they are playing their cards very close to their holding one's cards close to one in card-playing so that one's opponents will not see them.>*

one's cards right to act in such a way as to take advantage of a situation: *If she plays her cards right he will marry*

one's cards on the table to make known one's plans or intentions: *If you want us to help you'll have to put your cards on the card-playing, to show one's opponent one's cards.>*

the cards against (someone) to make it very difficult for (someone) to succeed: *The cards are stacked against him finding a job because he has no*

carpet

the carpet about to be rebuked or punished by someone in authority: *She will be on the carpet when the boss discovers that she is to the piece of carpet in front of a desk, where someone might stand to be rebuked.>*

(something) under the carpet to try to hide or forget about (something unpleasant): *They try to sweep under the carpet the fact that their son's in*

red carpet special, respectful treatment: *They're really rolling out the red They've invited the boss and his wife to to the red carpet put down for a royal person to walk on during official visits.>*

carrot

and stick reward and punishment as a method of persuasion: *The headmaster uses a policy of carrot and stick with the He praises them a lot but he also punishes them a below.>*

out a carrot to (someone) to promise (someone) a reward in order to get him or her to do something: *If you want them to work late you'll have to hold out the carrot of extra urging a donkey forward by holding a carrot in front of it.>*

carry

a torch for (someone) to be in love with someone, especially someone who does not return the emotion: *She's carried a torch for the boss for years but he doesn't even notice torch or a flame was regarded as symbolic of love.>*

coals to Newcastle see

the can see

the day see

cart

the cart before the horse to do or say things in the wrong order: *He painted the walls before the He certainly put the cart before the*

carte

given carte blanche to be given complete freedom to act as one wishes: *The owner has given him carte blanche to furnish her a blank card.>*

Casanova

a man who has relationships with many women: *He's a real He's been out with most of the girls in the Giacomo Casanova, a famous 18th-century Italian lover and adventurer.>*

case

on (someone's) case to keep on criticizing someone or complaining about them: *The new English teacher seems to have taken a dislike to me—he's on my case all the*

Cassandra

a person who makes predictions about unpleasant future events but who is never believed: *She's a real Cassandra, she's always seeing gloom* Greek legend, Cassandra, who was the daughter of

Priam, king of Troy, had the gift of prophecy but was destined never to be believed. She predicted the fall of Troy.>

cast

pearls before swine to offer something valuable or desirable to someone who does not appreciate it: *Taking her to the opera was a case of casting pearls before* biblical reference to Matthew 7:6.>

the first stone to be the first person to blame or criticize someone: *Eventually every-one blamed him but it was his sister who cast the first* biblical reference to the story in John 8:7 about a woman who was to be punished by being stoned to death.>

one's net wide see

die is cast see

castle

in the air or *castles in Spain* dreams or hopes that are unlikely ever to be realized: *She builds castles in the air about winning the*

cat

cat may look at a king there is nothing to prevent an ordinary person from looking at someone important: *She asked me why I was looking at her but I just said, "A cat may look at a king."*

the cat see

killed the cat to said as a warning not to pry into other people's affairs: *One day someone is going to hit him for asking personal questions, and he'll find out that curiosity killed the*

the cat got your tongue? said to someone who does not say anything out of timidity, etc, to encourage him or her to speak: *What have you got to say in your defence? Has the cat got your tongue?*

the cat out of a bag to reveal something secret or confidential, especially accidentally or at an inappropriate time: *They didn't want anyone to know that they had been married that day but their friend*

let the cat out of the referring to an old fairground trick in which a customer was offered a cat in a bag when he or she thought the bag held a piglet.>

[a cat on hot bricks](#) see

a scalded cat in a rapid, excited way: *She's rushing around like a scalded cat to get the meal ready for the something the cat brought or dragged in very untidy or bedraggled: After the football match the boys looked like something the cat brought*

enough room to swing a cat [to](#) for there to be very little space: *She can't stay at her daughter's There's not enough room there to swing a*

[to have a cat's chance in hell](#) or *a cat's chance in hell* to have no chance at all: *They don't have a cat's chance in hell of cat and mouse with (someone) to treat (someone) in such a way that he or she does not know what is going to happen to them at any time: The terrorists were playing cat and mouse with the One minute the hostages thought that they were going to be released, the next they thought that they were going to be cat often plays with its prey, a mouse, before killing it.>*

or set the cat among the pigeons [to](#) to cause a disturbance, especially a sudden or unexpected one: *Her neighbour certainly put the cat among the pigeons when he accidentally mentioned her husband's*

cats and dogs [to](#) to rain very heavily: *The picnic's cancelled—it's raining cats and*

which way the cat jumps to wait and see what other people are going to do and how the situation is developing before deciding on one's course of action: *I'm not going to rush into putting in an offer for the I'm going to wait and see which way the cat*

cat's pyjamas or *whiskers* to a person who is very highly regarded:
He thinks he's the cat's pyjamas in his new sports
more than one way to kill or *skin a cat* there's more than one way
method of doing things: *He left, not because he disliked the work,*
but because his colleagues were so unpleasant to him—there's more
than one way to kill a
the cat's away, the mice will play when the person in charge or in
control is not present the people whom he or she is in charge of
will work less hard, misbehave, etc: *When the boss is away, they*
take very long lunch breaks. When the cat's away, the mice will
catch

(someone) in the act to catch (someone) actually doing something
wrong or bad: *He hoped to steal the money and run but he was*
caught in the act by the

it to be scolded or punished: *He'll catch it when his father sees*
what he's done to the

one's breath see

one's death (of cold) see

(someone) napping to surprise (someone) when he or she is
unprepared or inattentive: *The early winter caught them They had*
no fuel for the

(someone) on the hop see

(someone) red-handed see

the sun to become sunburnt or sun-tanned: *The child's caught the*
sun although she was outside for only a short

a situation in which one can never win or from which one can
never escape, being constantly hindered by a rule or restriction
that itself changes to block any change in one's plans; a difficulty
that prevents one from escaping from an unpleasant or dangerous
situation: *If you need an emergency loan you can apply to the Social*

Fund, but it is a loan for credit-worthy people so you won't get it. It's Catch-22 the title of a novel by Joseph Heller.>

(someone) with his or her pants or trousers down to to surprise (someone) when he or she is unprepared or doing something wrong, especially when this causes embarrassment: When his boss found him chatting to his secretary instead of writing the monthly report, he regretted being caught with his pants to walking in on someone partially dressed.>

caution

caution to the (four) winds see

caviar

to the general something considered to be too sophisticated to be appreciated by ordinary people: Only intellectuals read his They're caviar to the Shakespeare's Act 2, scene ii.>

ceiling

ceiling see

through the ceiling to rise very high, to soar: House prices went through the

the ceiling or roof to to lose one's temper completely: She hit the ceiling when he cancelled the

ceremony

on ceremony to behave in a formal manner: You can take your jacket You don't have to stand on ceremony.

certain

a certain condition pregnant: She has been sick because she is in a certain

a certain age see

chalice

(someone) a poisoned chalice to be given something to do which seems an attractive proposition but which may well lead to failure or extreme difficulties: Pat is very pleased to have been made editor

of the magazine, but she's been handed a poisoned chalice because she's the third editor this

chain

weak link in the chain a person who does not perform as well as the others in a team: *Brian's laziness makes him the weak link in the*

chalk

different as chalk and cheese to completely different: *They're sisters but they are as different as chalk and*
it up to experience accept the inevitability of something: *You won't get your money back from the* *You might as well chalk it up to*
by a long chalk not by a long way, by no means: *They haven't given up yet, not by a long* the vertical chalk lines drawn to mark scores in a game, the longer lines representing the greater number of points.>

champ

at the bit see

chance

it to take a risk: I won't take an I think I'll chance

one's arm see

one's chances to think that one is highly likely to succeed: *Even with so many top-class competitors he still fancies his*

a fighting chance to have a possibility of success if a great effort is made: *The team still have a fighting chance of winning the tournament but they face tough*

an eye to the main chance to watch carefully for what will be advantageous or profitable to oneself: *He's learning to play golf because the boss plays it and he always has an eye to the main*

a sporting chance to have a reasonable chance of success: *Many experienced people have applied for the job but with his qualifications he has at least a sporting*

to have a cat's chance in hell see

to have the ghost of a chance not to have the slightest possibility of success: *He hopes to win the race but he really doesn't have the ghost of a*

the off-chance (of or that) in the hope (of or that), assuming there is the possibility (of or that): *We went to the theatre on the off-chance of getting You should go early in the off-chance that you get*

one's chance or chances to take a risk or take advantage of an opportunity on the understanding that one accepts whatever happens: You'll just have to take your chance and apply for the If your present employer finds out it's too

change

hands to pass into different ownership: *Houses in that street change hands extremely*

horses in mid-stream to change one's opinions, plans, sides, etc, in the middle of something: *At the beginning of the election campaign he was going to vote Conservative but he changed horses in mid-stream and voted Labour*

one's mind to alter one's decision or intention: He was going to go to Greece but he has changed his

one's tune to change one's attitude or opinion: *He disagreed with me yesterday but he changed his tune when he heard the*

and change see

a change of heart to alter one's opinion or decision, usually to a better or kinder one: *The headmaster was going to expel the girl but he had a change of heart when he saw how sorry she*

the changes to add variety by doing or arranging things in different ways: *She cannot afford new furniture but she rings the changes by shifting the furniture around from room to*

sea change see

chapter

chapter of accidents see

and verse detailed sources for a piece of information: *Don't just make vague references in your essay to other You must give chapter and the method of referring to biblical texts.>*

charity

begins at home one must take care of oneself and one's family before concerning oneself with others: She would like to be able to contribute to the welfare of children overseas but her own children need new clothes and charity begins at

as charity extremely cold: *When the central heating went off in the huge house it was as cold as is referred to as cold since it tends to be given to the poor and disadvantaged by organizations rather than by individual people and so lacks human feeling or warmth.>*

charm

a charmed life regularly to have good fortune and avoid misfortune, harm or danger: *The racing driver seems to lead a charmed He has never been involved in an like a charm to be very effective, to work very well: His efforts to persuade her to go out with him worked like a*

chase

after rainbows to spend time and effort in thinking about, or in trying to obtain, things that it is impossible for one to achieve: *He should concentrate on doing his job and stop applying for jobs he won't He spends most of his time chasing*

one's tail see

to the chase to start discussing or dealing with the most important part of something instead of wasting time on minor points: *We've discussed various points concerning the sale of my house. Please would you cut to the chase and tell me how much it's worth?* to the fact that in certain kinds of film a car chase is the most exciting part.>

cheek

by jowl side by side, very close together: *Workers and management work cheek by jowl in the same large*

a rain check on (something) see

the other cheek to take no action against someone who has harmed one, thereby giving him or her the opportunity to harm one again: *I know he insulted you but it will cause less trouble for everyone if you turn the other cheek rather than take your revenge* on biblical reference to Matthew 5:39, "Whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the left one also".>

cheese

different as chalk and cheese see

more full of holes than Swiss cheese see

off bored, weary or dissatisfied: *He's really cheesed off with his present job and has decided to look for a new*

cheese bad luck, a sentiment usually expressed by someone who does not care about the misfortune: *It's hard cheese for him if he has to work late but the rest of us can leave*

"cheese" a request to smile when one has one's photograph taken: *Don't look so glum, say one says "cheese" one's mouth forms a smile.*>

cherry

more than one bite at the cherry see

is just a bowl of cherries see

cheque

cheque see

Cheshire

like a Cheshire cat to smile broadly so as to show one's teeth: *She was grinning like a Cheshire cat as they handed her the to Alice's*

Adventures in Wonderland by Lewis Carroll, in which the Cheshire cat gradually disappears except for its smile.>

chest

(something) off one's chest to tell (someone) about something that is upsetting, worrying or annoying one: *If you know something about the accident you had better get it off your chest and tell the* [one's cards close to one's chest](#) see

chestnut

chestnut an old joke, usually one that is no longer funny: *The comedian wasn't His jokes were all old chestnuts that I had heard* [\(someone's\) chestnuts out of the fire](#) to rescue (someone) from a difficult or dangerous situation, often by putting oneself in difficulty or danger: *He is continually getting himself into financial trouble and he always expects his brother to pull his chestnuts out of the fire and lend him* a story by the 17th-century French writer La Fontaine, in which a monkey uses a cat's paw to get hot nuts from a fire.>

chew

[off more than one can chew](#) see

[the cud](#) to think deeply about something: *I'll have to chew the cud a lot before deciding whether or not to move*

[the fat](#) to have a discussion or conversation: *Let's not rush out straightaway. We can have a cup of tea and chew the fat*

chicken

something of very little value or importance; an insignificant amount of money: *They paid her chicken-feed for that valuable* [come home to roost](#) misdeeds, mistakes, etc, that come back with an unpleasant effect on the person who performed the misdeed, especially after a considerable time: *He told everyone that he had never been married, but his chickens came home to roost when his ex-wife turned*

one's chickens before they are hatched to make plans which depend on something that is still uncertain: *Don't give up this job before you are officially offered the It's unwise to count your chickens before they're*

child

play something that is very easy to do: *you will find the work child's*

childhood a time when an adult person, often an old person, behaves like a child: *The little boy's father seems to be in his second childhood and keeps playing with the train The old man seems to have entered a second childhood—he won't let anyone touch his*

child is father of the man the character of an adult is formed from childhood influences: *He's been in and out of prison which is not surprising because his father was a burglar before The child is father of the*

chin

one's chin up not to show feelings of depression, worry or fear: *I know it's difficult to find a job but you should keep your chin up and go on*

one's chin out to show determination in opposing someone or something: *Her parents tried to stop her going to university but she stuck her chin out and went ahead against their*
it on the chin to accept or to suffer (something) with courage: *He was upset when she broke their engagement but he took it on the chin and went out with other*

chink

in (someone's) armour see

chip

chip off the old block a person who is very like one of his or her parents: *That boy's a real chip off the old He's already as good a*

salesman as his

in one's chips to die: I hear that the old man cashed in his chips on the way to the to a gambler cashing in his or her chips or tokens in exchange for money at the end of a gambling session.>

a chip on one's shoulder to have an aggressive attitude and act as if everyone is going to insult or ill-treat one, often because one feels inferior: *He has a chip on his shoulder about his lack of education and is always belligerent towards* to a former American custom by which a young man who wished to provoke a fight would place a piece of wood on his shoulder and dare someone to knock it off.>

had one's chips to have had, and failed at, all the chances of success one is likely to get: If he fails the exam this time he's had his chips because he's not allowed to resit to gambling tokens.>

the chips are down when a situation has reached a critical stage: *He thought he had many friends but when the chips were down and he was unemployed he found he had only gambling term indicating that the bets have been placed.>*

choice

choice no choice at all; a choice between accepting what is offered or having nothing at all: *We've only got one empty room for It's Hobson's choice, I'm* to the practice of Tobias Hobson, an English stable-owner in the 17th century, of offering customers only the horse nearest the stable door.>

chop

and change to keep altering (something), to keep changing (something): *He's furious at them for chopping and changing their holiday*

the chop (1) to be dismissed or discontinued: *Both he and his research project got the* (2) to be killed: *The gang made sure that their enemy got the*

chord

[a chord](#) to be familiar in some way: *Something about his voice struck a*

[a chord](#) to arouse emotion or sympathy: *He is usually very hard-hearted but the little girl's tears touched a*

Christmas

[turkeys voting for Christmas](#) see

church

[as a church mouse](#) see

circle

[full circle](#) to return to the position or situation from which one started: *Diet advice has come full Dieters used to be told to avoid bread but now they are told to eat*

[the wagons](#) see

round in circles to keep going over the same ideas without reaching a satisfactory decision or answer: *I think we should postpone this discussion until we have more* *We're just going round in round in circles* to dash about and appear to be very busy without accomplishing anything: *She's been running round in circles preparing for the guests, but not one of the rooms is ready*

[the circle](#) to try to solve a problem whose solution seems impossible: *The finance minister is trying to square the circle of not raising taxes while, at the same time, improving public*

[circle](#) an unfortunate or bad situation, the result of which produces the original cause of the situation or something similar: *They're stuck in a vicious circle—his wife nags him for going out, and he has to go out to get away from her* logic, the term for the fallacy of proving one statement by the evidence of another which is itself only valid if the first statement is valid.>

circus

three-ring circus a place where there is a lot of noise and a lot of confused activity going on: *I'm taking my child to the nursery school party and I'm expecting it to be a real three-ring*

clanger

a clanger same as drop a brick see

clapper

the clappers extremely rapidly: You'll have to go like the clappers to get there on

class

a class by oneself or or in a class of its, etc, own far better than other people or things of the same type, without equal: The ice cream in that shop is in a class by As an actress, she's in a class of her

clay

feet of clay see

clean

clean bill of health see

clean slate a record free of any discredit; an opportunity to make a fresh start: *He has paid the penalty for his wrongdoing and now starts the new job with a clean* were formerly used for writing on in schools.>

as a whistle (1) extremely clean: *The kitchen surfaces were clean as a* (2) completely without guilt, blameless: *They thought that he was selling drugs but he was found to be clean as a is next to godliness* it is almost as important to be clean as it is to be religious and virtuous: *The teacher was always trying to get the children to wash their hands by telling them that cleanliness is next to*

clean to tell the truth about something, especially after lying about it: *He finally decided to come clean and tell the police about his part in the*

or *his* or *her*) *hands are clean* I am (or he or she is, etc) not guilty or responsible: *The police can question him if they like but his hands are*

one's nose clean to to keep out of trouble, to behave well or legally: *If you keep your nose clean for the rest of the term I think the teacher will forget about what you*

a clean breast of (something) to admit to (something), especially after having denied it: *At first they said that they hadn't been involved but then they made a clean breast of*

a clean sweep to get rid of everything which is unnecessary or unwanted: *If you have doubts about most of the existing staff you should make a clean sweep and dismiss them*

Clean a person who is highly trusted or respected: *Some of the members of the government are under suspicion but he's Mr (something) clean* to take or steal everything that can be removed from (something or somewhere): *The burglars picked his house*

a clean pair of heels to run away very quickly: *When the burglar saw the police he instantly showed a clean pair of clean* free of all guilt or blame: *The police investigated him but he's squeaky* surfaces tend to squeak when wiped.>

(someone) to the cleaners to cause (someone) to spend or lose a great deal of money: *The firm was really taken to the cleaners by the suppliers who provided the goods in a*

clear

as a bell very easy to hear: *His overseas telephone call was as clear as a such as church bells, are very audible.>*

as crystal very easy to understand or grasp: *It's clear as crystal that he's in love with*

as mud not at all easy to understand or grasp: *He tried to explain but his explanation was clear as*

the air see

the decks to tidy up, especially as a preparation for some activity or project: *I'll have to clear the decks and put all this shopping away before I start cooking to getting a ship ready for battle.>*

the clear free from suspicion: *the police suspected him but he has an alibi so he's in the*

clear of (someone or something) to keep away from or avoid (someone or something): *You should steer clear of badly lit*

coast is clear the danger or difficulty is now past: *She doesn't want to go into the house when her father's there, so tell her when he's gone out and the coast is a military term indicating that there were no enemy forces near the coast and so an invasion was possible.>*

cleft

a cleft stick unable to decide between two equally important or difficult courses of action: *He's in a cleft He's promised to take his wife out to celebrate their wedding anniversary but his boss is insisting on him working*

climb

climbing the wall(s) see

a mountain to climb see

clip

(someone's) wings to limit the freedom, power or influence of (someone): *She used to go out every night but her wings have been clipped since she had a the practice of clipping the wings of a bird to prevent it flying away.>*

cloak

involving or relating to a great deal of plotting and scheming: *He's resigned from the board of directors because of all the cloak-and-dagger business surrounding the sacking of the combination of a cloak and a dagger suggests conspiracy.>*

clock

[the clock](#) see

clockwork to go very smoothly, without any problems: *The escape plan worked like*

back the clock or *turn the clock back* to return to the conditions or situation of a former time: *Some employers would like to put back the clock sixty years and pay their employers practically He wishes that he could turn the clock back and be at home again with his as clockwork* perfectly regularly: *His visits to his mother were regular as*

the clock all the time; for twenty-four hours a day: *The rescue services are working round the clock searching for*

[closed book](#) see

closed doors in secret: *The committee is meeting behind closed*

[one's eyes to \(something\)](#) see

[ranks](#) see

[close shave](#) something that was only just avoided, especially an escape from danger, failure, etc: *He had a close shave when his car skidded out of control and ran into a*

close quarters very close, from a position nearby: *I thought she was quite young but when you see her at close quarters she looks quite to home* referring to something about which someone is very sensitive or which relates very closely to someone: *You shouldn't have talked about law and order in front of It was a bit close to home since her husband's in*

[close to the wind](#) see

close for comfort so near that one feels uncomfortable, worried, etc: *The meeting is a bit close for comfort since I haven't prepared the notes for it*

cloud

a cloud over (something) to spoil (something), to introduce something unpleasant or sad into a pleasant or happy situation: *Her mother's illness cast a cloud over their*

cuckoo land to an imaginary place, where everything is perfect; an unreal world: *They're living in cloud cuckoo land if they think they can afford that*

cloud has a silver lining something good happens for every bad or unpleasant thing: *He has no job, but every cloud has a silver lining as he is able to spend time with his*

one's head in the clouds to be day-dreaming and not paying attention to what is going on around one: *She has her head in the clouds thinking about her*

cloud nine extremely happy: *She's been on cloud nine since she met her new*

a cloud under suspicion, in trouble: *He left his previous job under a*

clover

clover in great comfort: *They're living in clover since he won the to farm animals which have rich food such as clover.>*

club

the club pregnant: *His girlfriend just told him that she's in the*
the club you are in the same unfortunate situation that I am or we are: *If you haven't done any work for the exams join the Neither have*

clue

clued up on (something) to be very well-informed about (something): *You'll have to be clued up on computers to get that*

to have a clue about (something) to have no knowledge of (something), to be badly-informed about (something): *She set off without having a clue about how to get to her*

clutch

[at straws](#) see

coach

[a coach and horses through \(something\)](#) to destroy (an argument etc) completely by detecting and making use of the weak points in it: *The defence lawyer drove a coach and horses through the prosecution's case against his to the fact that the defects (or holes) in the argument are so large as to let a coach and horses through them.>*

coal

[or take coals to Newcastle](#) to do something that is completely unnecessary, especially to take something to a place where there is already a great deal of it: *Taking a cake to her would be like carrying coals to She spends most of her time to Newcastle in England which was a large coal-mining centre.>*

[\(someone\) over the coals](#) to scold (someone) very severely: *The shop assistant was hauled over the coals for being rude to a coals of fire on or upon (someone's) head* to do good or be kind to (someone) who has done one harm so that he or she feels sorry or ashamed: *When the boy tried to steal her purse she heaped coals of fire on his head by offering him some money to buy* biblical reference to Proverbs 25:21–22.>

[over the coals same as rake over the ashes](#) see

coast

[coast is clear](#) see

coat

[one's coat according to one's cloth](#) to organize one's ideas and aims, particularly one's financial aims, so that they are within the

limits of what one has or possesses: *We'd like to buy a big house but we'll have to cut our coat according to our cloth and buy a smaller* Our income is not large.

one's coat to change sides: *He supported the king at first but he turned his coat and joined the enemy* to a soldier's coat whose colour and markings showed which army he belonged to. If he turned it inside out the colour was hidden.>

cobweb

away the cobwebs to make (someone) feel more energetic and alert after feeling rather tired and dull: *I'm going to take a walk by the sea to try to blow a few cobwebs*

cock

cock-and-bull story an absurd story that is unlikely to be believed: *She told me some cock-and-bull story about finding the money in a waste-paper*

a snook at (someone) to express one's defiance or contempt of (someone): *Now that he has another job he can cock a snook at his previous* referring to a rude gesture of contempt made by putting the end of one's thumb on the end of one's nose and spreading out and moving one's fingers.>

of the walk the person who is the most important or influential member in a group and who is very proud of this fact: *The boy was cock of the walk at school until a new boy beat him in a pen* in which fighting cocks were kept and bred was called a walk.>

off at half cock to be unsuccessful because of lack of preparation or because of a premature start: *The government scheme went off at half cock because of lack of preliminary* to a gun that fires too soon.>

coffee

up and smell the coffee to become more aware of and more realistic about what is going on around one: *Julie should wake up*

and smell the coffee because she's never going to become a professional singer and she needs to get a job right

coffin

[nail in \(someone's\) coffin](#) see

cog

cog in the wheel a person who plays a small or unimportant part in a large organization: *He boasts about his job in the international company but he's really just a cog in the*

coin

it in to make a great deal of money: *Local shopkeepers have been coining it in since the oil business came to the*

[\(someone\) back in his or her own coin](#) to get one's revenge on someone who has done harm to one by treating him or her in the same way. Now he's in charge he's paying his former boss back in his own coin by not promoting him.

other side of the coin the opposite argument, point of view, etc: *She has a really successful career, but the other side of the coin is that she can spend hardly any time with her*

[coin a phrase](#) see

cold

[cold as charity](#) see

comfort no consolation at all: *When one suffers a misfortune it is cold comfort to be told that there are other people who are much worse*

[in from the cold](#) to be allowed to take part in some activity that one was excluded from before: *After months of not being selected, he's come in from the cold and at last been offered a game with the team this*

[cold feet](#) to become nervous and change one's mind about being involved in (something): *He was going to row the Atlantic but got cold feet at the last*

(someone) the cold shoulder to act in an unfriendly way to (someone) by ignoring him or her: *She has tried to be friendly to her parents-in-law but they keep giving her the cold*

a cold sweat in a state of great fear or anxiety: *He was in a cold sweat when the police were searching his the fact that the skin tends to become cold and damp when one is very frightened.>*

cold blood see

(someone) cold to fail to impress or excite (someone): *The new dance group left the audience*

(someone's) blood run cold to cause terror or great distress in

(someone): *The ghostly figure made my blood run*

in the cold not taking part, not included: *Only her richer friends were asked to her party—the rest of us were out in the*

or throw cold water on (something) to discourage enthusiasm for

(something): *We were all looking forward to the dance but the*

organizer poured cold water on the idea by saying it would run at a

cold extremely cold: *This soup's supposed to be hot but it's stone*

horse of a different colour someone or something that is completely

different from someone or something else: *The previous headmaster*

was very kind to the pupils but the new one is a horse of a different

colour to become either very pale or else very red in the face

through fear, distress, embarrassment, anger, guilt, etc: *She*

changed colour when she was caught with the money in her

one's colours to the mast to commit oneself to a point of view or

course of action in a very obvious and final way: *Most people are*

undecided about who to vote for but the young people have nailed

their colours to the mast by putting up posters for the Green Party

to a ship's colours or flag. If this was nailed to the mast it could

not be lowered, lowering the flag being a sign of surrender.>

unwell: *Travelling always makes her feel off-* tend to turn pale when they are unwell.>

oneself in one's true colours to reveal what one is really like after pretending to be otherwise: *She pretended to be his friend but she showed herself in her true colours by reporting him to the to a ship raising its colours or flag to indicate which country or side it was supporting.>*

flying colours with great success: *They both passed the exam with flying to a ship leaving a battle with its colours or flag still flying as opposed to lowering them in surrender.>*

come

a cropper to suffer misfortune, to fail: *He came a cropper when he bought a hotel without knowing anything about the a hunting phrase meaning to take a serious fall.>*

clean see

down on (someone) like a ton of bricks see

in for (something) to be the receiver or target of (something): *The organizers came in for a great deal of criticism when the fête was*

in from the cold see

into one's own see

of age see

on stream see

off it don't be ridiculous, don't try to deceive me: *Come off it! You couldn't possibly have been at work and be back so*

to grief see

to grips with (something) see

to light see

to nothing see

to one's senses see

to that taking into consideration other facts: *She's not qualified for the job, but come to that he's not qualified for it*

unstuck to fail, to suffer a major setback: *Our holiday plans have come I have to work that*

come a long way see

it coming to one to deserve the punishment, misfortune, etc, that one is going to get: *I'm not sorry that he's been He's had it coming for*

to know whether one is coming or going see

common

completely ordinary: *I'm not going to wear anything I'll wear a common-or-garden skirt and*

common touch the ability to get on well with ordinary people: *He is a prince but most of his friends are just ordinary He has the common*

compare

compare see

confidence

vote of confidence see

trick the act of a swindler who gains the trust of someone and then persuades him or her to hand over money: *The old lady thought she was giving money to charity but the collector played a confidence trick on her and kept the money for*

conjure

name to conjure with the name of someone very important, influential or well-known: *Now that's a name to conjure He was one of our really great* suggestion is that such people have magical powers.>

conscience

all conscience being completely fair and honest: *In all conscience we cannot appoint him if he is not qualified for the*

contemplate

one's navel see

contention

[bone of contention](#) see

contradiction

contradiction in terms a statement, idea, etc, that contains a contradiction: *He is a cynic and thinks that a happy husband is a contradiction in*

convert

[to the converted](#) to speak enthusiastically in favour of something to people who already admire it or are in favour of it: *You are preaching to the converted by praising the candidate to We have already voted for*

cook

[\(someone's\) goose](#) see

[the books](#) see

[many cooks spoil the broth](#) if there are a great many people involved in a project they are more likely to hinder it than help it: *Let's appoint a very small organizing Too many cooks spoil the cooking? what is happening?, what is going on?: What's Everyone seems very*

cookie

the way the cookie crumbles that is the situation and one must just accept it: *He doesn't like working at weekends but that's the way the cookie is* American English for biscuit.>

cool

[as a cucumber](#) very calm and unexcited: *She hit the burg-lar over the head, cool as a*

calm and collected completely calm, in full control of one's emotions: *She was cool, calm and collected when she told him their love affair was*

or *kick one's heels to* to be kept waiting: *My meeting has not finished You'll just have to cool your*

one's cool to remain calm: *She always keeps her cool in a*
one's cool to become angry, excited etc: *It's easy to lose one's cool*
when children are

coot

as a coot see

cop

it (1) to be scolded or punished: *You'll cop it from your father if*
you go home (2) to die: *Three of the terrorists copped it in the*

much cop not very good, desirable, useful, etc: *The new teacher*
isn't much

copy

one's copybook to spoil a previously good record of behaviour,
achievement, etc, by doing something wrong: *He was thought*
certain to get the manager's job but he blotted his copybook by
losing a large export

copy a person or thing that is very like someone or something
else: *His new girlfriend's a carbon copy of his previous*

cord

the cord to become independent and stop relying on someone
else, such as your mother or father: *Jackie has finally cut the cord*
and left her parents' house to move into a flat with some other to
the umbilical cord between mother and baby which has to be cut
at birth.>

corn

one's corn to justify the amount of money which you earn or
which has been spent on you: *The marketing manger gets a very*
high salary but he's earned his corn by getting us several new sales
on (someone's) corns to offend (someone): *You fairly trod on her*
corns by criticizing the new secretary—that's her

corner

corners to use less money, materials, effort, time, etc, than is usually required or than is required to give a good result: *The production department is going to have to have a tighter budget and cut a few*

(someone) into a corner to force (someone) into a difficult or dangerous situation: *The firm are trying to drive their competitors into a corner by charging low*

all (four) corners of the earth from every part of the world, from everywhere: *The conference was attended by people from all corners of the*

a tight corner in an awkward, difficult or dangerous situation: *They were in a tight corner with their escape route cut off by the*

oneself into a corner to get oneself into a difficult situation from which there is only one method of escape or action: *Rod has painted himself into a corner by getting a large mortgage and then getting a bank loan to pay for now that he can't pay back the loan he's got no choice but to sell the*

the corner to begin to get better or improve: *The accident victim was very ill but he has turned the corner at*

cosh

under the cosh to be under a great deal of pressure or stress:

We're really under the cosh at work just now; we're launching a new product next week and there's a lot of preparation to be to a kind of stout stick used to hit people with.>

cost

all cost or *costs* no matter what must be done, given, suffered etc, whatever happens: *We must stop the enemy advancing at all*

a bomb or *a packet* to cost a very great deal of money: *His new car cost him a*

an arm and a leg to cost an excessive amount of money: *Those houses cost an arm and a*

[the earth](#) to cost a very great deal of money: *That holiday cost them the*

[the cost](#) to consider the risks, difficulties and possible losses involved in doing something: *He didn't stop to count the cost before he had an affair, and his wife left*

one's cost to one's disadvantage or loss: *It will be to your cost if you offend the office* *She's the chairman's*

cotton

[\(someone\) in cotton wool](#) to be over-protective of (someone): *I'm not surprised that Meg went a bit wild when she left home because her mother wrapped her in cotton wool all the*

count

[one's chickens before they are hatched](#) see

[the cost](#) see

for the count unconscious or deeply asleep: *The children are out for the count after their long* to boxing where a boxer who has been knocked down by his opponent has to get up again before the referee counts to 10 in order to stay in the match.>

[up and be counted](#) see

counter

the counter secretly or illegally: *When meat was rationed he used to supply his richer customers under the*

country

cousin a person from the country, considered unsophisticated by a town or city dweller: *His country cousin has never been to a pop*

to the country to hold a general election: *When the government was defeated on the employment bill the prime minister decided to go to the*

one's line of country see

courage

courage see

the courage of one's convictions to be brave enough to do what one thinks one should: *If you are sure that your colleague stole the money you should have the courage of your convictions and report*
up or screw up courage to force oneself to be brave: *Finally he plucked up courage and asked her to marry*

course

for courses see

for the course see

its course see

the course see

court

(someone or something) out of court not to give serious consideration to (someone or something): *Management laughed our request for a salary increase out of to a trivial legal case.>*

court to (someone) to try to gain the love of (someone): *The prince is paying court to a foreign*

ball is in (someone's) court it is (someone's) turn to take action: *I've done all I can. The ball's in your court*

(something) out of court to prevent (something) from being considered for (something): *His prospects of marrying her have been ruled out of court by her father because he cannot afford to support*
a to a court of law where evidence, etc, ruled out of court has no effect on the case.>

Coventry

(someone) to Coventry collectively to refuse to speak to or associate with (someone): *His colleagues sent him to Coventry for working during the* from an incident in the English Civil War when

Royalists captured in Birmingham were sent to the Parliamentary stronghold of Coventry.>

cover

one's back see

the waterfront see

cow

sacred cow something that is regarded with too much respect for people to be allowed to criticize it freely: *You musn't say the old town hall is ugly—it's one of the town's sacred cow is considered sacred by Hindus.>*

or until the cows come home for an extremely long time: *I could listen to her music until the cows come walk very slowly from the field to the milking sheds unless someone hurries them along.>*

crack

fair crack of the whip to a fair share, a fair chance of doing (something): *The children were supposed to take turns at playing on the swing but the little ones did not get a fair crack of the*

hard nut to crack see

(the) crack of dawn very early in the morning: *We must leave for the airport at crack of*

a bottle see

the whip to treat sternly or severely those under one's control or charge: *If you want the workers to finish the orders on time you'll have to start cracking the They take too much time the use of a whip to control or punish people.>*

cracking to start moving, working, etc, quickly: *You had better get cracking or you'll miss the*

a crack at (something) to have a try at (something): *Why not have a crack at the competition?*

all it's cracked up to be not to be as good as it is said to be: *The holiday resort is not all it's cracked up to*

over the cracks see

a sledgehammer to crack a nut to spend a great deal of effort on a small task or problem: *We don't need a whole team of workmen to mend one small hole in the That really is taking a sledgehammer to crack a*

creature

comforts things that contribute to one's physical well-being: *Her adult son still lives at home because he likes his creature*

creek

the creek in trouble, in serious difficulties: *We'll be up the creek if the car breaks down It's miles to the nearest*

creep

(someone) *the creeps* to arouse dislike, disgust or fear in

(someone): *I don't like the new He gives me the*

(someone's) flesh creep to arouse fear or horror in (someone): *The eerie howling made my flesh*

crest

(riding) on the crest of a wave to be going through a very successful period: *Pete's business didn't do very well to start with but it's on the crest of a wave*

cricket

as a cricket very lively: *The old lady's as lively as a reference to the insect.>*

cricket not fair or honourable, unsportsmanlike: *It's not cricket to ask him to pay the bill for all of game of cricket is regarded as being played in a gentlemanly way.>*

crocodile

tears a pretended show of grief or sorrow: *She wept at her uncle's funeral, but they were crocodile tears as she really disliked to an old belief that crocodiles weep while eating their prey.>*

cross

[a bridge when one comes to it](#) see

[one's fingers](#) see

[one's heart](#) see

[one's mind](#) see

[swords with \(someone\)](#) see

[the line](#) see

[the Rubicon](#) to do something that commits one completely to a course of action that cannot be undone: *He has crossed the His letter of resignation has been Caesar's crossing of the River Rubicon in 49 BC committed him to war with the Senate.*>

[the i's and cross the t's](#) see

[one's wires crossed](#) see

[a cross to bear](#) to have to suffer or tolerate a responsibility, inconvenience or source of distress: *He certainly has a cross to He has to look after both his elderly parents while still working full to the fact that in the days of crucifixions, those being crucified had to carry their own crosses to the place of execution.*>

at cross purposes to be involved in a misunderstanding because of talking or thinking about different things without realizing it: *We've been talking at cross I was referring to a different Mr*

crow

[the crow flies](#) measured in a straight line: *As the crow flies the town is five miles away but by road it is*

[crow](#) to have to admit or accept that one was wrong: *He had to eat crow when he got the capital of Australia*

crown

[jewel in the crown](#) see

crunch

it comes to the crunch when a time of testing comes, when a decision has to be made: *When it came to the crunch I decided not to*

cry

[crying shame](#) a great shame, a disgrace: *It's a crying shame that those children are dressed in*

[far cry from \(something\)](#) a long way from (something), very different from (something): *His present lifestyle is a far cry from that of his*

[shoulder to cry on](#) see

[for the moon same as ask for the moon](#) see

out for (something) to be badly in need of something or for something to be done: *The old house is in a bad It's crying out for a new coat of*

[one's eyes out](#) see

over spilt milk [to](#) to waste time regretting a misfortune or accident that cannot be undone: *I know you're sorry that you didn't get the job but there's no use crying over spilt*

[wolf](#) see

crying out loud a phrase used to express annoyance, impatience, etc: *For crying out loud! Their phone's been engaged for*

[full cry](#) enthusiastically and excitedly pursuing something: *The crowd were in full cry after the to the cry made by hunting dogs.>*

cuckoo

[cuckoo in the nest](#) a person who gains some kind of advantage from a situation without contributing anything useful: *Johnny's girlfriend is a real cuckoo in the nest in this flat because she eats our food and uses all the facilities, but she doesn't actually live here and so pays no rent or the cuckoo's habit of laying eggs in other birds' nests.>*

[cuckoo land](#) see

cucumber

[as a cucumber](#) see

cud

the cud see

cudgel

one's brains see

up the cudgels on behalf of (someone or something) to fight strongly on behalf of (someone or something), to support (someone or something) vigorously: *She's taken up the cudgels on behalf of children's*

cue

one's cue from (someone) to use the actions or reactions of (someone) as a guide to one's own, to copy (someone's) actions: *The children took their cue from their mother and remained* theatrical term, literally meaning to use the words of another actor as a signal for one to speak or move.>

cuff

the cuff without preparation: *The speaker gave a clever talk, completely off the* to the habit of former after-dinner speakers making brief headings on the celluloid cuffs of their evening shirts as a reminder of what they wanted to say rather than preparing a formal speech.>

cup

be one's cup of tea not to be something which one likes or appreciates: *Seaside holidays are not really our cup of one's cups* under the influence of alcohol: *He starts singing when he's in his*

many a slip 'twixt cup and lip see

cupboard

love pretended affection shown for a person because of the things he or she gives one: *The child always kisses her aunt but that's because she knows she will bring her a* *It's just cupboard* people and animals liking those who feed them, food being kept in cupboards.>

[a skeleton in the cupboard](#) see

curiosity

[killed the cat](#) see

curl

[one's toes curl](#) see

curry

[favour with \(someone\)](#) to try to gain the approval or favour of (someone) by insincere flattery or by being extremely nice to him or her all the time: *The girl thinks that she will pass the test if she curries favour with the* to do with brushing horses with a curry comb from "curry favel", from Old French *estriller fauvel* being a chestnut horse.>

curtain

curtains for (someone or something) to be the end of (someone or something): *The change of ownership means curtains for the present* to curtains falling at the end of a stage performance.>

lecture a private scolding, especially one given by a wife to a husband: *I bet he got a curtain lecture when he got home for flirting at the* the curtains that formerly were hung round a four-poster bed.>

raiser something that begins or acts as an introduction to something: *Her appearance on the school stage was a curtain raiser for a long and successful career as an*

[down the curtain on \(something\)](#) to cause (something) to come to an end: *The government is ringing down the curtain on that* above.>

curve

[\(someone\) a curve \(ball\)](#) to surprise and confuse someone by doing something unexpected: *Sara thought the boss was going to thank her for working overtime when he threw her a curve and told her that she was going to have to work harder if she wanted to keep*

her reference to someone throwing a ball in baseball which surprises the batter by curving away when it reaches him.>

cut

cut above (someone or something) rather better than (someone or something): *The office workers think they are a cut above the factory*
at the cutting edge see

a long story short to to give a brief account of something quite complicated or lengthy: *I could go into a great deal of detail but, to cut a long story short, they've*

and dried settled and definite: *We cannot change our They're cut and to wood that has been cut and dried and made ready for use.>*

and thrust methods and techniques of rivalry, argument or debate: *The politician is skilled in the cut and thrust of parliamentary to sword fighting.>*

both ways to have an equal or the same effect on both parts of a question or on both people involved in something: *We can impose sanctions on the enemy country but sanctions can cut both*
corners see

(someone) dead see

(someone) down to size see

it fine to allow hardly enough time to do or get something: *You're cutting it a bit You might miss the*

it out to stop doing (something): *The children were teasing the cat but I told them to cut it*

loose see

no ice see

off one's nose to spite one's face see

one's coat according to one's cloth see

one's teeth on (something) see

one's own (own) throat see

to the chase see

the Gordian knot see

(someone) to the quick see

up upset: *She is cut up about the death of her*

up rough see

cut out for (something) not naturally suited to: *He wants to be a doctor, but he's not cut out for*

cut the mustard see

cylinder

on all cylinders working or operating at full strength: *The factory hasn't been firing on all cylinders for some used of an internal combustion engine.>*

D

dab

dab hand at (something) an expert at (something): *He's a dab hand at*

daddy

daddy of them all the most extreme example of (something); the finest or the worst example, often the worst: *He has made many mistakes so far but his latest one is the daddy of them*

dagger

daggers drawn feeling or showing great hostility towards each other: *They're been at daggers drawn ever since the breakup of their*
see

daggers at (someone) to look with great dislike or hostility at (someone): *When she won the prize her fellow contestants looked daggers at*

daily

bread basic living costs: *They have to struggle to earn the daily bread for their*

dozen a series of physical exercises done every day, usually every morning: *He always does his daily dozen before*

daily round the usual routine of daily life: *He's tired of the daily round and he's given up his job to travel round the*

daisy

pushing up the daisies to be dead: *I saw his obituary today but I thought he'd been pushing up the daisies for*

as a daisy not at all tired, lively: *The old lady was fresh as a daisy after her long*

damage

the damage? what does it cost? What's the total cost?: "What's the damage?" the diners asked the

Damocles

[sword of Damocles](#) see

damp

[damp squib](#) something which is expected to be exciting, effective, etc, but which fails to live up to expectations: *Everyone looked forward to the Christmas party but it turned out to be a damp to a wet firework that fails to go off.>*

a damper on (something) to reduce the enjoyment, optimism, happiness of (something): Her parents arrived home early and instantly put a damper on the

dance

[attendance on \(someone\)](#) see

to a different tune to act or think in a completely different way, especially when forced to do so: At first she refused to leave but she danced to a different tune when the police

(someone) a (merry) dance to cause (someone) a series of great, usually unnecessary, problems or irritations: Their daughter led them a merry dance by going to stay with an old school friend without telling

dander

one's dander up to become very angry: The headmaster has really got his dander up about people who play Northern English dialect.>

dandy

and dandy quite all right: We had problems with the holiday bookings but everything's fine and dandy

Darby

and Joan a devoted elderly couple: So many people get divorced nowadays that it is a refreshing change to meet a Darby and the names of such a couple in an 18th-century English ballad.>

dark

leap in the dark an action or decision, the result of which is unknown or unpredictable: *Her new job is a bit of a leap in the dark but there are no other possibilities at the*

shot in the dark an attempt or guess based on very little information: *We don't know his exact address, but it's worth taking a shot in the dark and looking him up in the telephone*

whistling in the dark to try to give the impression that one is more confident of, or less worried about, a situation than one actually is: *Tom tells everyone that his business is going well and that he's seriously thinking of expanding, but he's whistling in the dark; the new computer firm in town has taken away most of his*

horse a person or thing whose abilities, worth, etc, are unknown: *He thinks that he is certain to win but I know for a fact that there is at least one dark horse in the*

the dark lacking knowledge or awareness: *Everyone else seems to know all about the plans but I am still in the*

it or something dark to keep it or something secret: *We know all about his prison record but we must keep it dark from other people in the*

darken (someone's) door not to dare to visit (someone): *When his daughter stole his money he told her not to darken his door*

dash

a dash to wear very smart or unusual clothes and so impress others: *He cut quite a dash in his scarlet*

date

past one's sell-by date to be no longer useful, needed, popular, etc: *This fashion designer likes young models; to him models are past their sell-by date at the age of 20!*

daunt

daunted not discouraged in any way: *She had a bad start to the race but nothing daunted she went on to*

Davy Jones

Jones's locker the bottom of the sea: The ship and all the sailors on board went to Davy Jones's Jones was a name given in the 18th century to the ruler of the evil spirits of the sea.>

dawn

[false dawn](#) an event which makes a situation look as though it is improving when it is not: *When the multinational company began looking at buildings in the town, we were hopeful that much-needed jobs would come to the area, but it was a false dawn; they set up a factory at the other end of the*

[\(the\) crack of dawn](#) see

day

in a day's work [to](#) all part of one's normal routine, not requiring extra or unusual effort: *Of course the hotel receptionist will get the theatre tickets for* *It's all in a day's*

day of the week whatever the circumstances: *His horse can race faster than yours any day of the*

[the end of the day](#) when everything has been taken into consideration: *At the end of the day we must find someone to do the*

[it a day](#) to put an end to (something); to stop doing (something), especially to stop working: *It's too late to finish the job in* *Let's call it a*

or win the day [to](#) to be successful, to gain a victory: *The lawyer's argument carried the* a military term meaning to win a battle.>

in, day out every day without exception: *It's rained day in, day out for a*

[robbery](#) the charging of prices that are far too high: *Taxi prices in that city are daylight*

etc) days are numbered you are about to be dismissed, be killed, etc: *When the boss finds out about that mistake your days are* give up the day job! a humorous piece of advice given to someone not to stop doing his/her usual job in order to try to make a living at something which is less secure and requires a great deal of talent which the person does not have: *One of the secretaries from work was singing in the club last night and we all said, "Don't give up the day job!"*

dog has his day everyone will get an opportunity at some time: *Every dog has his Your turn will as the day is long very happy: The children are happy as the day is long playing on the*

a field day see

had one's or its day to be past the most successful part of one's or its life: I thought the cinema had had its day but it has been seen better days see

from day to day to think only about the present without making any plans for the future: With so little money it is difficult to do anything other than live from day to

(someone's) day to make (someone) very pleased or happy: He really made his mother's day by sending her

the day to announce the date of one's wedding: *At last the engaged couple have named the*

to be one's day to be a day when nothing seems to go right for one: First I couldn't find a place to park, then I got a parking ticket and finally I ran out of It just hasn't been my

of these days at some time in the future: One of these days you'll have a home of your

of those days a day when nothing seems to go right: I'll be glad to go to It's been one of those

the day to prevent something from going wrong or from being a failure: *When it rained we had no place to hold the fête but the headmaster saved the day by lending us the school*

daylight to be coming to the end of a long task: *I've been working for weeks on the research project but at last I'm beginning to see*

the day to take advantage of any opportunities which occur now, rather than worry about the future: *If you've been given the chance to travel round the world, seize the day; you can go to university next year!*

will be the day that is extremely unlikely to happen: *"Perhaps your boss will offer you a salary "That'll be the day."*

order of the day see

other day one day recently: *I saw him just the other*

were the days the times in the past about which we are talking were good times: *Do you remember our schooldays? Those were the days!*

dead

dead duck a person or thing that is very unlikely to survive or continue: *The proposed new traffic scheme is a dead Most of the committee are going to vote against*

dead end a situation from which it is impossible to progress: *That factory job's a dead You have no*

dead loss a person or thing that is completely useless or unprofitable: *He's a dead loss as a*

dead ringer see

dead of night in the middle of the night when people are usually asleep: *The burglars broke in at dead of*

(someone) dead to ignore (someone) completely: *My neighbour has been cutting me dead since our children*

and buried completely dead or extinct with no chance of being revived: *The issue of the proposed new motorway is dead and*

as a dodo completely dead or out of fashion: *They're trying to revive village traditions that have been dead as a dodo for to a flightless bird that has been extinct since 1700.>*

beat exhausted: I'm dead beat after walking up that from the neck up extremely stupid: Don't take his He's dead from the neck

in the water with no hope of success: *We had hoped that our plans for a new shopping centre would be well received, but there's been a lot of opposition and the plans are now dead in the to a dead fish, which is no use to fishermen or anglers.>*

Sea fruit a thing that appears to be, or is expected to be, of great value but proves to be valueless: *Her job abroad sounded very glamorous but it turned out to be a case of Dead Sea to a fruit, the apple of Sodom, that was thought to grow on trees beside the shores of the Dead Sea. It was beautiful to look at but fell to ashes when touched or tasted.>*

set on (something) determined to have or to do (something): His son is dead set on going to

to the world in a very deep sleep: *I didn't hear the phone. I was dead to the*

wood a person or thing that is no longer necessary or useful: *The new management say that they are going to get rid of all the dead to waken the dead extremely loud: The children's rowdy game was enough to waken the*

a dead horse see

the dead bury their dead past problems, quarrels, etc, are best forgotten: You must stop thinking about your divorce. It was a long time ago and you should let the dead bury their biblical reference to Matthew 8:22, in which Jesus said, "Follow me and let the dead bury their dead.">

my dead body in the face of my fierce opposition: *The council will pull my house down over my dead into or fill dead men's shoes* to to take over the position of someone who has died or left under unfortunate circumstances: *If you want promotion in that firm you'll have to step into dead men's No one ever leaves to go not be seen dead in or with*, extremely unlikely to be seen wearing something, accompanying someone, etc, because of an extreme dislike or aversion: *He wouldn't be seen dead in flared She wouldn't be seen dead in public with*

deaf

as a post completely deaf: *There's no point in The old man is deaf as a on deaf ears* to not to be listened to, to go unnoticed or disregarded: *There's no point in giving her It will just fall on deaf deaf completely deaf: The old man is stone deaf and can't hear a thing but he refuses to wear a hearing*

a deaf ear to (something) to refuse to listen to (something), to take no notice of (something): *He turned a deaf ear to her appeals for*

deal

done deal a project, arrangement, etc, which has been agreed to and completed and cannot be changed: *We're in the process of selling our house and by this time next week it should be a done*

raw deal unfair treatment: *The younger son got a raw deal when his father's estate was*

square deal fair or honest treatment: *I don't feel that I got a square deal when I bought that*

and dealing see

death

death's door extremely ill, dying: *He seemed to be at death's door yesterday but he shows signs of recovery*
in at the death to be present at the end or final stages of something: *The factory closed It was sad to be in at the originally to being present at the death of the prey in a hunt.>*

one's death (of cold) to become infected with a very bad cold: *You'll catch your death of cold in those wet trap a building that is in a dangerous state: That high building with no fire escape is a death*

with death to do something extremely risky and dangerous: *She's dicing with death driving a car with faulty brakes in this wet*

the death to be badly received: *His proposals have died the They were rejected by the originally to an actor or performer getting a poor reception from the audience.>*

(something) to death to discuss or deal with (something) to such an extent that it is no longer interesting: *The newspapers have flogged to death the story about the politician and the*

on or hold on like grim death see
of death see

or feel like death warmed up to look or feel very unwell or very tired: *You've looked like death warmed up ever since you had the the fear of death or God into (someone) see*

or tired to death of (someone or something) extremely weary or bored with (someone or something): *I'm sick to death of that piece of Let's listen to something*

one's own death warrant to bring about one's own downfall, ruin, etc: *He signed his own death warrant when he criticized the firm's product to a*

be the death of (someone) (1) to cause the death of (someone):

That son of hers worries his mother so much that he'll be the death

of (2) to make (someone) laugh a great deal: *"That comedian will be the death of me," gasped my*

deck

[the decks](#) see

[the deck](#) to fall to the ground: *Len slipped on the ice and hit the deck, spraining his ankle*

deep

[is only skin deep](#) see

thrown in at the deep end to be put suddenly into a difficult situation of which one has no experience: *The trainee journalist was thrown in at the deep end and sent out on a story on his first morning in the to the deep end of a swimming pool.>*

[off at the deep end](#) to lose one's temper: *His father went off at the deep end when he saw his wrecked* (See above).

[deep water](#) in great difficulties or trouble: *Financially they've been in deep water since he lost his*

[waters run deep](#) see

degree

[\(someone\) the third degree](#) to subject (someone) to intense questioning, especially by using severe methods: *The officer gave the captured enemy soldiers the third degree under* slightly unwell: *She's not at work—she's feeling one degree*

[the nth degree](#) to the greatest possible degree, extent or amount: *They will back you to the nth* to the use of n as a symbol to represent a number, especially a large number.>

delicate

a delicate condition pregnant: *She announced to the group that her daughter was in a delicate*

dent

a dent in (something) to reduce (something) by a considerable amount: *My holiday abroad has made a dent in my*

depth

depth thoroughly: You must study the problem in depth before making a recommendation.

of one's depth in a situation which one cannot cope with: *The child is out of his depth in that* *The work is too hard for* literally to being in water deeper than one can stand up in.>

the depths of (something) to reach the lowest level of unhappiness, misfortune, etc: *He really plumbed the depths of misery when his wife*

deserts

one's just deserts to be treated as one deserves, especially to receive deserved punishment: *The burglar got his just deserts when he was sent to*

design

designs upon (someone or something) to wish to possess (someone or something), usually belonging to someone else: *Look I think he has designs on your*

device

(someone) to his or her own devices to leave (someone) to look after himself or herself, often after having tried unsuccessfully to help him or her: *You've done all you Now you must leave him to his own*

devil

the very devil to be very difficult or troublesome: *Getting to that town by public transport is the very*
the devil you know it is preferable to have someone or something that one knows to be bad than take a chance with someone or something that might turn out even worse: *I think we should keep*

our present At least we can cope with their faults, and it's a case of better the devil you

the devil and the deep blue sea faced with two possible courses of action each of which is as unacceptable as the other: *He's between the devil and the deep* If he takes the promotion he has to move to another part of the country. If he stays here he will be

take the hindmost the person who is last must accept the worst fate or the least acceptable conditions, so everyone should take care to avoid this position: *There are so few jobs and so many young people looking for them nowadays that it is devil take the* the devil his due to be fair to someone, even although one dislikes him or her: *I cannot stand him but give the devil his due he's an excellent*

must when the devil drives if it is absolutely necessary that something must be done then one must do it: *I would like to take some time off, but this work is needed for next week and needs must when the devil*

devil's advocate to put forward objections to a plan, idea, etc, simply in order to test the strength of the arguments in its favour: *It's really important that there are no flaws in our proposal for That's why I'm playing devil's*

of the devil here is the very person to whom we have just been referring: *Speak of the There's the man we've been* for "speak of the devil and he will appear" which refers to a superstition which held that talking about evil gave it the power to appear.>

will be the devil to pay there will be serious trouble: *There'll be the devil to pay when the boss finds out we all left* legendary bargains struck with the devil by which one could have immediate worldly success, happiness and riches, if one gave him one's soul at a later date.>

diamond

diamond a person who behaves in a rough manner but who has good or valuable qualities: *He's extremely good at his job but he'll hate the formal He's a real rough*

dice

[with death](#) see

the dice against (someone) to arrange things so that (someone) has no chance of success: *Since he has no qualifications the dice are loaded against him in his job* to a method of cheating in gambling by putting lead or similar heavy material into a dice so that only certain numbers will come up.>

[dying for \(something\)](#) to be longing for (something): *He's dying for a*

hard to take a long time to disappear or become extinct: *He can't get used to new methods of production—old habits die*

laughing to be extremely amused: *We nearly died at the clown's*

[the death](#) see

with one's boots on to die while still working: *He refused to retire but died with his boots on* to soldiers dying in active service.>

[or die](#) see

say die never give up hope: *You may have lost your girlfriend but never say You'll find someone*

[die is cast](#) a step has been taken which makes the course of future events inevitable: *The die is cast—he has asked her to marry* translation of the Latin *iacta alea* supposedly said by Julius Caesar when he crossed the Rubicon in 49 BC and so committed himself to a war with the Senate.>

differ

[different kettle of fish](#) see

to differ to agree not to argue about something any more since neither party is likely to change his or her opinion: *We are*

reasonably friendly now since we agreed to differ about We used to quarrel all the

different as chalk and cheese see

one's differences to forget about past disagreements: The two members of the board will never agree about company policy but in the interests of the firm they have agreed to sink their

the difference to agree on an amount of money halfway between two amounts, especially between the amount that one person is charging for something and the amount that someone else is willing to pay for it: He's asking £200 for the bike and you only want to pay Why don't you split the difference and offer him £150?

dig

one's heels in to show great determination, especially in order to get one's own wishes carried out: *You won't persuade him to attend the He's digging his heels in and refusing to*

one's own grave to be the cause of one's own misfortune: *I feel sorry for the young man who lost his job but he dug his own grave when he kept taking days*

dilemma

the horns of a dilemma in a position where it is necessary to choose between two courses of action: *The old lady's on the horns of a dilemma* She can't decide which of her grandchildren's invitations to medieval rhetoric a dilemma was likened to a two-horned animal on one of whose horns the person making the decision had to throw himself or herself.>

dim

a dim view of (something) to look with disapproval on (something): *The boss takes a dim view of his employee's inability to get to work on*

dine

out on (something) to be given social invitations because of information, gossip, etc, one can pass on: *Ever since he got back to America he's been dining out on having met the*

dinner

a dog's dinner an untidy mess: *The pupil's written work is like a dog's*

of (something) than you have had hot dinners a very great deal of (something): *He's been in jail more times than I've had hot*

dirt

old man an elderly man who shows a sexual interest in young girls or young boys: *The police are keeping an eye on the dirty old man in the*

the dirt on (someone) to say unpleasant or scandalous things about an individual's private life: *The tabloids love to dish the dirt on*

(someone's) dirty work to do something wrong or unpleasant on behalf of (someone else): *The manager has asked his deputy to do his dirty work and sack half the*

the dirt on (someone) to treat (someone) in an unfair, dishonest or disloyal way: *He did the dirt on his friend and told the police about her part in the*

name is dirt or mud (someone) is in great disfavour: *When he was company secretary he embezzled money, so now his name is dirt around*

(someone) like dirt to treat (someone) with contempt: The new head of the household treats the staff like

[one's dirty linen in public same as air one's dirty linen](#) see

disappear

a disappearing see

discord

discretion

is the better part of valour it is wise not to take any unnecessary risks: *I thought of betting all my winnings on the next race but I decided that discretion was the better part of* to Shakespeare's *Henry IV Part Act 5, scene iv.*>

dish

[the dirt on \(someone\)](#) see

distance

the distance to complete something successfully, to last until the end of something: *I didn't think that he would go the distance but he finished the marathon race*

[one's distance](#) not to come too close, not to be too friendly: *It is important for teachers to keep their distance from their striking distance* reasonably close: *He was within striking distance of the town when he*

dividend

[dividends](#) to bring advantages at a later time: *I know it's difficult to have to study when the weather's so fine, but all your hard work will pay dividends when you pass your exams and get a good to dividends paid on money invested, as on stocks and shares.*>

do

done deal see

(someone) a good turn see

away with (someone or something) see

one's *bit* to do one's share of the work, etc: *If we all do our bit to collect donations we should reach our target*

(someone) *down* (1) to do (someone) harm, to cheat (someone):

The businessman made his fortune from doing other people (2) to speak unfavourably of or criticize (someone): Salesmen usually do down the products of their

(someone) *in* to kill (someone): *The police are looking for the person who did her*

(someone or something) justice see

one's level best see

for without any hope of rescue, help or recovery: *We're done Our enemies are gaining on*

to a turn see

one's nut see

one's own thing see

or die to make the greatest effort possible at the risk of killing, injuring, ruining, etc, oneself: *The soldiers were told that their next attack on the enemy would be a case of do or*

(someone) *out of (something)* to prevent (someone) from getting (something), usually by dishonest or deceitful means: *The other brothers did the youngest brother out of his inheritance by telling their father that he was*

(someone) proud see

the honours to act as host, to serve food or drink to one's guests:

His wife did the honours and poured the

the trick see

time to serve a prison sentence: *I'm sure he'll do time for shooting the*

(something) up to renovate or redecorate (something): *We're doing up an old coach*

do's (1) fair treatment: *Everybody in the group is entitled to fair* (2) be fair!: *Fair do's! It's my turn to have the*

do with (something) to make use of (something) as a substitute for something better: *They would like to buy a house but they will have to make do with rented*

the done thing not acceptable behaviour: *It's not the done thing to smoke at the table.*

doing certainly not: *"Would you lend me £10?" "Nothing doing!"*

some doing to take a great deal of effort: *We might just get there on time but it'll take some*

dos and don'ts what one should or should not do in a particular situation: *It's difficult to know the dos and don'ts when you go to a new*

doctor

what the doctor ordered exactly what is required: *A cool drink is just what the doctor ordered in this*

dodo

as a dodo see

dog

dog and pony show an event which has been organized just to impress someone: *The firm are putting on a series of dog and pony shows to try to attract new buyers for their*

dog in the manger a person who stops someone else from doing or having something which he or she does not want: *The child's a real dog in the manger. He doesn't want to play with his model cars but he won't lend them to his* one of Aesop's fables in which a dog prevents the horses from eating the hay in the feeding rack although he himself did not want to eat the hay.>

dog's life a miserable life: *He leads a dog's life with his nagging*

hair of the dog_(that bit one)_ see

off the dogs to stop attacking or criticizing (someone): *The protesters against the new road say that they won't call off the dogs until it is announced that the project has been*

eat dog a ruthless struggle against one's rivals to survive or be successful: *It's dog eat dog in the business world during a*
someone who is given all the odd jobs to do, particularly unpleasant ones: The boss treats her like the office dogsbody and gets her to run errands and make the

dog has his day see

to the dogs to be no longer good, moral, successful, etc: *He used to be such a hard-working young man but since his mother died he's gone to the*

a dog a bad name if bad things are said about a person's character they will stay with him or her for the rest of his or her life: *He's actually a very good worker, but he's got a reputation for laziness, and you know what they say about giving a dog a bad the doghouse in disfavour: He's in the doghouse for being late for a dog and bark oneself* to employ someone to do a job and then do it oneself: *She has a secretary and yet she does all her own Talk about keeping a dog and barking*

sleeping dogs lie do not look for trouble; if there is no trouble, do not cause any: *I think that she's forgotten about my mistake, so don't remind Just let sleeping dogs*

the dog see the rabbit let me, etc, come near, get a view, etc:

Could you all get away from the television screen and let the dog see the I want to watch

a dog's dinner see

cats and dogs see

dog story a very long joke with a pointless or a ridiculous ending: *His uncle's shaggy dog stories go on for*

tail is wagging the dog_see

(someone) to the dogs deliberately to cause (someone) to suffer an unpleasant fate, especially when this is done for selfish or dishonest reasons: *It was he who made the mistake but he threw his assistant to the dogs and had him sacked for dog* the person who is in charge: *Now that the manager has left, several of the workers are fighting to be top* can't teach an old dog new tricks the older you get the more difficult it is to learn new skills or accept ideas or new fashions: *The old man resigned from his caretaker's job when they called for new security "You can't teach an old dog new tricks," he*

doggo

doggo to remain in hiding, not to do anything that will draw attention to oneself: *Lie The police are looking for*

done see

donkey

ages or years a very long time: *He's been with that firm for donkey's* from a pun on donkey's ears, which are very long.> work the hard, often tiring or physical, part of any job: *They're doing all the painting of the house themselves but they're hiring someone to the donkey*

the hind legs off a donkey to talk too much or to talk for a very long time: *I try to avoid my neighbour if I'm in a She can talk the hind legs off a*

death's door see

knocking at the door to try to join an organization or company: *It's about this time of year that hundreds of new graduates come knocking at the door, and we don't have any vacancies this* (someone's) door to come or go into (someone's) house: *He told his son never to darken his door*

closed doors in private, secretly: *Something's The boss is talking to them behind closed*

a or one foot in the door to start to gain entrance to somewhere or something when entrance is difficult: *He hasn't been invited to join the golf club but he's been asked to play That's one foot in the* to someone putting a foot in a door to wedge it open in order to gain entrance.>

the wolf from the door see

(something) at (someone's) door to blame (someone) for (something): *The police are trying to lay the crime at his door just because he's an*

(someone's) doorstep very close to where (someone) lives:

Understandably they don't want a motorway on their doors to give someone an opportunity to improve his or her position, to improve someone's chances of success: *Having his father in the same profession will open doors for him when he applies for a*

(someone) the door to make (someone) leave: *If those people are disturbing the other customers show them the*

dose

dose or taste of one's own medicine something unpleasant done to a person who is in the habit of doing similar things to other people: *He's always bullying the younger boys but he got a dose of his own medicine when one of their brothers beat him*

a dose of salts very quickly or very efficiently: *She got through the typing like a dose of* to Epsom salts which is used as a purgative.>

dot

the i's and cross the t's *to* to attend to details: *She's good at general planning but you'll need someone to dot the i's and cross the*

the dot (1) exactly on time: *They arrived on the dot for the* (2) exactly at the time stated: *You must be there at six o'clock on the* to the dots on the face of a clock.>

[on the dotted line](#) see

double

[double-edged or two-edged sword](#) see

the double very quickly: *You had better get your homework handed in—on the* military term, literally at twice the normal marching speed.>

a double take to look at or think about (someone or something) a second time because one has not taken it in or understood it the first time: *I did a double take when I saw my old I hadn't seen him for 30*

back to turn round and go back the way one has come: *The fox doubled back and avoided the*

[Dutch](#) unintelligible words or language: *I couldn't understand what the lecturer was talking about—it was double Dutch* to the fact that Dutch sounds a very difficult language to those who are not native speakers of it.>

[double](#) to see two images of everything instead of one: *I thought I was seeing double when the twins walked into the*

doubt

[doubting Thomas](#) a person who will not believe something without strong proof: *He won't believe that you're back until he sees You know what a doubting Thomas he* to the biblical story of Thomas, the disciple who doubted Christ's return from the dead, John 21:24–29.>

down

[down in the world](#) see

(a person who is) without money or a means of support, homeless: *The down-and-outs are sleeping under the*

untidy, uncared-for, poorly dressed: *She's a bit down-at-heel but she can't afford to buy new*

[in the dumps or down in the mouth](#) depressed, in low spirits: *He's always down in the dumps in the*

[on one's luck](#) see

the drain completely wasted: *My computer crashed and that was a day's work down the*

[the line](#) see

very practical: *He doesn't wish to be involved with the theory of the*
He is a very down-to-earth

[tools](#) see

[to the wire](#) see

under Australia: He has many relatives down

down to (something) to begin to work at (something) in earnest:

The exams are next You'll have to get down to some

down well or big to be a great success: The conjuror went down well with the

[downhill](#) to get worse and worse, to deteriorate: *The old lady's gone downhill mentally since I last saw*

a down on (someone or something) to be very hostile or opposed to (someone or something): *The teacher seems to have a down on the new boy for some*

[the side down](#) see

[\(something\) down](#) see

[\(someone\) down the river](#) see

[\(someone\) down to the ground](#) see

[down to \(someone\)](#) see

dozen

[dozen](#) see

[dozen](#) see

nineteen to the dozen see

drag

(someone/someone's reputation) through the mud see

drape

oneself in the flag see

draw

to the drawing board see

a blank see

a line under (something) see

a veil over (something) see

in one's horns see

the line see

the long bow see

the short straw see

the teeth of (someone or something) see

drawn-out going on for a long time, especially unnecessarily: *The reception was a long, drawn-out*

drawer see

of the top drawer from the upper classes or aristocracy: *They may be out of the top drawer but they are absolutely*

dream

dream ticket used of two people who are expected to work very successfully together: *With Tracy as club president and Don as vice-president I think we have a real dream* used to refer to political elections.>

on! used to indicate to someone that his/her hopes of something are not likely to be realized: *You don't seriously think we'll get a famous film star to open our new village hall? Dream on!*

your dreams! same as *dream* *Do you really think that our parents would let us go to an all-night rave? In your dreams!*

American dream see

like a dream to work or operate very smoothly or successfully: *The plan for the surprise birthday party worked like a dress*

to kill or dressed to the nines dressed in one's smartest clothes so as to attract attention: *She was dressed to kill for their first drift*

the drift to understand the general meaning of something: *I got the drift of the lecturer's talk although I didn't understand all the drink*

like a fish to drink a great deal of alcohol: *He has a terrible complexion as he drinks like a to (someone or something) to toast (someone's) health: Let's drink to the new*

drive

driving at to be suggesting or trying to say: *I wasn't sure what he was driving at but I thought that he was implying I was*
a coach and horses through (something) see
a hard bargain see
a wedge between see

(something) home to (someone) see

drop

drop in the bucket see
the drop of a hat immediately, requiring only the slightest excuse: *He will start singing at the drop of a*
dropping like flies see
a brick see
(someone) a line see
in to pay a casual visit: *Do drop in if you are*
into (someone's) lap to happen to (someone) without any effort: *The job abroad just dropped into his He didn't even apply for*
the ball see

off to fall asleep: *My father dropped off during the*
out to withdraw from school, university, etc, or from society: *After*
his first year at college he dropped *He hated his parents' lifestyle so*
much that he decided to drop out and live

[your guard](#) see

(something) *drop* to let (something) be known accidentally: *She let*
it drop that he was

[penny drops](#) see

[could have heard a pin drop](#) see

drown

[one's sorrows](#) to take alcoholic drink in order to forget one's
unhappiness: *The day he was made redundant he drowned his*
sorrows in the

drum

[the drum](#) see

(someone) *out* to send (someone) away, to ask (someone) to
leave: *They've drummed him out of the club for starting a* to the
use of drums when an officer was being publicly dismissed from
his regiment.>

dry

[dry run](#) a practice attempt, a rehearsal: *The headmaster wants a*
dry run of tomorrow's speech

as a bone extremely dry: *The grass is dry as a*

[as dust](#) extremely dull or boring: *Some of the texts we have to read*
this year are dry as

up to forget what one was going to say: *It was embarrassing for*
everyone when the speaker dried

[and dry](#) see

[one's powder dry](#) to remain calm and prepared for immediate
action: *Don't do anything just Keep your powder dry and wait to see*

what the opposition do. Then you can decide what action to to the fact that gunpowder must be kept dry to be effective.>

(someone) high and dry see

duck

dead duck see

lame duck a weak or inefficient person or organization: You shouldn't keep helping He's just a lame duck who's relying on you too

sitting duck a person or thing that is very easy to attack: Their firm was a sitting duck for take-over bids as it was obviously in financial to the fact that a sitting duck is easier to shoot at than one flying in the air.>

water off a duck's back be totally ineffective: Don't bother offering him advice—it's water off a duck's to the fact that water runs straight off the oily feathers on a duck's back.>

one's duck to have one's first success: We were worried about the trainee salesman but he's broken his He's made his first cricketing term—no score in cricket is known as a duck.>

to (something) like a duck to to be able to do (something) right from the beginning naturally and without difficulty: The child took to skiing like a duck to

duckling an unattractive or uninteresting person or thing that develops in time into someone or something very attractive, interesting or successful: She is now an international model but as a child she was a real ugly to the story by Hans Andersen about a baby swan that is brought up by ducks who consider it ugly by their standards until it grows into a beautiful swan.>

dust

the dust see

like gold dust see

as dust see

(someone's) dust to be much less successful than someone with whom one is in some kind of competition: *Their team were at the bottom of the league a few weeks ago when we were at the top, but now we're eating their*

dust to be unused or unattended to: *Those bikes are just lying in the garage gathering dust—why don't we give them to the kids next door?*

the dust settle to give things time to calm down: *Jean's parents are still very angry that you were so late in bringing her You should let the dust settle before you go round there*

see (someone) for dust not to see (someone) again because he has run away: *When he discovers that he's the father of her child you won't see him for to clouds of dust left behind by horses or vehicles when they are moving fast.>*

the dust from one's feet to leave somewhere, usually gladly: *I've been in this town long It's time to shake the dust from my*

dust in (someone's eyes) to attempt to confuse or deceive (someone): *They threw dust in the policeman's eyes by saying that they had seen an intruder but this was just to give the real burglar time to get temporarily blinds people if it gets into their eyes.>*

Dutch

Dutch see

auction an auction in which the auctioneer starts with a high price and reduces it until someone puts in a bid: *I got the table quite cheaply in a Dutch*

courage courage that is not real courage but induced by drinking alcohol: *He needed some Dutch courage before asking for a salary from a Dutch military custom of drinking alcohol before going into battle, perhaps from the fact that gin was introduced into England by the Dutch followers of William III.>*

treat a kind of entertainment or celebration where everyone concerned pays for himself or herself: *He's asked us to help him celebrate his promotion but it's to be a Dutch Dutch lunch, to which all of the guests were expected to contribute some of the food.>*

Dutch to share expenses: I'll accept your dinner invitation if we go a Dutchman a phrase used to indicate that one does not at all believe what is being said: *If that salesman's honest, I'm a to (someone) like a Dutch uncle to scold (someone) or talk to (someone) for what is supposedly his or her own good: He's her younger brother but he talks to her like a Dutch* from the Dutch reputation for strict family discipline.>

dye

thorough, of firmly fixed opinions: *He's a dyed-in-the-wool Arsenal* to the dyeing of material while it is in its raw state before being spun so that the colour is deeper and lasts longer.>

see

E

eager beaver see

eagle

an eagle eye on (someone or something) see

ear

flea in one's ear see

ears see

music to one's ears see

(someone's) ear to keep talking to someone for a long time so that you annoy or bore him/her: *I wanted to read on the bus, but Anna spent the whole journey bending my ear about her quarrel with her*

out on one's ear to have to leave a job, organization, etc: *If Tom is late one more time he'll be out on his*

on deaf ears see

one's ears for (something) same as give one's right arm for (something) see

in one ear and out the other not to make any lasting impression: *I gave my assistant detailed instructions but they went in one ear and out the*

from ear to ear to have a wide smile on your face: *We knew that Jenny had passed her driving test because she was grinning from ear to ear*

nothing between the ears to be stupid: *We've had to sack the new apprentice because he seemed to have nothing between his*

(someone's) ear to have the sympathetic attention of (someone, usually someone influential): *He may well get the manager's job—he has the ear of the*

(something) coming out of one's ears used to emphasize how much of something you have: *We have a good crop of apples this year—so much so that they're coming out of our*

or keep one's ear to the ground to keep oneself informed about what is happening around one: *The caretaker will know if there are any vacant* He keeps his ear to the from a method of tracking prey.>

to (someone or with only half an ear to not to pay much attention to what is being said: *There was something on the radio news about the incident, but I was only listening with half an* (etc) ears are burning someone somewhere is talking about me (etc): *My ears should have been burning this morning—I believe my employers were discussing my* belief that one's ears grow hot when someone is talking about one is mentioned by Pliny, the Roman writer.>

back one's ears to listen attentively: *Pin back your ears if you hear his name*

back (someone's) ears to reprimand (someone): *I must try to get to work on time; I don't want the boss pinning back my ears for being* it by ear to deal with matters as they arise without making plans beforehand: *It's difficult to know how they will react to your* You will have to play it by to playing a piece of music from memory rather than from printed music.>

up one's ears to begin to listen attentively: *He was bored by the speech but he pricked up his ears when he heard his name* to animals literally pricking up their ears when they are listening attentively.>

a deaf ear to (something) see

to one's ears in (something) to deeply involved in (something): *I'm up to my ears in work* this comparison with someone who is almost submerged by very deep water.>

have ears see

behind the ears see

early

early bird catches the worm see

earn

one's corn see

one's stripes see

earth

(someone)_(back)_down to earth to make (someone) aware of the practicalities of life or of a situation: *She was daydreaming about a career on the stage but was brought down to earth by her boss asking her to do some*

the earth see

to earth to go into hiding: *The criminals went to earth after the to a fox escaping into its earth or hole during a hunt.>*

heaven and earth see

have or not stand an earthly (1) not to have the slightest chance: *The youngest competitor doesn't stand an earthly in the competition against the experienced* (2) to have no knowledge or information: *I haven't an earthly where he* <(1) A shortened form of a religious expression "not to have an earthly hope".>

(someone or something) to earth to to find (someone or something) after a long search: *I finally ran the book to earth in a second-hand book* to a hunting term for chasing a fox into its earth or hole.>

salt of the earth see

easy

as falling off a log or *easy as pie* extremely easy: *Passing the exam was easy as falling off a*

meat someone or something that is easily taken advantage of: *She was so naïve that she was easy meat for lecherous*

on the eye very attractive: *He always employs secretaries who are easy on the*

easy on (someone or something) (1) not to treat (someone) too sternly: Go easy on the child—she didn't mean to spill the (2) not to use very much of (something): Go easy on the milk—we haven't much

it easy (1) not to hurry or expend much effort: *Take it We've got plenty of time to catch the (2) not to get upset or angry: Take it Losing your temper won't help the*

eat

at the cutting edge of (something) to be part of the most modern, advanced development or stage of (something): *Gwen's new project is at the cutting edge of cancer*

crow see

one's heart out see

humble pie see

one's words see

(someone's) dust see

one's cake and eat it see

(someone) eating out of one's hand to have (someone) doing everything that one wishes, because he or she likes or admires one: *The boss is usually a very stern, unfriendly man but the secretary has him eating out of her* to an animal that is so tame that it will eat out of someone's hand.>

eat my hat see

eating you? what's annoying or troubling you?: What's eating you? You've been in a bad mood all

ebb

a low ebb in a poor or depressed state: *She has been at a low ebb since the death of her* to the tide when it has flowed away from the land.>

edge

double-edged or two-edged sword see

on the edge of your seat to be very excited and eager to know what happens next: *The film was a thriller and we were all on the edge of our seats until the very*

frayed at the edges to be less strong or effective than formerly: *When it was first established we thought that the school policy on bullying was excellent, but circumstances have changed and it is now rather frayed at the* to cloth that is beginning to unravel.>

some/a few rough edges to have a few faults, often with regard to social behaviour: *Joan has a few rough edges but I'm sure that, with some training, she will make an excellent*

a word in edgeways or edgewise see

the edge on (someone or something) to have the advantage of (someone or something): *He should* *With his experience he has the edge on the other*

one's edge to become less effective or less good at what you do: *Sam used to be our best salesman, but I think he's beginning to lose his to a knife becoming blunt.>*

a knife edge see

edge nervous: She was on edge until she heard the results of the

(someone) over the edge to make someone unable to cope, mentally ill, etc: *Sue has just recovered from a nervous breakdown and we're worried that losing her job will push her over the edge*

one's teeth on edge see

the edge off (something) to reduce (something), to make (something) less sharp, etc: *His smile took the edge of his*

egg

nest-egg see

egg see

left with egg on one's face to be left looking foolish: *He told everyone that his horse would certainly win but he was left with egg on his face when it came in*

all one's eggs in one basket to rely entirely on the success of one project, etc: *The young graduate has put all her eggs in one basket and only applied for one*

[as eggs is eggs](#) see

[one's grandmother to suck eggs](#) to try to tell someone how to do something when he or she is much more experienced than oneself at it: *We've been playing chess for years, but the young beginner was giving us hints—certainly a case of teaching one's grandmother to suck*

[can't make an omelette without breaking eggs](#) see

ego

[ego](#) see

eight

[or have one over the eight](#) to be or to have had too much to drink: *He started a fight when he was one over the* to a former belief that one could have eight alcoholic drinks before one becomes drunk.>

elbow

grease hard physical work: *New polishes are all very well but it will take elbow grease to get a shine on that*

room space enough to move or to do something: *I'll need elbow room in the kitchen if I am to get the meal*

(someone) *the elbow* to get rid of (someone), to end a relationship with (someone): *She's given her fiancé the elbow and is going out with someone*

[power to \(someone's\) elbow](#) see

[at elbow](#) ragged, having holes: *That old sweater is out at* [Throw it to one's elbows same as up to one's ears](#) see

element

one's element in a situation in which one is happy or at one's best: *He's in his element sailing to the four elements of medieval science of fire, earth, air and water.*>

elephant

white elephant something which is useless and troublesome to look after: *The vase my aunt gave me is a real white It's ugly and impossible to* elephants were given by the kings of Siam to followers who had displeased them since the cost of keeping such an elephant was such that it would ruin the follower.>

a memory like an elephant never to forget things: *Her mother won't forget that I borrowed her She's got a memory like an* pink elephants to have hallucinations, especially when one has drunk too much alcohol: *The drunk man saw pink elephants at the foot of his*

eleventh

the eleventh hour at the last possible minute: *She handed in her essay at the eleventh* biblical reference to the parable of the labourers in the vineyard in Matthew 20.>

empty

vessels make most noise to the most foolish or least informed people are most likely to voice their opinions: *She complains all the time about the new scheme but she knows nothing about* Empty vessels make most

end

dead end see

a loose end with nothing to do, with no plans: *The young man's been at a loose end since he finished his*

the end of the day see

the end of one's tether at the end of one's patience, tolerance, etc: *She's at the end of her tether looking after three small to a rope that will only extend a certain distance to let the animal attached to it graze.>*

one's wits' ends see

to a sticky end see

off at the deep end see

one's end up to perform as well as other people involved: *I didn't know much about the subject being discussed but I kept my end*
ends meet to live within the limits of one's income: *He earns very little but somehow they make ends*
ends referred to are the start and finish of one's annual accounts.>

end justifies the means if the result is good it does not matter how one achieved it: *She cheated in order to pass the exam but she says that the end justified the*

end of the line or *road* the point beyond which survival is impossible: *Their marriage has reached the end of the*

hold of the wrong end of the stick see

thin end of the wedge see

the end of the world see

enfant

terrible a younger person who embarrasses older people with his or her unconventional ideas or behaviour: *The new member of the committee is an enfant terrible and shocked the older members by suggesting radical*

enough

is as good as a feast if you have enough of something you should be satisfied with that; you do not need any more: *We had just enough presents to give all the children at the party one each, but enough is as good as a*

error

the error of your ways to realize or admit that one has done something wrong or behaved badly: *As a young teenager Sam went round with a wild crowd, but he has now seen the error of his ways and is studying hard to get to*

[and error](#) see

essence

the essence of the greatest importance: *Speed is of the essence in this*

establishment

Establishment the group who hold positions of authority in a country, society, etc: *Young people often rebel against the*

eternal

rest death: The old man has gone to his eternal

[triangle](#) a sexual relationship between two men and one woman or between two women and one man, often involving conflict: *He is married but he has a mistress—the eternal*
Eternal City Rome.

even

[even](#) see

[even with \(someone\)](#) to be revenged on (someone): *He vowed to get even with his opponent for committing a*

[or keep on an even keel](#) to keep steady or calm with no sudden changes: *One minute she's up, the next she's She must get on an even*

event

[wise after the event](#) to realize how a situation should have been dealt with after it is over: *Her father never knows what to do at the time but he's always wise after the*
the event as it happened: *We thought he would win but in the event he*

the event of (something) if (something) happens: He inherits the business in the event of his father's

every

[inch a or the](#) see

[man jack](#) see

everything

[but the kitchen sink](#) see

evidence

evidence easily seen: His love for her is much in

Queen's or King's evidence to give evidence against a fellow criminal in order to have one's own sentence reduced: The accused turned Queen's evidence and spilled the beans about his

evil

[evil eye](#) see

[lesser of two evils](#) the less unpleasant of two fairly unpleasant choices: *I had either to dig the garden or look after my sister's two children for the afternoon; digging was the lesser of the two*

[off the evil hour](#) or day to keep postponing something unpleasant: *He should go to the dentist but he keeps putting off the evil*

ewe

[ewe lamb](#) (someone's) favourite: *Her youngest son is her ewe*
biblical reference to Samuel 12:3.>

exception

[exception that proves the rule](#) the fact that an exception has to be made for a particular example of something proves that the general rule is valid: *All the family have black The youngest member, who is fair-haired, is the exception that proves the exception to (something) to take offence at (something): I took exception to his overcritical comments about my*

exhibition

an exhibition of oneself to behave embarrassingly in public: She made an exhibition of herself at the office party by getting very
expense

the expense of (someone or something) causing loss, harm, embarrassment, etc: He won the race, but at the expense of his
extra

[the extra mile](#) see

eye

[my eye \(and Betty Martin\)](#) completely untrue: *He told me he was wealthy, but I knew that it was all my*

eye for an eye (and a tooth for a tooth) a punishment to match the offence committed: He killed the son of the man who murdered his daughter—an eye for an biblical reference to Exodus 21:23.>

sight for sore eyes [to](#) a pleasant or welcome sight: “Well, you’re a sight for sore eyes,” said the old man to his son, who was just back from a long trip

smack in the eye for (someone) an insult or rebuff for (someone): When she married someone else it was a real smack in the eye for her ex-

[is in the eye of the beholder](#) see

[one in the eye for \(someone\)](#) to be something unpleasant that happens to someone who deserves it: *He tried to get the boss to sack her, but it was one in the eye for him when she was*

[see with half an eye](#) to see or understand without difficulty: *You can see with half an eye that he is seriously*

[one’s eyes to \(something\)](#) deliberately to ignore (something blameworthy): *The local policeman closed his eyes to the pub being open after closing*

[one’s eyes out](#) to weep bitterly: *The little girl cried her eyes out when her rabbit*

[on the eye](#) see

something which reveals an unexpected fact: *When he stood up to the bully it was a real eye-opener to She'd thought he was a something extremely ugly: That new building is an*
[your eyes on \(something\)](#) to look at (something) with a great deal of pleasure: *The children feasted their eyes on the display of toys in the shop*

your eye in to get some practice or experience at doing something so that you become more skilful: *I start my new job tomorrow and the boss is on holiday till next week; that gives me a few days to get my eye*

[one's eye teeth](#) see

[\(someone\) the glad eye](#) see

an eye for (someone or something) to be a good judge of (someone or something), to be able to spot (someone or something) as a good example: *She has an eye for a bargain when it comes to*

an eye to the main chance see [to](#)

[mud in your eye!](#) see

[the twinkling of an eye](#) very rapidly, immediately: *The child disappeared in the twinkling of an*

[an eagle eye on \(someone or something\)](#) to watch (someone or something) extremely closely: *Keep an eagle eye on that till when Jamie's around because I don't trust to the fact that eagles have particularly keen vision.>*

[a weather eye open](#) or *keep one's eyes peeled* or *skinned* to keep a close watch, to be alert: *Keep your eyes peeled in case the police*
nautical term for watching for changes in the weather.>

[eyes at \(someone\)](#) to look at (someone) with sexual interest: *She was making eyes at the man at the*

[to bat an eyelid](#) not to show any surprise, distress, etc: *He didn't bat an eyelid when the police charged*

(someone's) eyes to (something) to make (someone) aware of (something, usually unpleasant) previously unknown: *They finally opened his eyes to his wife's*

the wool over (someone's) eyes see

some/a few eyebrows to surprise or shock some people: *The vicar's daughter's plunging neckline raised a few eyebrows at the church*

eye to eye with (someone) to be in agreement with (someone): *The couple rarely see eye to eye about how to bring up their*

apple of (someone's) eye see

evil eye the supposed power of causing harm by a look: *I think he's put the evil eye on I always play chess badly when I'm playing against*

more to (someone or something) than meets the eye the true worth or state of (someone or something) is not immediately obvious: *I think that there's more to his illness than meets the*

a blind eye to (something) same as close one's eyes to (something) see above.

to one's eyes same as up to one's ears (in something) see

one's eyes open fully aware of one's actions: *She married him with her eyes She knew he was a violent*

F

face

slap in the face see

staring one in the face (1) to be very obvious, although one may not realize this at first: *I was worrying about being short of money and Wendy was worrying about the lease on her flat running out shortly, but the solution to both our problems was staring us in the face; I rented my spare room to* (2) to be likely to happen or to be about to happen: *The recession had affected his business badly and Peter was staring bankruptcy in the*

smoke in (someone's) face see

face to face with (someone or something) (1) to meet (someone), sometimes suddenly and unexpectedly: *Jane was shopping in the high street when she came face to face with an old school friend she hadn't seen for* (2) to experience (something) directly and have to deal with it: *Sara's parents had been very rich and this was the first time that she had come face to face with*

off one's nose to spite one's face see

the music to face and deal with a situation caused by one's actions: *At first he ran away after the crime but he returned to face the* from a performer facing the musicians below the front of the stage as he or she makes an entrance on stage.>

in the face of (something) to oppose or defy (something): *She takes pleasure in flying in the face of* to a dog attacking.>

out of (someone's) face to go away and stop annoying (someone): *I wish you'd stop complaining about your problems and get out of my*

(something) a *face-lift* to make (something) look better, to renovate (something): *They've given the old house a complete to a cosmetic operation to raise the skin of the lower face to improve the appearance.>*

a long face to look unhappy: *Judging from his long face I assume that he didn't get the*

a face like thunder to be very angry-looking: *She had a face like thunder when he was late for*

the face of (something) while having to cope with (something unpleasant): *She succeeded in the face of great*

a straight face to stop oneself from smiling or laughing: *James didn't know about the surprise party and was complaining about everyone forgetting his birthday; I could hardly keep a straight*

on the other side of one's face see

face to suffer a loss of respect or reputation: *She refused to apologize to her employee because she thought she would lose face by doing*

or *pull a face to* to twist one's face into a strange or funny expression: *She made a face behind her father's*

a brave face on it to try to appear brave when one is feeling afraid, distressed, etc: *I'm nervous about the interview but I'm putting a brave face on*

(someone's) face to prevent (someone) from appearing stupid or wrong: *It was her mistake but her secretary saved her face by taking responsibility for*

one's face against (someone or something) to oppose (someone or something) with great determination: *The chairman has set his face against the proposal and that's the end of*

one's face to put in an appearance, especially when one will not be welcome or when one will be embarrassed: *I'm surprised that she showed her face at the party after she got so drunk at the last*

(someone or something) at face value to judge (someone or something) on outward appearance: *She takes him at face value, but his sincerity is to the value of a coin or note printed on it.*>
the grin off (someone's) face see

faint

heart never won fair lady boldness is necessary to achieve what one desires: *You won't get a job sitting Faint heart never won fair to have the faintest* not to have the slightest idea: *I haven't the faintest who he*

fair

fair crack of the whip see

fair means or foul by any method whatsoever: *He's determined to get that job by fair means or*

and square (1) honestly, in a fair way: *He won the contest fair and square, not because he was the umpire's* (2) straight, directly: *He hit him fair and square on the*

do's see

game a person or thing that it is considered quite reasonable to attack, make fun of, etc: *Politicians are fair game to members of the*

play fairness and justice: *The children are organizing the sports themselves but there will have to be some teachers there to see fair*
friends people who are friendly towards one only when one is doing well or not in any kind of trouble: *All his fairweather friends deserted him when he lost his*

a fair way to very likely to: *He's in a fair way to becoming a*

fairy

away with the fairies to be crazy or out of one's mind so that one imagines things: *My granny's very old and away with the fairies; she thinks I'm her dead*

fairy godmother a person or organization that offers unexpected help with a problem or difficulty: *Beth was a talented musician but her parents were too poor to send her to music college and she only got to go because a local benefactor acted as her fairy*

faith

(all) *good faith* with honest and sincere intentions: *I recommended the job to him in all good*

fall

about to be extremely amused: *The children fell about at the clown's*

back on (someone or something) to rely on (someone or something) if all else fails: *When her husband left her she knew that she could fall back on her*

[between two stools](#) see

[by the wayside](#) see

down on (something) to do badly at (something): *Since he was ill he has been falling down on his*

[angel](#) see

[flat](#) to fail, to have no effect: *The comedian's jokes fell completely for (someone or something) (1) to be deceived by (something): She fell for his charm but he was a (2) to be attracted to or fall in love with (someone or something): He fell for his best friend's*

[foul of \(someone or something\)](#) to do something that arouses someone's anger or hostility: *He fell foul of the law at an early*

[from grace](#) to lose (someone's) favour: *She used to be her father's favourite but she fell from grace when she married without his*

[into line](#) see

[into place](#) see

[off the wagon](#) see

[on deaf ears](#) see

[on stony ground](#) see

or land on one's feet see

out to quarrel: *He fell out with his neighbour over the repair of their communal*

over oneself to to set about doing something with great willingness and eagerness: *She fell over herself to make her rich guest*

false

false alarm see

false dawn see

false start see

false pretences by using deceit: *They got into the house under false pretences by saying they were*

familiarity

breeds contempt people cease to appreciate people or things they know well: *He doesn't realize what a marvellous wife he has because familiarity has bred*

family

the family way pregnant: *Her son's scarcely a year old, but she's in the family way*

in the family a characteristic found in many members of the same family: *Violence runs in that At least three of them are in*

famine

feast or famine see

fancy

and) fancy free to not in love with anyone, not romantically attached: *He used to be married but he's fancy free*

one's chances see

or tickle one's fancy to attract one, to arouse a liking in one: *She has seen a dress that took her*

far

far cry from (something) see

and away by a very great amount: *He's far and away the best*

be it from (someone) to when (someone) has no right to do something but they do it anyway: Far be it from me to presume to advise you, but are you doing the right thing?

far to be very successful: *The boy is not academic but I think he will go*

too far to do or say something that is beyond the limits of what is acceptable: The young employee went too far when he hit the far, so good up until now the project, etc, has been successful: So far so good, but we don't know what will happen in the

fashion

a fashion see

fast

see

in the fast lane see

fast and loose with (something) to act irresponsibly with

(something): He had no intentions of marrying He was just playing fast and loose with her

a fast one on (someone) to to deceive (someone): He pulled a fast one on me by selling me a stolen to bowling a fast ball in cricket.>

fat

the fat see

isn't over till the fat lady sings to used to remind people that the result of a competition is not established until the end of the game, match, etc: Our team were losing quite badly and some of the fans left early, but Dick said, "It isn't over till the fat lady And he was right: we scored three goals in the last ten minutes of the

the fatted calf see

off the fat of the land to live in a luxurious fashion: *While he was successful they lived off the fat of the*

fat is in the fire trouble has been started and it cannot be stopped: *The fat was in the fire when his parents discovered he had been out all causes a fire to flare up.>*

fate

fate worse than death something terrible that happens to one, often referring to rape: *The village girls suffered a fate worse than death at the hands of the*

(someone's) fate to ensure that something, usually unpleasant, happens to (someone): *The workers' fate was sealed when the firm was bought They lost their*

fate to act in a way that is likely to bring one ill luck or misfortune: *You're tempting fate by having a party It's bound to rain*

father

child is father of the man see

father and mother of (something) an extreme example of (something, usually something bad): *The couple had the father and mother of a row last*

fault

a fault to too great an extent: *He embarrasses her by his lavish He's generous to a*

favour

favour with (someone) see

fear

the fear of death or *God into (someone)* to God, to terrify (someone): *Hearing the eerie shrieks in the graveyard put the fear of God into*

is no fear of (something) it is not likely that (something) will happen: *There's no fear of our getting an extra*

fear or favour with complete fairness, without bias: *You must conduct the investigation into the fraud without fear or*

feast

feast or famine to be a situation in which there is too much of something or too little: *In this town it's either feast or famine when it comes to films; last week there was nothing on that I wanted to see and this week there are at least four films I'd like to go*

is as good as a feast see

your eyes on (something) see

feat

no mean feat used to emphasize the difficulty of a task or venture: *It was no mean feat for Jimmy to finish the marathon race when he had just recovered from a leg*

feather

feather in one's cap something of which one can be proud:

Winning the tournament was a real feather in the young player's

of a feather flock together see

one's (own) nest to make a profit for oneself, often at the expense of someone else: *All the years that he was storekeeper with the firm he was feathering his*

as a feather see

the feathers or fur fly to cause trouble or a quarrel: *The politician really made the feathers fly when he announced the privatisation of the* to birds or animals fighting.>

(someone's) feathers to annoy or upset (someone): *The new head teacher will ruffle the feathers of some of the staff if she makes too many changes to the*

the white feather to to show signs of cowardice: *His colleagues accused him of showing the white feather when he refused to ask for a salary* white feather in the tail of a fighting cock was a sign of inferior breeding.>

feel

at home see

free permission to do what you wish: *Feel free to borrow the*
in one's bones to know (something) by instinct: *I felt in my bones*
that he was

one's feet same as find one's feet see

the pinch see

feet

(someone's) *feet* easily within (someone's) reach or power: (1) *With*
his qualifications the world is at his (2) greatly admiring of
(someone): *All the young men were at the feet of the beautiful*
one's feet to take a long time to do something: *The government*
has been accused of dragging its feet on improving care for the
or land on one's feet to to be fortunate or successful, especially
after a period of uncertainty or misfortune: *After being unemployed*
he landed on his feet with a job in

one's feet to to become capable of coping with a situation: *She felt*
overwhelmed by motherhood at first but she's finding her feet
cold feet see

feet of clay to have a surprising weakness, despite having been
thought to be perfect: *He thought his wife was an angel, but he*
discovered that she had feet of clay when she was rude to the
biblical reference to Daniel 2:31–34.>

both feet on the ground or *have one's feet on the ground* to be
practical and sensible: *Her husband is a dreamer but she has her*
feet on the

the ball at one's feet see

two left feet see

under (someone's) feet to hinder or get in (someone's) way: *The*
children get under her feet when she's doing the

one's feet up to take a rest: *He's been working hard all his life and*
it's time for him to put his feet

the dust from one's feet see

at (someone's) feet receive tuition from (someone) and be influenced by (him or her): *He sat at Picasso's feet as a*
on one's own feet to be independent: *Your children will have to learn to stand on their own feet* some
(someone) off his or her feet to affect (someone) with great enthusiasm or emotion; to influence (someone) to do as one wishes: *She should never have married him, but he swept her off her*
the weight off one's feet see

fence

fences to put things right after a quarrel, etc: *Your quarrel with your father was a long time* You should try to mend fences
one's fences to act too hurriedly or rashly: *I know you're attracted to her, but don't rush your fences by asking her to marry you until you get to know her* horse-riding term.>

on the fence to refuse to take sides in a dispute, etc: *My mother and my sister have quarrelled but I find it's wiser to sit on the*
fiddle

while Rome burns see

as a fiddle extremely fit: *His father has been ill but he's fit as a fiddle*

second fiddle to (someone) to to be in a subordinate or inferior position to (someone): *She always plays second fiddle to her glamorous sister* at

field

fields and pastures new see

a field day to take advantage of an opportunity to do something you enjoy, especially to criticize: *The journalists had a field day when the prime minister*

the field to take advantage of many chances offered to one, especially to go out with several members of the opposite sex: *He*

played the field for years but to my surprise he is getting married next

fifth

[fifth wheel](#) see

fight

fit extremely healthy and in good condition: The player was injured but he's fighting fit

[like Kilkenny cats](#) to fight fiercely: *The two boys fought like Kilkenny* a story of two cats in the town of Kilkenny who were tied together by their tails and fought until only their tails were left.>

[shy of \(something\)](#) to avoid (something): *He's been fighting shy of telling her he's*

[a fighting chance](#) see

fill

[a dead man's shoes same as step into a dead man's shoes](#) see
out to get plumper: She was very thin but she's beginning to fill the bill see

had one's fill to have had enough, to be unable to tolerate any more: *He says he's had his fill of his boring*

find

[one's feet](#) see

[one's or its own level](#) see

out the hard way to find out (something) by one's own experience rather than from others: *He found out the hard way that it's difficult to get into*

fine

[it fine](#) see

[\(something\) down to a fine art](#) to have learned to do (something) extremely well: *She's got getting out quickly in the morning down to a fine*

through (something) with a fine-tooth comb to search (something) very carefully: You must go through the written contract with a fine-tooth comb fine-tooth comb is used to remove lice from hair.>

[a fine line between \(something\) and \(something\)](#) see

finger

[all fingers and thumbs](#) to be clumsy or awkward when using one's hands: *I'm so I'm all fingers and*

[one's fingers](#) or get *one's fingers burnt* to suffer because of something that one has been involved in: *He hoped to make money by investing in the firm but he got his fingers burnt when it went*

[one's fingers](#) to hope for good fortune: *Cross your fingers that it doesn't rain*

[or pull one's finger out](#) to stop wasting time and get on with something: *If that job is to be finished on time you'll have to get your finger*

[a finger in every pie](#) to be involved in a large number of projects, organizations, etc: *I'm not sure what business he's in—he has a finger in every*

[a finger in the pie](#) to be involved in something: *I wondered who had caused the I might have known that he would have a finger in the*

(something) at one's fingertips to know all the information about *(something): She has the history of the village at her*

[green fingers](#) see

[one's finger on the pulse](#) see

(something) slip through one's fingers to lose (an advantage, opportunity, etc), often by one's inaction: *He let the job slip through his fingers by not applying in*

to lift a finger not to do anything at all: *Jill has two teenage daughters and neither of them lifts a finger around the house, although she works full*

the finger at (someone) to indicate who is to blame: *She would point the finger at anyone to save her son from being*

one's finger on (something) to identify (something) exactly: *I could not put my finger on why I disliked*

or wrap (someone) round one's little finger to be able to get (someone) to do exactly as one wishes: *Her father will lend her the She can twist him round her little*

your fingers to the bone to to work extremely hard: *Jack and Pat have five children and have to work their fingers to the bone just to feed and clothe*

fire

fuel to the fire see

of fire see

breathing fire to be extremely angry: *The boss is breathing fire because you haven't finished typing those letters to the fire-breathing dragons of legend.>*

fire with fire to use the same kind of methods as one's opponent: *The opponents of the proposed building are going to have to appoint a top-class lawyer if they are to fight fire with fire; the builders are represented by a very experienced legal*

on all cylinders see

on like a house on fire to get on very well: *I didn't think my two friends would like each other but they get on like a house on*

fire to wait or be delayed: *His holiday plans are hanging fire until his health to a gun in which there is a delay between the trigger being pulled and the gun being fired.>*

many or several irons in the fire see

one's fire to delay doing something: *The workers were planning strike action but they were advised to hold their fire until their union leaders had talks with to delaying firing a gun.>*

the firing line in a situation in which you are likely to be blamed or criticized: *The junior doctors are in the firing line, but it was the consultant who made the to people who have been lined up in order to be shot dead.>*

a fire under (someone) to make (someone) start working harder or more energetically: *The rate of production has increased dramatically since the new factory manager came; he really lit a fire under the of the frying pan into the fire see*

with fire to do something dangerous: *The child is playing with fire by teasing that It will bite*

(someone's) chestnuts out of the fire see

the Thames or world on fire to do something remarkable: *He'll never set the Thames on fire but he'll do quite well at his to the River Thames, which it would be impossible to set alight.>*

fat is in the fire see

no smoke without fire see

fire being attacked: *The new traffic plans have come under fire from several to being shot at.>*

go through fire for (someone) used to emphasize what lengths someone would go to for a loved one: *I can't believe that she has been accused of neglecting her children; she would go through fire for **first***

first hand directly: *I got my information about the council meeting at first hand from my cousin, who attended*

thing early in the morning or in the working day: *The boss wants to see you first*

to or make or reach first base see

the first flush of (something) in the early and vigorous stages of (something): *He offered to work overtime in the first flush of enthusiasm for the*

the first place see

the first move see

to know the first thing about (something) to know nothing about (something): *He doesn't know the first thing about*

the first water of the highest quality, of the most extreme type: *She is a doctor of the first He is a fool of the first* to a top-quality diamond, diamonds being graded into three “waters” according to clarity.>

fish

big fish in a small pond see

fishing expedition an attempt to get information or find out the truth about something, often in a secretive way: *The journalist said that she wanted to write a profile of our managing director, but I think that she had heard something about the firm being in financial difficulties and was on a fishing*

pretty kettle of fish see

queer fish a person who is considered strange or eccentric: *He's a queer fish who seems to have no*

like a fish see

in muddy to or *troubled waters* to concern oneself with matters that are unpleasant or confused: *You'll really be fishing in troubled waters if you investigate the employment practices in that*

other fish to fry to have something else to do, especially something that is more important or more profitable: *We asked him to join us but he had other fish to He has a new*

a fish needs a bicycle used to emphasize how unnecessary someone or something is: *What we want is some action; we need another committee like a fish needs a*

a fish out of water ill at ease and unaccustomed to a situation:

Having come from a small office she felt like a fish out of water in the huge

shooting fish in a barrel used with reference to some kind of contest or competition in which one side is so much stronger than the other that the weaker side has no chance of winning:

The first round of the tennis match is going to be like shooting fish in a barrel for Fred; he's won the championship three times already

and he's been drawn against Tom who just took up tennis this

are plenty more fish in the sea many more opportunities will arise;

many more members of the opposite sex are around: I know your

girlfriend has left you but there are plenty more fish in the

fit

fits and starts irregularly, often stopping and starting: He tends to work by fits and starts, rather than

as a fiddle see

like a glove see

the cap fits, wear it see

five

bunch of fives a clenched fist, a blow with one's fist: The bully said he'd give him a bunch of fives if he didn't give him

how many beans make five see

fix

a fix in an awkward or difficult situation: I'm in a fix now that I've lost my

flag

or put the flags out to celebrate something (a rare event): *The day she smiles at a customer I'll hang the flags*

(something) up the flagpole to put forward (a plan or idea) in order to gauge reactions to it: *We want to do something to*

celebrate the centenary of the club and the committee are going to

run a few ideas up the flagpole, hoping that we'll all agree on one of

*[the flag](#) to attend an event only so that one can say that one has been present, or in order to make sure that one's firm, organization, etc, is represented: *I really don't want to go to the bank's party but as no one else from the company is I'll have to show the**

*oneself in the flag [to](#) to do something which is meant to emphasize your loyalty to your country or organization but actually brings some gain or advantage to oneself: *The politician wrapped himself in the flag about the extent of his war effort when, in fact, he was a director of a firm which made huge profits from making munitions for the**

flame

old flame a former boyfriend or girlfriend: *His wife objected to him seeing an old flame who was in*

the flames to make a difficult situation worse: *She quarrelled with him, and her friend fanned the flames by telling her what he had said about her in*

[a moth to a flame](#) see

[\(someone\) down in flames](#) see

flash

[flash in the pan](#) a sudden, brief success: *He did well in the first set but it was just a flash in the He lost the to a flintlock gun in which the spark from the flint ignited the gunpowder in the priming pan, the flash then travelling to the main barrel. If this failed to go off there was only a flash in the pan.>*

flat

[flat](#) see

[on one's back](#) see

a flat spin in a state of confused excitement: *She was in a flat spin when she heard her fiancé was coming home from the*
flavour

of the month a person or thing that is particularly popular at a particular time, although this is likely to be temporary: *These shoes are very difficult to walk in but they're flavour of the month with teenage*

flea

flea in one's ear a sharp scolding: *He got a flea in his ear from the teacher for being*

a market where second-hand or cheap clothes and goods are sold: *She got a lovely skirt at a stall in the the Marché aux Puces in Paris.>*

flesh

thorn in (someone's) flesh or side a permanent source of annoyance or irritation: *Her younger son is a thorn in her* *He's always getting into* biblical reference to II Corinthians 12:7.>

and blood (1) family, relations: *Surely they'll take her* *She's their own* *flesh and* (2) human beings in general: *Resisting the delicious-looking cake was more than flesh and blood could*

or have one's pound of flesh to obtain everything that one is entitled to, especially if this causes difficulties or suffering to those who have to give it: *The factory owner certainly gets his* *pound of flesh from his* *They work long hours at boring to* Shakespeare's play *The Merchant of* in which Shylock tries to enforce an agreement by which he can cut a pound of flesh from Antonio.>

the flesh in real life, not in a photograph: *She never dreamt that she'd see her favourite celebrity in the*

(someone's) flesh creep see

flesh-pots luxurious living: *She's enjoying the flesh-pots of the biblical reference to Exodus 16:3.>*

[spirit is willing_\(but the flesh is weak\)](#) see

flex

[one's muscles](#) see

flip

[one's lid](#) to suddenly get extremely angry: *Jenny flipped her lid when Paul told her that he was going to have to cancel their holiday*

flog

[a dead horse](#) see

flood

the flood a very long time ago: *The clothes she wears were in fashion before the to the biblical flood in Genesis 7:9.>*

floodgates

[the floodgates](#) to make it possible for a great many people to do something or make it likely that this will happen, perhaps by removing some kind of restriction: *The government is afraid that, if one group of workers is allowed to break the wages agreement, it will open the floodgates for all the*

floor

[in on the ground floor](#) see

[the floor](#) (1) to rise to make a public speech: *The chairman took the floor to introduce the* (2) to begin to dance: *The couple took the floor to do the*

[the floor with \(someone\)](#) to defeat (someone) thoroughly: *The experienced player wiped the floor with the young*

flush

[the first flush of \(something\)](#) see

[fly in the ointment](#) something that spoils something: *The holiday was enjoyable—the only fly in the ointment was that my father lost his*

are no flies on (someone) there is no possibility of deceiving or cheating (someone); there is no lack of sense in (someone): *She won't buy his old* *There are no flies on*

[like to be a fly on the wall](#) would like to be present and able to hear what is going on without being seen: *I would like to have been a fly on the wall when she told him what she thought of*
[the crow flies](#) see

[dropping like flies](#) used to emphasize that a great number of people are becoming ill or dying from the same cause: *It was a very severe virus and people were dropping like*

flying high to be very successful, to be in a position of power: *He's flying high nowadays as chairman of the company, but he started off as the errand*

[a kite](#) see

[blind](#) see

[in the face of \(something\)](#) see

[off the handle](#) see

off to a flying start to have a very successful beginning: *Our appeal got off to a flying start with a donation of*

[might fly](#) see

[flying colours](#) see

foam

[at the mouth](#) to be very angry: *He was foaming at the mouth when he got a parking dogs foam at the mouth.>*

fog

to have the foggiest not to have the slightest idea: *I haven't the foggiest where she's*

follow

[in \(someone's\) footsteps](#) see

[one's nose](#) see

suit to do just as someone else has done: *He got up to leave and everyone followed* reference to card-playing when a player plays the same suit as the previous player.>

food

for thought something to make one think carefully: *The managing director's talk about the state of the firm gave us food for*

fool

fool's paradise a state of happiness that is based on something that is not true or realistic: *She lived in a fool's paradise thinking that he was going to marry*

nobody's fool to have a good deal of common sense: *She's nobody's* *She knows the salary they offered her is too*

rush in (where angels fear to tread) an ignorant person can sometimes achieve what a more wary person cannot: *Fools rush in —he went straight to the top person and got our complaint* Alexander Pope's "An Essay on Criticism".>

a fool of oneself to make oneself appear ridiculous or stupid: *He thought that he would make a fool of himself if he sang in*

a fool of (someone) to make (someone) appear ridiculous or stupid: *She made a fool of him by imitating his*

to suffer fools gladly not to have any patience with foolish or stupid people: *Clever children get on with that teacher but she doesn't suffer fools*

foot

in (someone's) footsteps to do the same as someone else, particularly a relative, has done before: *He's following in his father's footsteps and studying*

and fancy free see

off on the wrong foot to get off to a bad or unfortunate start: *He got off on the wrong foot with her parents by arriving*

a or one foot in the door see

one foot in the grave to be very old: *Young people tend to think that anyone over 50 has one foot in the grave!*

boot is on the other foot see

one's best foot forward see

one's foot down to be firm about something, to forbid someone to do something: *She wanted to hitch-hike but her mother put her foot down so she's going by*

one's foot in it to do or say something tactless: *You put your foot in it when you mentioned her He's just left*

oneself in the foot to make a mistake or do something stupid which causes problems for oneself or harms one's chances of success: *Dave shot himself in the foot when he stole money from his grandmother; she was going to leave him all her money but she changed her will before she*

fork

with a forked tongue to tell lies: *He was speaking with a forked tongue when he said he loved* a phrase used by North American Indians.>

form

good or *bad form* be in or not in accordance with social conventions or customs: *It is bad form to smoke between courses at the dinner*

form in good condition, fit and in a good humour: *He's been ill but he's back on form*

refers to the condition of a horse.>

to form in accordance with someone's usual pattern of behaviour: *True to form, he arrived about an hour*

fort

the fort to take temporary charge of something: *The owner of the shop is in hospital and I'm holding the*

forty

winks a short nap: *I'll just have forty winks before I go*

foul

fair means or foul see *fair*

foul of (someone or something) see

play a criminal act, especially one involving murder: The police have found a body and they're suspecting foul legal term.>

four

all fours see

frame

in the frame (1) to be likely to get or win something: *Sue's in the frame for the manager's* (2) to be suspected of being guilty of a crime: *Joe Taylor's been in prison before and he's in the frame for the bank robbery, according to the local*

fray

frayed at the edges see

free

and) fancy free see

free see

and easy informal, casual: *He's the boss but he's always very free and easy with his*

an argument or fight in which everyone joins in an uncontrolled way: It started off as a quarrel between husband and wife but it ended up as a free-for-all with all the neighbours

(someone) a free hand give (someone) permission to do as he or she wishes: *They gave the interior decorator a free hand with the renovation of their*

unhurt or unpunished: He was charged with the crime but he got away scot-free for lack of

no such thing as a free lunch see

French

French leave to stay away from work, etc, without permission: *He might well be dismissed for taking French* to an 18th-century French custom of leaving a party without saying goodbye to one's host or hostess.>

fresh

as a daisy see

fields and pastures new see

Freudian

Freudian slip the use of a wrong word while speaking that is supposed to indicate an unconscious thought: *The policeman made a Freudian slip when he said the accused was being persecuted for hitting another* He meant to say to the theories of the psychologist Sigmund Freud.>

Friday

or girl Friday an invaluable assistant: *The boss cannot find anything in the office when his man Friday is to Friday*, a character in *Robinson Crusoe* by Daniel Defoe.>

friend

friend in need is a friend indeed a friend who helps when one is in trouble is truly a friend: *She visited him regularly in A friend in need is a friend*

friends see

a friend at court or *have a friend in high places* to have a friend in an influential position who will be able to help one: *They say she got the job because she has a friend at Her cousin is on the*

frog

a frog in one's throat to be hoarse: *We couldn't hear what she was saying as she had a frog in her*

front

in the front line see

fruit

fruit see

Sea fruit see

fruit something desirable that is made even more so because one is forbidden for some reason to obtain it: *He is in love with her but she is forbidden fruit, being his brother's* to the biblical tree in the Garden of Eden whose fruit Adam was forbidden by God to eat in Genesis 3.>

fry

other fish to fry see

of the frying pan into the fire to free of a difficult or dangerous situation only to get into a worse one: *He was in debt to the bank and now he is in debt to a money-lender—he's definitely out of the frying pan and into the*

fuel

fuel to the fire see

full

full of oneself to be very conceited: *She's so full of herself since she married a rich*

full circle see

of beans see

full completely, with nothing left out: *You must complete the form in*

full cry see

full swing see

the fullness of time when the proper time has arrived, eventually: *In the fullness of time her baby was*

fun

and games a lively time, an amusing time: *We had fun and games when the grandchildren came to*

fun of (someone) or *poke fun at (someone)* to laugh at (someone), to make mocking remarks about (someone): *The little girl's*

classmates made fun of her for wearing old-fashioned

funeral

my, etc, funeral that's my, etc, problem and I must deal with it:

He's spent all his money but that's his

funny

business unfair activities, deception: There's some funny business going on in that firm because they keep losing

fur

[the fur fly same as make the feathers fly](#) see

furniture

part of the furniture said of someone of whom people take little notice, because he/she has been around a long time or is often there: *I can't get used to not seeing Sandy every day; he was caretaker here when I first started and was part of the furniture for many*

furrow

a lonely furrow to work or make one's way alone without help: *Single parents often have to plough a lonely*

fuss

a fuss to complain vigorously: *She got her money back from the shop because she made a*

a fuss of (someone) to pay a lot of attention to (someone), to show (someone) a lot of affection: *She always makes a fuss of her*

G

gab

gift of the gab the ability to talk readily and easily: *He loves public*
He has the gift of the

gaff

the gaff see

gain

ground to make progress, to become more generally acceptable or popular: *The campaign against the nuclear base is gaining*

time to arrange things so that one has more time to do something: *The student should have handed in his essay yesterday but he pretended to be ill to gain*

pain, no gain see

ventured, nothing gained see

gallery

to the gallery to act in an amusing or showy way to the ordinary people in an organization, etc, in order to gain popularity or their support: *The politician was playing to the gallery at the party*

game

(someone) *at his or her own game* to do better than (someone) at his or her activity, especially a cunning or dishonest one: *In previous years he won the cross-country race by taking a short cut but this year another competitor beat him at his own*

the game to be a prostitute: *She said that she had gone on the game to feed her*

game see

the game away to reveal a secret plan, trick, etc, usually accidentally: *We planned a surprise party for her birthday but her*

mother gave the game

games not to treat something seriously enough: *James was serious about getting married one day and was upset to discover that Meg had only been playing*

the game to behave fairly and honourably: *Come on, play the You shouldn't accuse him in his*

ahead of the game to be able to deal successfully with any changes that may occur in an activity in which one is involved: *The computing business is changing so rapidly that many firms will find it impossible to stay ahead of the*

game is not worth the candle see

game is up the plan, trick, crime, etc, has been discovered and so has failed: The game is Our parents have found out about our plan to hold a party when they go away for the

name of the game see

gamekeeper

turned gamekeeper see

garden

garden see

in the garden is lovely everything is fine: She was unhappy in that job but she says everything in the garden's lovely

(someone) up the garden path to mislead or deceive (someone):

She thought he was going to marry her but he was just leading her up the garden

gasp

one's last gasp just about to collapse, be ruined, die, etc: *We were at our last gasp when we reached the top of the*

gate

a bull at a gate see

gather

dust see

gauntlet

the gauntlet to be exposed or subjected to blame, criticism or risk:

Before he married her he had to run the gauntlet of her family's disapproving is a mistaken form of Swedish "Running the was a Swedish military punishment in which the culprit had to run between two lines of men with whips who struck him as he passed.>

up the gauntlet to to accept a challenge: Jim challenged Joe to a game of chess, but Joe knew that Jim had been county champion and refused to take up the

down the gauntlet to issue a challenge: The work force threw down the gauntlet when they told management that they would go on strike unless their working conditions were down a gauntlet, a protective glove, was the traditional method of challenging someone to a fight in medieval times.>

gear

into gear to start to work properly or effectively: I had never done that kind of work before and it took me a few days to get into to a car's engine.>

(something) out of gear to prevent (something) from working in the usual or an effective way: *The unexpected bad weather has thrown the town's transport system out of*

genie

the genie out of the bottle used to describe something that creates a major change in people's life: *The people who invented computers certainly let the genie out of the*

genuine

genuine article see

get

getting on for (something) to be close to (a particular age, time, etc): We need to go home soon. It's getting on for Despite his young

appearance he's getting on for

a bit above oneself see

away from it all see

even with (someone) see

nowhere to make no progress: *We've been looking for the lost dog for hours and we're getting*

one's hooks into (someone) see

or pull one's finger out see

(something) out of your system see

the hump see

the picture see

hard to get see

(someone) where to get off to tell (someone) that one will not tolerate him or her or his or her behaviour any more: *He kept borrowing things from me until I finally told him where to get*

ghost

up the ghost to die, stop working, etc: *My old washing machine finally gave up the* refers to a person's spirit—a biblical reference to Job 14:10.>

a ghost/lay the ghost of (something) to do something which stops you from being affected or upset by something which happened in the past: *Jane thought that if she visited the house where her mother had been murdered it might help her to lay a few* Only when Nora married again was she able to lay the ghost of her first, unhappy

to have the ghost of a chance see

gift

in one's gift if something is in (someone's) gift then that person has the right or power to give it to anyone: *The king regarded all the castles as being in his*

gift see

[a gift horse in the mouth](#) to criticize something that has been given to one: *Don't look for flaws in that It was a gift and you mustn't look a gift horse in the* at a horse's teeth is a way of telling its age and so estimating its value.>

[gift of the gab](#) see

[one is God's gift \(to someone\)](#) see

gild

[the lily](#) to add unnecessary decoration or detail: *She looks at her best when wearing make-up but she tends to gild the lily and wear far too* adaptation of a speech from Shakespeare's *King* Act 4, scene ii.>

gilt

the gilt off the gingerbread to take away what makes something attractive: *She loved the job when she travelled a lot but the gilt was taken off the gingerbread when her boss asked her to stay in the office all used to be sold in fancy shapes and decorated with gold leaf.*>

gird

[one's loins](#) to prepare oneself for action: *I'll be late for work if I don't gird my* biblical phrase from Acts 12:8. Robes had to be tied up with a girdle before men began work or they got in the way.>

give

[a dog a bad name](#) see

[a good account of oneself](#) see

and take willingness to compromise: *There has to be some give and take in* You can't get your own way all the

[as good as one gets](#) see

(something) away to let (some information, etc) be revealed accidentally: *I meant to keep our destination a secret but my father gave it*

[\(something\) a whirl](#) see

(someone) _grief_ see

(someone) _his or her head_ see

(someone) _the glad eye_ see

(someone) _the push_ see

the game away_ see

up the ghost_ see

to give (someone or something) _house room_ see

glad

rag's best clothes worn for special occasions: *They got into their glad rags and went out for*

(someone) *the glad eye* to to look at (someone) in a way that shows that one is romantically or sexually interested in him or her: *He was giving the glad eye to all the girls at the*

glass

ceiling_ an invisible barrier, established by tradition, personal discrimination, etc, which prevents women from achieving the top jobs in their companies, professions, etc: *Many of our middle management team are women but there is definitely a glass ceiling here; all the top management jobs go to*

who live in glass houses should not throw stones people with faults themselves should not criticize faults in others: *He criticized his wife for arriving late, but he himself is hardly ever on* Someone should tell him that people in glass houses shouldn't throw

gloss

over to avoid facing unpleasant facts by giving them only a cursory description or omit them altogether: *He glossed over the fact that the beautiful and expensive anniversary dinner they had enjoyed had in fact been paid for by his*

a gloss on (something)_ to elaborate on a subject in a falsely flattering way: *When Tracy was demoted she somehow put a gloss on*

the issue and it suddenly became the career move she had always longed

glove

[hand in glove \(with someone\)](#) see

[like a glove](#) to fit perfectly: *That new dress fits her like a (someone or something) with kid gloves* see

the gloves off to begin to fight, argue, etc, in earnest: *So far our discussions about the disputed will have been gentlemanly but now the gloves are to boxers' gloves.*>

go

[along for the ride](#) see

[back a long way](#) see

[for the jugular](#) see

[into overdrive](#) see

[goes with the territory](#) see

gold

[sitting on a goldmine](#) to possess something very valuable or potentially profitable, often without realizing this: *The old lady is sitting on a goldmine; her late husband's stamp collection is worth a living in a goldfish bowl* in a situation where one has very little privacy: *After living in the city we found village life like living in a goldfish*

[gold](#) to do or find something that makes one very rich or very successful: *Jock has struck gold with his latest*

gnat

at a gnat (and swallow a camel) to trouble oneself over a matter of no importance, something only slightly wrong, etc, but be unconcerned about a matter of great importance, something very wrong, etc: *The headmaster was really straining at a gnat when he expelled four boys for biblical reference to Matthew 23:23-24.*>

go

the word go right from the very start: *Their marriage went wrong right from the word*

(someone or something) *the go-by* to ignore or disregard (someone or something): *He asked her out but she gave him the*

against the grain see

belly-up see

bust see

downhill see

far see

for (someone or something) (1) to attack (someone or something) either physically or verbally: *The press really went for the government about the unemployment* (2) be attracted by: *He always goes for older*

great guns see

halves with (someone) see

places see

steady see

the whole hog see

to ground see

to (someone's) head see

to town see

to the wall see

with a bang see

with a swing see

a go (1) to make an attempt: *I'm no cook, but I'll have a go at baking a* (2) to try to stop a criminal escaping from the scene of a crime: *The old man got badly injured when he had a go at the armed*

touch and go see

a go of it or something to make a success of something: *I hope he makes a go of it in his new Perhaps they will make a go of their new*

go impossible, not given approval: *We asked if we could leave early but it was no*

the go continually active, busy: *She's quite elderly but she's always on the*

goal

an own goal to do something which fails to achieve what you set out to do and, instead, harms your own interests: *Some MPs feared that choosing a new voting system would be scoring an own*

goalpost

the goalposts to change the conditions, rules or aims applying to a project, etc, after it is under way so that it is disadvantageous to others but advantageous to oneself: *Management said that we could all work an extra shift per week, but they moved the goalposts when they realized how much this was costing them in extra*

goat

the goat to behave in an intentionally silly way: *He was acting the goat to amuse the*

(someone's) goat to irritate (someone): *Her high-pitched laugh really gets my*

the sheep from the goats see

God, god

of God see

little tin god a person who thinks that he or she is more important than he or she really is and tries to order others around: *The workers are tired of the little tin god who is the deputy*

the lap of the gods uncertain, left to chance or fate: *It's in the lap of the gods whether we get there on time or*

the fear of God into (someone) see

but for the grace of God go I if I had not been fortunate that could easily have happened to me: *My colleague is now unemployed, and there but for the grace of God go There were many redundancies in the*

one is God's gift to (someone) to have a very conceited opinion of oneself: *He thinks he's God's gift to*

gold

golden age see

gold mine a source of wealth or profit: *The health food shop turned out to be a real gold*

like gold dust be very scarce: *Food is like gold dust in some areas of the*

boy a young man who is popular or successful: He was the golden boy in our year at school, winning all the academic and sports

handshake a large amount of money given to someone who is leaving a job, usually because he or she has been declared redundant: He has started his own business with his golden

as gold very well- behaved: *The children were good as gold when their grandmother was looking after*

the goose that lays the golden egg see

crook or pot of gold at the end of the rainbow wealth or good fortune that one will never achieve: *He's always looking for a well-paid job, but with his lack of qualifications it's as much use as looking for the crook of gold at the end of the*

is golden see

golden rule a principle or practice that it is vital to remember: *The golden rule when making a sponge cake is never to open the oven door while it is the golden rule was that one should behave toward others as one would wish them to behave to oneself.>*

its or one's weight in gold to extremely valuable or useful: *Their baby-sitter is worth her weight in*

gone

on (someone) very much attracted to (someone): *He's gone on my*

good

good job a satisfactory or fortunate state of affairs: *It was a good job that I took an It was pouring with rain when I got off the to the good to one's benefit or advantage: He arrived late but that was all to the good as we were not quite*

as good as one's word to do what one has promised to do: *He said he would lend her the money and he was as good as his*

on to a good thing or have a good thing going to be in a desirable or profitable situation: He lives there rent He's certainly onto a good

up to no good to be planning something wrong or illegal: *His wife knew before the robbery that he was up to no*

(someone) the world of good see

good (and all) for ever, permanently: They're leaving town for good and

good measure see

as good as one gets to be as successful as one's opponent in an argument, contest, fight, etc: *He was shouting at his wife but she gave as good as she got by yelling*

as gold see

for nothing worthless: She's a hard worker but she married a man who's good for

a good mind to (do something) see

(someone's) good books in favour with (someone): She's in her mother's good books for cleaning the

good hands see

good time see

(someone's) good graces see

(someone's) own good time see

good to be successful in one's career or business: *He was penniless when he arrived, but he soon made*

good time see

in a good word for (someone) see

(something) *in good part* to accept (something) without being offended or angry: *We thought she would be furious at the practical joke but she took it in good*

good purpose with useful or successful results: *She used her qualifications to good*

the good richer: *After the fête the charity was £500 to the*

a bad or good grace see

goodbye

goodbye to see

goods

the goods to do what one is required or expected to do: *Don't promise to help if you can't deliver the*

and chattels movable property: *He was asked to leave, taking all his goods and old legal term.>*

goose

wild-goose chase see

(someone's) goose to ruin (someone's) chances of success: *She had a good job but she cooked her goose by arriving late every*

the goose that lays the golden egg to to destroy something that is

a source of profit or advantage to oneself: *Her mother used to*

baby-sit for them regularly but she stopped after they left the children with her for three *They certainly killed the goose that laid the golden*

to one of Aesop's fables in which the owner of a goose that laid

golden eggs killed it and opened it up, thinking to get all the

golden eggs at once, only to discover that there were none.>

sauce for the goose is sauce for the gander what applies to one person should apply to another, usually to a member of the opposite sex: *If women have to work and look after the house so should men. After all, what's sauce for the goose is sauce for the gander.*
not say boo to a goose see

gooseberry

gooseberry to be the third person present with a couple who wish to be alone: *When they go to the cinema her young sister always plays the third person.*

Gordian

the Gordian knot to to solve a problem or end a great difficulty by a vigorous or drastic method: *He was going to give the lazy worker a warning, but he decided to cut the Gordian knot and sack her.*
right to a legend in which whoever could untie a knot in a rope belonging to King Gordius, king of Phrygia, would be made ruler of all Asia. Alexander the Great severed the knot by cutting through it with a sword.>

gospel

(something) as gospel to accept (something) as absolutely true: *She takes everything her husband says as gospel, although everyone else knows that he is a liar.*
to the books of the Bible dealing with the life and teachings of Christ.>

grab

does that grab you? what do you think of that?: *I thought we might go out for a grab.*
How does that grab you?

for grabs ready to be taken, bought, etc: *There's a job up for grabs at the moment.*

grace

from grace see

(someone's) good graces to be liked by or be popular with (someone), often because one has done him/her a favour of

some kind: *I'm in my grandmother's good graces for once because I offered to do her shopping for her and walk her*

grace a good quality which prevents someone or something from being completely bad or worthless: *No one really likes Sheila as a boss although most people would admit that fairness is her saving*
but for the grace of God go I see

a bad or good grace in an unpleasant (or pleasant) and unwilling (or willing) way: *With a good grace, he acknowledged that his opponent was the*

grade

the grade to succeed in what you are trying to achieve, often by reaching a required standard: *Amy wanted to pass enough exams to get into music college, but, unfortunately, she didn't make the*
referred to a train which succeeded in climbing a steep section of track.>

grain

against the grain to be against someone's inclinations, feelings or wishes: *It goes against the grain for her to be pleasant to She*
loathes to the direction of the grain in wood, it being easier to cut or smooth wood with the grain rather than across or against it.>

(something) with a grain or pinch of salt see

grape

grapes saying that something that one cannot have is not worth having: *He said that it was a very boring job but that was just sour grapes because he wasn't offered to one of Aesop's fables in which a fox that failed to reach a bunch of grapes growing above his head said that they were sour anyhow.>*

grapevine an informal and unofficial way of passing news and information from person to person, gossip: *I heard on the grapevine that they had got*

grasp

[the nettle](#) see

grass

[snake in the grass](#) see

[widow](#) a woman whose husband is away from home for a short time for reasons of business or sport: *She's a grass widow while her husband is abroad* on the term referred to an unmarried woman who had sexual relations with a man or men, the origin being that such relations usually took place out of doors.>

[the grass grow under one's feet](#) to delay or waste time: *If you want that contract you had better apply for it Don't let the grass grow under your*

or turn (someone) out to grass to cause (someone) to retire: *The company have decided to put the caretaker out to grass although he's not reached retirement age* to turning out a horse into a field after its working life.>

grass is always greener on the other side of the fence another set of circumstances or lifestyle always seems preferable to one's own: *She has just started a new job but she's still envious of her sister's* *The grass is always greener on the other side of the* to the habit of grazing animals of grazing through the fence separating them from the next field.>

[grass roots](#) the ordinary people in an organization, etc: *The politician ignored the grass roots opinion in his*

grasshopper

[to a grasshopper](#) extremely small: *Our family have known her since she was knee-high to a*

grave

[one's own grave](#) see

[one foot in the grave](#) see

would turn in his or her grave (someone) would be very annoyed or upset: *Her father would turn in his grave if he could see her in*
gravy

gravy train an easy method of getting a great deal of money or other advantages: *His present job allows him such a generous expenses budget that he is on a real gravy* is a slang term for easy gain or profit.>

great

[great guns](#) see

[minds think alike](#) see

Greek

all Greek to me, I, etc, don't understand any of it: *They demonstrated the machine, but it was all Greek to* to the fact that ancient Greek was considered a difficult language to learn.>

[gift](#) a gift that is dangerous or disadvantageous to the person given it: *The loan of his cottage turned out to be a Greek* *The roof fell in and injured* to the gift of a wooden horse to the Trojans from the Greeks, which contained Greek soldiers who attacked the Trojans which led to the fall of Troy.>

Greek calends never: *They will get married on the Greek* was the Roman calendar, not the Greek, that had calends, the first day of the month.>

green

[the green light to \(something\)](#) give one's permission for (something): *The new road has been given the green light by the*

about the gills looking as though one were going to be sick: *They were decidedly green about the gills during the sea*

[green fingers](#) to be good at growing plants: *He grows a whole range of* *He really has green*

[as green as one is cabbage-looking](#) see

green-eyed monster another name for jealousy: *She is suffering from the green-eyed monster over her sister's new*

grey

grey area a part of a subject, etc, where it is difficult to distinguish between one category and another, an area of confusion: *The question of school security is a grey* *The teachers are responsible for some aspects and the caretaker for matter* brain, powers of reasoning: *You'll just have to use your grey matter to work out how to get*

[in \(grey\) suits](#) see

grief

[to grief](#) to suffer misfortune or failure: *Our plans have come to The council have turned them*

[\(someone\) grief](#) to criticize or nag (someone): *Jim forgot all about their wedding anniversary last week and his wife's been giving him grief ever*

grim

on or *hold on like grim death* [to](#) to take a firm, determined hold of something in difficult or dangerous circumstances: *The boy held on like grim death to the high branch of the tree until help*

grin

[like a Cheshire cat](#) see

[and bear it](#) to tolerate something without complaining: *It's a boring job but you'll just have to grin and bear Jobs are so*

[from ear to ear](#) see

the grin off (someone's face) [to](#) to make (someone) stop feeling pleased or satisfied: *Lucy was boasting about coming first in the race when one of the track officials wiped the smile of her face by telling her that she had been*

grind

to a halt slowly begin to stop or cease working: *Without more money the work of the charity will grind to a*
[to the grindstone](#) see

[\(one's or someone's\) nose to the grindstone](#) see

[an axe to grind](#) see

grip

a grip (of or on something or oneself) to take firm control (of something or oneself): *He must get a grip on his drinking or he will lose his*

[or come to grips with \(something\)](#) to begin to deal with

(something): *You cannot ignore the naughtiness of the You must come to grips with the*

the grip of (someone or something) in the control or power of

(someone or something): *The country is in the grip of a cruel*

[one's grip](#) to become less effective: *Mr Giles seems to be losing his grip; the pupils used to have great respect for him, but now they fool around in his class all the*

grist

[all grist to the or someone's mill](#) all this experience, information will prove useful in some way: *His job as a paper boy pays very little but all is grist to the He's saving to go on means corn for grinding.>*

grit

[one's teeth](#) to make every effort not to show one's feelings of pain, disappointment, etc: *He gritted his teeth as the nurse cleaned his*

ground

new or fresh ground to deal with a subject, etc, for the first time:

She's breaking new ground by writing She usually writes

the ground from under (someone's) feet to cause (someone's)

actions, arguments, etc, to be ineffective, often by acting before

he or she does: *When the boss sacked him he cut the ground from under his feet by telling him he had already posted his letter of on stony ground to to have no attention paid to it: The teacher advised the pupils to study hard that term but, in many cases, his advice fell on stony to seed falling on stony, infertile ground and so not being able to grow.>*

ground see

in on the ground floor to be in at the very start of a project, business, etc: *You might get in on the ground floor of the They're looking for*

(something) off the ground to get (a project) started: I don't think his research scheme will ever get off the to a plane.>

to ground same as go to earth (see

both feet on the ground or have one's feet on the ground see

or keep one's ear to the ground see

the ground running to start a new activity immediately with a great deal of energy and enthusiasm: *We expected the new manager to hit the ground running and introduce new ideas immediately, but she said that she would rather wait and see how things were done soldiers leaving a helicopter or getting up from being dropped by parachute and immediately running into battle.>*

rules basic rules which must be obeyed or applied: *If we're going to share a house we must have a few ground*

ground see

one's own ground dealing with a subject, situation, etc, with which one is familiar: *He's usually shy but he's on his own ground when it comes to discussing*

the ground for (something) to do something that will make it easier for (something) to happen in the future: *The conference does not take place until next year but there is much we can do to prepare the getting the ground ready for things to grow in.>*

oneself into the ground to become exhausted from working too hard or trying to do too many things: *Julie's mother ran herself into the ground preparing for Julie's*

(someone or something) to ground same as run (someone or something) to earth see

one's ground to change one's opinions, attitude, etc: *He was wildly opposed to the scheme but he's shifted his*

stamping ground see stamp

one's ground to remain firm, not to yield: *Everyone tried to get him to change his mind but he stood his*

(someone) down to the ground to to suit someone perfectly: *The cottage suits them down to the It's in the country but near the*

the moral high ground to to adopt a position based on the fact that you feel your opinions, policies or actions are morally

superior to those of others: *Because of the increased interest in environmental issues in the country all of the political parties are trying to take the moral high ground on*

or thick on the ground scarce or plentiful: *Tourists are thick on the ground in summer but thin on the ground in*

the ground someone walks on to love or admire (someone) with absolute devotion: *Don't criticise Elizabeth when John's present because he worships the ground she walks*

Grundy, Mrs

Grundy a narrow-minded person who is censorious of other people's behaviour: *The old woman's a Mrs Grundy who objected to the young couple kissing in the* to a character in *Speed the Plough* by Thomas Morton.>

guard

your guard see *let your guard*

your guard down/lower your guard/drop your guard to to stop being careful or alert: *The prison authorities used to have a very strict*

drugs policy, but they seem to have let their guard down recently and drugs are a real problem there

your guard see let your guard

or *off one's guard* prepared or unprepared for any situation, especially a dangerous or difficult one: *The examiner caught him off guard by asking him about a subject which he hadn't to fencing.*>

old guard see

guess

guess see

guess is as good as mine I have no idea: *Your guess is as good as mine as to how we'll get*

guinea

pig a person who is the subject of an experiment: *The patient felt that the doctor had used him as a guinea pig with the new to the use of guinea pigs in medical experiments.*>

gullet

in one's gullet same as *stick in one's throat* (see

gum

up the works to cause a machine, system, etc, to break down:

When the computer broke down it gummed up the entire

a gum tree in a very difficult or hopeless situation: *He's up a gum tree if he can't get his car to to an opossum climbing such a tree when being hunted.*>

gun

gunning for (someone) to plan to harm (someone): *Her head of department is gunning for her, and she's scared of losing her*

guns see

great guns to to be going or performing very well: *The firm's going great guns with a full order*

a gun to (someone's) head to same as hold a pistol to (someone's) head (see

the gun to start before the proper time: *You jumped the gun by applying for the It's not been advertised to athletes starting a race before the starting gun goes.>*

(someone's) guns to cause (someone's) plans or actions to be ineffective: *He was planning to come to our party uninvited but we spiked his guns by changing the date of historically to driving a metal spike into the touch-hole of a captured enemy gun in order to render it useless.>*

to one's guns to remain firm in one's opinions, etc: *They tried to get him to say he was mistaken about the time the offence was committed but he stuck to his to a soldier who keeps shooting at the enemy and does not run away.>*

all or both guns blazing fiercely and aggressively: *It was a brilliant football match; both sides came out with all guns blazing and scored three goals to a cowboy fight in classic Western films.>*

gut

a gut to make a tremendous effort to do something: *We'll have to bust a gut to finish this project in*

guts

one's guts to tell someone all you know or feel, however private or secret: *Jill got drunk last night and spilt her guts about her problems with her*

H

hackles

(someone's) *hackles rise* to make (someone) angry: *The shop assistant's rudeness made my mother's hackles are the feathers on the necks of male birds, which rise when the bird is angry.>*

hair

hair of the dog (that bit one) an alcoholic drink taken as a supposed cure for having consumed too much alcohol the night before: *He needed a hair of the dog the morning after the* an old belief that if you were bitten by a mad dog and got rabies you could be cured by having hairs of the same dog laid on the wound.>

in (someone's) hair to irritate (someone): *She's not in a good mood —the children are getting in her*

one's hair on to remain calm and not get angry: *Keep your hair He didn't mean to bump your*

one's hair down to behave in an informal, relaxed manner: *She fairly let her hair down at the party and danced on the*

(someone's) *hair stand on end* to terrify or horrify (someone): *Some of the policeman's accounts of murders he had investigated made her hair stand on*

to turn a hair not to show any sign of fear, distress, etc: *He didn't turn a hair when the bully threatened*

hairs to argue about small unimportant details, to quibble: *He's a There's no point in splitting hairs over whether he's a burglar or a*

one's hair (out) to show frustration or irritation: *The shop assistant was tearing her hair out over the indecision of her*

half

half the battle see

other or *better half* (someone's) wife or husband: *Where's your better half this evening?*

see with half an eye see

things by half to do things in an incomplete, careless way: *He will have attended to every He never does things by*

halves with (someone) to share costs with (someone): *The rent won't be all that expensive if we go*

off at half cock see

a loaf is better than no bread a little of something desirable is better than nothing: *We would have liked a bigger garden but half a loaf is better than no*

to (someone or with only half an ear see

(someone) halfway to reach a compromise agreement with

(someone): *Neither of us got all our We met each other*

half very much so: "Is he a good player?" "Not half, he's

half of it only part of the problem, situation, etc: I had heard he was violent towards her but I didn't know the half of

hammer

under the hammer to be for sale at an auction: *The paintings came under the hammer as one to the hammer that an auctioneer bangs on the table to indicate that a sale has been made.>*

at it hammer and tongs to fight or quarrel loudly and fiercely: *The two neighbours were going at it hammer and tongs over repairs to the garden to a blacksmith holding a piece of heated iron in his tongs and striking it loudly with his hammer.>*

hand

dab hand at (something) see

old hand see

first hand see

or *on hand* available, ready for use, ready to help: *The invalid needs to keep his painkillers at hand* *The nurse is on hand if you need*
[hand in glove with \(someone\)](#) to be closely associated with
(someone) for a bad or illegal purpose: *One of the assistants in the jewellery shop was hand in glove with the jewel*
[the hand that feeds one](#) see
[in hand](#) see
[hands](#) see

at hand very near: *Her mother lives close at*
(someone's) *hand* to force (someone) to do something that he or she may not want to do or be ready to do: *He didn't want to move to a new house yet but his wife forced his*
[\(someone\) a free hand](#) see
[or lend \(someone\) a \(helping\) hand](#) to help (someone): *She visited every day to give her mother a hand with the*
hand in hand to be closely connected: *Poverty and crime often go hand in*

(something) *down* to pass (something) from one generation to another: *Some of the village traditions have been handed down from Tudor*

over fist in large amounts, very rapidly: *The owners of the new restaurant are making money hand over* a nautical term meaning rapid progress such as can be made by hauling on a rope putting one hand after the other.>

a hand in (something) to be involved in (something), to have contributed to the cause of (something): *The police are sure that he had a hand in the*

[\(someone\) eating out of one's hand](#) see

[\(something\) handed to one on a plate](#) see

[\(something\) handed to one on a silver platter](#) see

one's hands full to be very busy: *She has her hands*

or get the upper hand (of or over someone) see

the whip hand over (someone) see

good hands well looked after: *The patient is in good hands* He's got an excellent

hand (1) remaining, not used, etc: *After we have paid all the bills we will have £30 in hand* (2) being dealt with: *The matter of your complaint is in hand*

one's hand in to retain one's skill at something by doing it occasionally: *The ex-champion doesn't play tennis very often but he plays enough to keep his hand in*

(someone or something) backwards or like the back of one's hand

see

(someone) *a hand to help (someone): Could you lend me a hand to change the wheel? I have a flat*

from hand to mouth to have enough money only to pay for one's present needs without having any to save: *They earn so little that all they can do is to live from hand to mouth* money comes into one's hand is used to put food in one's mouth.>

hands make light work to a job is easier to do if there are several people doing it: *If we all help we'll soon get the house done* *Many hands make light work*

etc, hands are tied something prevents me from acting as I, etc, might wish to: *I would like to refund your money but my hands are tied* *There is a shop rule against*

to do a hand's turn to do nothing: *I've been cleaning the house all morning but she's not done a hand's turn*

hand (1) without further consideration or research: *I can't say off hand what the population of the town is* (2) abrupt, curt: *The customers complained about her being so off hand*

of hand (1) out of control: *The protest march was getting out of hand* (2) without consideration of the matter: *She dismissed my suggestion off hand*

out of

into (someone's) hands to do exactly what someone wants one to do because it is to his or her advantage: *You shouldn't have got You played right into his hands because he had just told the boss that you are bad-tempered with the to playing one's hand at cards so as to benefit another player.>*

one's hand in one's pocket to spend or give money: *All of you will have to put your hands in your pockets to pay for the*

one's hand to reveal to others one's plans or intentions, previously kept secret: *She really showed her hand when she told his wife about their She wanted to marry to showing one's hand to other players in a card game.>*

one's life in (someone's) hands see

(someone) in hand to train or discipline (someone): *It's time*

(someone) took that boy in *He's out of*

one's life in one's hands see

the law into one's hands see

in one's hand to give up, to abandon a course of action, etc: *He tried to persuade her to marry him but finally threw in his to a card player throwing his cards on the table to indicate that he is out of the game.>*

one's hand to (something) to do, to be able to do: *He is a philosopher but he can turn his hand to carpentry and*

on (someone) hand and foot to look after (someone) to such an extent that he or she does not have to do anything for himself or herself: *The mother waits on her sons hand and*

one's hands of (someone or something) to refuse to be involved any longer in (something) or to be responsible for (someone or something): *His father said he would wash his hands of him if he got into trouble with the police* biblical reference to the action of Pontius Pilate after the crucifixion of Jesus in Matthew 27:24.>

one hand tied behind one's back very easily: *He could have won the fight with one hand tied behind his*

handle

[off the handle](#) to lose one's temper: *She flies off the handle whenever anyone disagrees with to an axehead which flies off the handle when it is being used.>*

hang

[hanging matter](#) a very serious subject or deed: *I was surprised that he was I wouldn't have thought what he did was a hanging a crime punishable by death or by hanging.>*

the hang of (something) to learn how to do (something) or begin to understand (something): *I think she's got the hang of changing gears smoothly at*

[by a thread](#) see

[fire](#) see

[loose](#) see

[one's head](#) to look ashamed or embarrassed: *The little girl hung her head when her mother scolded*

[on or hold on like grim death](#) see

[on \(someone's\) words](#) see

[the flags out](#) see

[up one's hat](#) see

[an axe hanging over one](#) see

up on (someone or something) obsessed with (someone or something): *He's completely hung up on horror*

[might as well be hanged for a sheep as a lamb](#) see

[hangs a tale](#) see

happy

to the happy hunting ground to die: *I didn't realize the old man had gone to the happy hunting* an American Indian phrase.>

as a lark to or sand-boy extremely happy: *The child was happy as a sand-boy playing with her new event the birth of a baby: When is the happy event?*

hunting ground a place where someone finds what he or she desires or where he or she is successful: *That shop is a happy hunting ground for She buys most of her clothes*

or a happy medium a sensible middle course between two extremes: *She's spends her time either over-eating or She should find a happy medium somewhere in*

hard

hard act to follow see

hard nut to crack see

hard put to it (to do something) to have great difficulty (in doing something): *You would be hard put to it to find a better*

a rock and a hard place see

(someone) a hard time to act in an unpleasant, unsympathetic or tough way towards (someone): *They wanted him to leave and gave him a hard time until he*

not to be changed or ignored: *There is a hard-and-fast office rule that no one takes time off without prior to a ship that is stuck fast from having run aground.>*

as nails lacking in pity, sympathy, softer feelings, etc: *She wasn't moved by the child's tears, but then she's hard as*

tough, toughened by experience of life: *She was very gentle when she was young but years in business have left her*

not influenced by emotion: *Even the hard-boiled politician shed a tear at the sight of the starving to hard-boiled eggs.>*

cash coins and bank-notes as opposed to cheques, etc: *The workman wanted to be paid in hard cash and refused a*

done by unfairly treated: *She felt hard done by because her father gave her less money than he gave her*

facts facts that cannot be disputed: The hard facts are that we are losing

practical and not influenced by emotion: *She's too hard-headed a business woman to give you a job because she's sorry for*

lines bad luck: *It was hard lines that the champion didn't a reference to a ship's ropes being made hard by ice.>*

story a story of misfortune told to gain sympathy: *He got money from all of us by telling us all the same hard-luck*

of hearing rather deaf: The old lady's hard of hearing but she won't wear a

in difficulties, in trouble: They will be hard-pressed this month to pay the

up not having much money: They're too hard up to go on

a hard line to take strong, stern or unyielding action or have strong opinions about something: *The headmaster took a hard line with pupils who played*

hard stuff strong alcoholic drink, spirits: He drinks wine but not the hard

school/university of hard knocks see

hare

as a March hare see

with the hare and hunt with the hounds to try to give one's support to two opposing sides at once: *You're going to have to vote for one of the You can't go on running with the hare and hunting with the*

a hare to raise a subject in the course of a discussion, often to divert attention from what was the main subject of it: *During the discussion about increasing salaries the manager started a hare about*

people smoking in the to causing a hare to leave its hiding place to distract the hounds taking part in a fox hunt.>

hark

back to (something) to refer to (something that has been said or has happened earlier): *She kept harking back to how things used to be* to a hunting term which is a command to the hounds and their handlers to double back and try to pick up a lost scent.>

harp

on (something) to keep on talking about (something): *She kept harping on about how badly paid she* to playing the harp with one string only.>

hash

a hash of (something) to ruin or spoil (something), to do (something) badly: *He made a real hash of putting up those* to a dish made from chopped up pieces of meat mixed together, which looks rather messy.>

(someone's) hash to deal with (someone) in such a way that he or she causes no more trouble or is prevented from doing what was intended: *Her ex-husband refused to give up the key to her flat but she settled his hash by changing all the*

haste

haste less speed if one attempts to do something in too much of a hurry one makes careless mistakes and ends up taking longer to do it: *If you try to hurry the typist she makes* You know what they say about more haste less

hat

[the drop of a hat](#) see

[up one's hat](#) to move into a house, job, etc, with the intention of staying a long time: *She thought her father-in-law was just staying for the weekend but he's really hung up his* to hanging up one's hat in someone's hat stand.>

off to (someone) (someone) should be praised and congratulated: Hats off to the new girl for slapping the office womanizer on the
trick any action done three times in a row: We sold three houses
this morning—a hat originally to a cricketer receiving a hat from
his club for putting out three batsmen with three balls in a row.>

eat my hat an expression used to express total disbelief in a fact,
statement, etc: *I'll eat my hat if he isn't*

(something) under one's hat to keep (something) secret: *He was*
told to keep his salary increase under his

(someone or something) into a cocked hat to defeat or surpass
(someone or something) completely: *Her dress knocked all the*
others into a cocked cocked hat was a three-cornered hat in the
18th century made by folding the edges of a round hat into
corners.>

hat see

the hat round to ask for contributions of money: *We passed the*
hat round the office for her leaving

one's hat off to (someone) to express or show one's admiration for
someone): You must take your hat off to her for supporting the
family all these

through one's hat to talk about something without any knowledge
about it, to talk nonsense: *Pay no attention to his advice on He*
knows nothing whatsoever about finance and is talking through his
one's hat in the ring to declare oneself a contender or candidate
for something: *He's decided to throw his hat in the ring and apply*
for the post of managing to a method of making a challenge in
prize boxing matches at fairgrounds, etc.>

a different or *another hat* to speak as the holder of a different
position: *She was speaking as a teacher but now she's wearing a*
different hat and speaking as a

hatch

down the hatches to prepare for trouble: *In the recession a lot of firms had to batten down the hatches and think of ways of saving to preparations for a storm on a ship at sea.>*

matches and despatches the announcement of births, marriages and deaths in a newspaper: *Their engagement was announced in the matches, matches and despatches section of their local*

hatchet

the hatchet to agree to be friends again after a quarrel: *The two families have been hostile to each other for years but they've finally decided to bury the to an American Indian custom of burying tomahawks when peace was made.>*

hatter

[as a hatter](#) see

haul

[\(someone\) over the coals](#) see

have

had it to have no hope of survival, success, etc: *The little corner shop will have had it when the supermarket*

[it coming to one](#) see

[it in for \(someone\)](#) to try to cause trouble for (someone): *The manager has had it in for her since she refused to go out with*

it in one to have the ability, courage, etc, to do something: *I honestly didn't think he had it in him to argue with the*

[it out with \(someone\)](#) to discuss areas of disagreement or discontent with someone in order to settle it: *Don't go around complaining about how she treats Have it out with*

(someone) on to try to deceive (someone), often for a joke: *The police aren't looking for Your friends are having you*

[\(someone\) have it](#) suddenly to attack (someone) either physically or verbally: *She was tired of never arriving on time and finally let him have*

havoc

havoc with (something) to cause serious damage to (something):

His stressful job played havoc with his

hawk

(someone) like a hawk to watch (someone) very carefully: *They are watching her like a hawk because they suspect her of stealing*

hay

haywire to go completely wrong, to go out of control: *The organization of the office went haywire when she was to wire that was used to bind hay. It very easily became twisted and therefore came to symbolize confusion.>*

the hay or sack to go to bed: *He was so tired that he hit the hay immediately after* were formerly filled with hay or made from the same material as sacks.>

looking for a needle in a haystack see

hay (while the sun shines) to profit or take advantage of an opportunity while one has the chance: *He's been offered a lot of overtime and he needs the He might as well make hay while the sun is only possible in fine weather.>*

roll in the hay see

head

(someone's) head see

one's head against a brick wall see

or *eat or snap (someone's) head off* to speak very sharply and angrily to (someone): *What's wrong with her? She's been biting everyone's head off all*

(something) to a head to bring something to a state where something must be done about it: *There has been hostility between them for some time but his public criticism of her brought matters to a to bringing a boil, etc, to a head so that it can be lanced.>*

one's head in the sand to deliberately ignore a situation so that one does not have to deal with it: *He says his job is safe but he is burying his head in the sand* The factory is closing to the old belief that ostriches hide their heads in the sand when they are in danger because they think that they cannot be seen.>

make head nor/or tail of (something) cannot understand (something) at all: *I can't make head nor/or tail of these*

one's head down (1) to start working hard: *The exams are next I had better get my head down* (2) to have a sleep or a nap: *If I just get my head down for an hour I'll be all*

(someone) his or her head to allow (someone) to do as he or she wishes: *The owner gives the manager his head in the running of the* literally to slackening one's hold on the reins of a horse.>

to (someone's) head (1) to make (someone) arrogant or conceited: *Winning the prize went to his head and he goes around* (2) to make (someone) slightly drunk: *One glass of wine seems to go to her* *one's head* see

a head for (something) to have an ability or aptitude for (something): *He can't climb the mountain* *He has no head for*

a (good) head on one's shoulders to be clever or sensible: *The boy should go far in life. He has a good head on his* *a rush of blood to the head* see

one's head screwed on the right way to be sensible: *He won't give up his job* *He's got his head screwed on the right*

over heels completely: *They're head over heels in*

will roll someone is going to get into serious trouble: *Heads will roll when mother sees the mess the house is in* to the use of the guillotine to execute criminals.>

the headlines to attract a great deal of media attention: *He hit the headlines last year when he married a*

a gun to (someone's) head see

a pistol to (someone's) head see

one's head up (high) not to feel ashamed or guilty, to remain dignified: *After her crime she'll never hold her head up in the village*

a level head or keep one's head to remain calm and sensible, especially in a difficult situation: *When he discovered the fire he kept a level head and phoned for the fire*

one's head above water to have enough money to keep out of debt: *With so many children they have great difficulty in keeping their heads above*

(something) on the head to put an end to (something): *Our plans for a picnic were knocked on the head by the*

one's head off to laugh very loudly: *They laughed their heads off when he slipped on a banana*

a bear with a sore head see

one's head to cease to remain calm, to act foolishly: *She lost her head during her driving test and made a lot of*

headway to make progress: *They don't seem to be making much headway with their research originally to ships.>*

one's head examined to be foolish or insane: *If you believe his story you need your head*

to know whether one is on one's head or one's feet or heels to be totally confused: *I served so many customers that I didn't know*

whether I was on my head or my

one's head insane, not rational: *The old man was off his head to give his daughters his*

the top of one's head see

(someone's) (own) head be it (someone) must take responsibility or blame: *On your head be it if Mum is You made us*

(someone's) head (l) too difficult for (someone) to understand: *The explanation of the scientific experiment was right over my (2) when*

(someone) seems to have a better right: They promoted him over

her head although she was better (3) *beyond (someone) to a person of higher rank: He went over the departmental manager's head and reported the matter to the managing*
or lay one's head on the block to leave oneself open to blame, punishment, danger, etc: *He laid his head on the block by letting his assistants have the afternoon* to laying one's head on the block before being beheaded.>

our, etc, heads together to discuss something together, to share thoughts on something: *If we put our heads together we'll come up with a*

its ugly head to appear or happen: *They were happy at first but jealousy reared its ugly*

one's head to be puzzled: *The police are scratching their heads over the motive for the*

or weak in the head not very intelligent or clever: *He must be soft in the head to trust her*

one's head off to talk a great deal: *We hadn't seen each other for a long time and so we talked our heads*

through the back of one's head see

(someone's) head to make (someone) conceited: *Her head was turned by his extravagant*

heart

(someone's) own heart see

heart-to-heart a private talk where one tells one's thoughts, troubles, etc, openly: *She had a heart-to-heart with her mother about her health*

heart basically, really: *He seems unfriendly at first but at heart he's very kind and*

(someone's) heart to make (someone) very sad: *He broke her heart when he left town without telling*

one's heart said to emphasize the truth of what one is saying: *I'll be there on Cross my*

(someone's) heart good to give (someone) pleasure: *It did my heart good to see the children*

one's heart out to be distressed because one cannot have someone or something which one is longing for: *She is eating her heart out for her*

heart never won fair lady see

the bottom of one's heart most sincerely, very much: *I apologize from the bottom of my heart for the*

a change of heart see

(something) at heart to be deeply interested or concerned about (something): *Your father may seem discouraging about the job but he has your best interests at*

one's heart in one's mouth to feel afraid or anxious: *She had her heart in her mouth as she watched the young man standing on the edge of the*

and soul completely, with all one's energy: *She pledged herself heart and soul to look after the*

heart goes out to (someone) (someone) feels sympathy or pity for (someone): *Our hearts went out to the orphaned*

heart is in the right place (someone) is basically kind, sympathetic, etc, although not appearing to be so: *Our neighbour seems very stern, but her heart's in the right*

heart is not in it (someone) is not enthusiastic about something: *He's given up teaching because his heart wasn't in*

heart sinks (someone) feels depressed, disappointed, etc: *Her heart sank as she saw the policeman standing on her*

good heart cheerful and confident: *The soldiers were in good heart before the*

(someone's) heart of hearts in the deepest part of one's mind or feelings: *In her heart of hearts she knew her mother was*

something by heart to memorize (something) thoroughly: *The teacher told the pupils to learn the poem by*

heart to grow discouraged: *She was very enthusiastic about her plan but she lost heart when no one seemed*

to have the heart (to do something) not to be unkind, unsympathetic, etc, enough (to do something): *I didn't have the heart to tell her that her husband was having an affair with another*

new heart into (someone) to make (someone) feel encouraged and more hopeful: *Scoring a goal put new heart into the*

one's heart on or have one's heart set on (something) to desire (something) very much: *He's set his heart on buying a motor*

heart to become encouraged: *The travellers took heart when they saw the town*

(something) to heart (1) to be upset by (something): *He was only teasing but she took his remarks to* (2) to be influenced by and take notice of (something): *She took the doctor's advice to*

the cockles of the heart to make one feel happy and contented: *Watching her with the baby would warm the cockles of the*

one's heart on one's sleeve to let one's feelings be obvious: *She was badly hurt by him although she's not one to wear her heart on her*
a heavy heart see

all one's heart most sincerely: *I hope with all my heart that you will be*

heat

the heat of the moment while influenced by the excitement or emotion of the occasion: *They were having a quarrel and in the heat of the moment she threatened to kill*

the heat out of (something) to make (a situation) less emotional, tense, etc: *They were just about to fight each other when their friend took the heat out of the situation by suggesting they sit down and*

heave

(someone) *the (old) heave-ho* to get rid of (someone), to dismiss (someone): *He's been given the old heave-ho from the firm for*

heaven

seventh heaven extremely happy: *She was in seventh heaven when her son was* Jewish literature the seventh heaven is the highest of all heavens and the one where God lives.>

from heaven something advantageous which happens unexpectedly, especially in a time of trouble: *My parents' offer of a loan was manna from* We were practically biblical reference to Exodus 16:15.>

heaven and earth to to make every effort possible: *The doctor moved heaven and earth to save the patient's*

from heaven a sudden and unexpected sum of money: *They were very poor, so the prize money from the competition was pennies from or stink to high heaven* to have a strong and nasty smell: *The drains stink to high*

heavy

difficult to make progress with or cope with: *I found the climb originally to the surface of a horse-race track.>*

heavy weather of (something) to to make more effort to do something than should be required: *The pupils made heavy weather of the exam paper although it was quite originally to a ship which does not handle well in difficult weather conditions.>*

a heavy heart with great sadness or despondency: *It was with a heavy heart that she left her family*

hedge

one's bets see

as though one has been dragged through a hedge backwards to look very un- tidy: *The little boy always looks as though he has been dragged through a hedge backwards when he comes home from*

heel

heel see

(someone) to heel to bring (someone) under one's control: *The new teacher soon brought the unruly class to to making a dog walk to heel.>*

or kick one's heels see

one's heels in see

see

over heels see

a clean pair of heels see

to one's heels to run away: *She took to her heels when she saw the bull in the*

on one's heel to turn and walk away in the opposite direction:

When he was rude she turned on her heel and

helm

the helm in charge: With a new person at the helm in the company there are bound to be to the helm of a ship.>

help

or lend (someone) a (helping) hand see

hen

a hen on a hot girdle very nervous and restless: She was like a hen on a hot girdle waiting for the telephone to

here

here nor there of no importance: It's neither here nor there whether he comes or

hereafter life after death: He does not believe in the

herring

red herring a piece of information which misleads (someone) or draws (someone's) attention away from the truth, often introduced deliberately: *She told the police that she had seen a man at the door of the burgled house but it proved to be a red red herring is a strong-smelling fish whose scent could mislead hunting dogs if it were dragged across the path they were pursuing.>*

fish nor fowl nor good red herring neither one thing nor the other: He has lived in so many parts of the country that his accent is neither fish nor fowl nor good red

like herring in a barrel very tightly packed: *The audience were packed like herring in a barrel at the pop*

hide

hidden agenda see

one's light under a bushel see

hide nor hair of (someone or something) no trace at all of (someone or something): The police searched for the missing

prisoner but they could find neither hide nor hair of
a hiding to nothing in a situation where one cannot possibly win:
She wants to be a vet but she's on a hiding to nothing because she
hasn't the academic a reference to boxing.>

(someone's) hide to beat or thrash (someone): The boy's father
threatened to tan his hide if he got into trouble at school to leather-
making.>

high

high flier a person who is bound to be very successful or who
has achieved great success: She was one of the high fliers in our
year at

for the high jump to be about to be punished or scolded: You're
for the high jump when your mother sees that torn

high time be time something was done without delay: It is high
time you cut the

or get on one's high horse to be or become offended in a haughty
manner: She gets on her high horse if you ask her to do some She
says she is a personal assistant not a

and mighty arrogant: Since he became rich he's so high and mighty
he won't speak to his former

as a kite see

spot an exceptionally good part of something: One of the high
spots of their holiday was their visit to

or search high and low for (someone or something) to to search
absolutely everywhere for (someone or something): I've hunted high
and low for my address book but in

(someone) high and dry to leave (someone) in a difficult or
helpless state: His secretary walked out and left him high and dry
in the middle of the busiest time of

high very successful: The financier was riding high until the recession
of the moon being high in the sky.>

high of feelings, tempers, etc, to be extremely angry, agitated, etc:
Feelings ran high among the crowd when the police arrested the young to the sea when there is a strong current and high waves.>

the moral high ground see

hill

amount to a hill of beans see

as the hills see

the hill past one's youth or one's best: *In that firm you're over the hill at*

hilt

to the hilt see

(someone) *to the hilt* to support (someone) totally: *Her parents backed her to the hilt when she decided to have the to the hilt of a sword.>*

hind

take the hindmost see

history

history to be past, to be no longer relevant or important: *I know he has a police record but that's history*
history to do something remarkable that will be remembered in the future: *He made medical history by performing the first heart*
rest is history used to indicate that no more need be said about something because the details of it are well known: *Then Robin met Sally and the rest is*

hit

smash hit see

a hit with (someone) to be popular with (someone): *The magician was a real hit with the children at the*

a bad patch see

a man when he's down to attack someone who is already suffering from some misfortune: *She left him just after he lost his She really knows how to hit a man when he's*

accident an accident involving a vehicle where the driver who caused it does not stop or report the accident: *The little girl was killed in a hit-and-run The driver stopped for a moment then drove off in a great*

it off to get on well, to become friendly: *I knew they would hit it They have so much in*

the big time see

the ceiling or roof see

the deck see

the hay or sack see

the headlines see

the jackpot see

the mark see

the nail on the head see

the road see

the wall see

Hobson

choice see

hog

the whole hog to to do something completely and thoroughly: *We decorated one room and then decided to go the whole hog and do the whole* referring to buying a whole pig for its meat rather than just parts of it.>

hoist

with one's own petard see

hold

on or hold on like grim death see

a hold over (someone) to have power or influence over (someone): I think the old man has some kind of hold over He always does what he

(something) against (someone) to dislike (someone) because of (something) he or she has done: He always held it against her that she had her child

[a \(gun\) to someone's head](#) see

[a pistol to \(someone's\) head](#) see

forth to talk for a long time forcefully or pompously: The lecturer held forth on his views on the political

good to be valid or applicable: The rules that applied last year hold good this

[one's breath](#) see

[one's head up \(high\)](#) see

[one's horses](#) see

[one's own](#) see

[one's tongue](#) see

out on (someone) not to tell (someone): He's been holding out on us for It turns out he's engaged to be

[the fort](#) see

[the purse strings](#) see

[holds barred](#) no restrictions on what is permitted: *It was a case of no holds barred in the election All the candidates criticized their opponents*

hole

[more full of holes than Swiss cheese](#) see

secret and often dishonourable: Their romance is a hole-and-corner affair because she is

a hole in an awkward or difficult situation: They're in a real Their passports have been stolen along with all their

a hole in (something) to use a large part of (something): *Holding the party left a huge hole in our supply of*
(something) like (someone) needs a hole in the head to regard (something) as being completely unwelcome or undesirable: *The firm needs a strike at the moment like they need a hole in the*
holes in (something) to find faults in (a theory, plan, etc): *He had no suggestions of his own but he picked holes in*
through a hole in one's head same as talk through the back of one's head see

holy

acting as though one is more moral, more pious, etc, than other people: *She is so holier-than-thou that you wouldn't believe that she once spent a night in the police* biblical reference to Isaiah 65:5.>
holy of holies a private or special place inside a building: *That's her father's* *It's the holy of holies in their* literal translation of the Hebrew name for the inner sanctuary where the Ark of the Covenant was kept.>

hollow

hollow legs see

home

home from home a place where one feels comfortable and relaxed: *Our holiday villa was a home from*
or drive (something) home to (someone) to to cause someone fully to understand or believe (something): *Their mother's illness really brought home to them how much they relied on*
one's homework to prepare thoroughly for a meeting, etc, by getting all the necessary information: *You will have to do your homework if you are going to win that export*
at home to feel comfortable and relaxed: *She's from Italy originally but she feels completely at home here*

and dry having successfully completed an objective: *I didn't think we'd get the contract but it's just been signed so we're home and*
truth a plain, direct statement of something that is true but unpleasant or difficult for someone to accept: *I told her a few home truths about how her behaviour was affecting the*
oneself at home to make oneself comfortable and relaxed: Make yourself at home while I prepare the
to write home about not very special, not remarkable: *The food in the hotel was all right but nothing to write home*
home to win easily: *Our candidate romped home to win the election by a huge horse-racing, referring to a horse winning a race with ease.>*

lights are on but nobody is home see
or until the cows come home see

honour

the honours see

hook

hook or by crook by any means possible: *She's says she'll get to the party by hook or by crook although she has no*

one's hooks into (someone) to become involved with (someone) and gain a great deal of influence or control over him or her: *Harry used to be a very generous person until Meg got her hooks into him and now he's as mean as she*

the hook free from some difficulty, problem, etc, or something one does not want to do: *I didn't want to go to the party and my friend let me off the hook by asking me to* reference to angling when a fish is taken off the hook and released.>

one's hook to go away: *Why don't you sling your hook and leave us alone?*

(something) hook, line and sinker to believe (something) completely: *His story was obviously untrue but his mother swallowed it hook, line*

and to a fish that swallows not only the hook but the whole of the end section of the fishing line.>

*home stretch or straight to the last part of something, especially when this has been a particularly long or difficult process: *It takes a long time to train to become a doctor, but Bella is on the home stretch now and graduates next**

hoop

*(someone) through the hoops to cause (someone) to experience something unpleasant or difficult: *The interviewers certainly put the candidates through the hoops by asking searching to circus performers who jump through hoops set on fire.>**

hop

*(someone) on the hop to find (someone) unprepared: *My guests arrived early and caught me on the hop without the meal**

*mad extremely angry: *He was hopping mad when his new car broke*
*(someone) on the hop to keep (someone) busy or active: *Her grandchildren keep her on the***

hope

*high hopes of (something) to be extremely hopeful of success in (something): *He has high hopes of getting into university thanks to his excellent exam**

*against hope to continue to hope although there is little reason to be hopeful: *She is seriously ill but they are hoping against hope that she will recover**

*springs eternal (in the human breast) it is part of our nature as human beings to hope: *So far he doesn't have a job but hope springs eternal in the human* quotation from Alexander Pope's "An Essay on Criticism.">*

*one's hopes on (someone or something) to rely on (someone or something) helping one in some way: *They have no money and they're pinning their hopes on the horse they backed**

horizon

the horizon used to indicate that something is likely to happen soon: *There are several good job opportunities for Sam on the horizon if he does as well as expected in his*

horn

[in one's horns](#) to restrain one's actions, particularly the spending of money: *Now that they have a child they will have to draw in their* to a snail drawing in its horns if it is in danger.>

in on (something) to join in on (something) uninvited and unwanted: *She's trying to horn in on the organization of the*

[horns](#) to argue or fight: *It wasn't long before the new boss and the union leader locked to horned male animals who sometimes get their horns caught together when fighting.>*

[the horns of a dilemma](#) see

hornet

up a hornet's nest to cause a great deal of trouble: *The headmaster stirred up a hornet's nest when he suggested changing the school*

horse

[horse of a different colour](#) see

the wrong horse to show support for the person, side, plan, etc, that turns out to be the loser in some way: *You backed the wrong horse when you appointed him as He's hopeless with*

[or get on one's high horse](#) see

[horses in mid-stream](#) see

[horse](#) see

like a horse to eat a great deal: *Like most teenage boys he eats like a*

a dead horse [to](#) to continue to try to arouse interest, enthusiasm, etc, in something which is obviously not, or no longer, of interest:

He's trying to sell life insurance to his neighbours but he's flogging a dead An agent from another firm has already been round the one's horses not to move so fast: Hold your horses! I haven't agreed to your plan

sense common sense, practicality: She has no specialist knowledge of the business but she has horse

for courses certain people are better suited to certain tasks or situations: He's good at planning things and she is good at putting plans into action. It's a case of horses for horses run better on certain types of ground.>

the stable door after the horse has bolted see

a gift horse in the mouth see

nod is as good as a wink to a blind horse see

the cart before the horse see

from the horse's mouth from someone closely connected with a situation and therefore knowledgeable about it: I got it straight from the horse's She told me herself she was though a horse is giving a tip about a race in which it is running.>

horses would not drag_(someone)_to something_or somewhere nothing would persuade (someone) to attend something or go somewhere: Wild horses wouldn't drag me to his I loathe

horse someone who is keen to work or help: She is chairman of the organizing committee but it's the willing horses who do all the

can take a horse to water but you can't make it drink you can encourage someone to do something but you cannot force him or her to do it: You can get the university prospectuses for your son, but after that it's for him to You can take a horse to water but you can't make it

hot

hot and cold see

the hots for (someone) an informal way of saying that someone is sexually attracted to someone: *Jill is currently going out with Tom, but it was quite obvious at last night's party that she has the hots for*

[air](#) see

a direct telephone line for use in emergencies: *The two leaders have spoken on the*

on (someone's) heels close behind (someone): *She arrived and then he rushed in hot on her*

[potato](#) something which it is difficult or dangerous to deal with:

The complaint about faulty goods is a hot Pass it on to the under the collar angry or agitated: *He got very hot under the collar when she refused to believe*

[hot water](#) in trouble: *The boy will be in hot water when his father sees the damage he*

[the hot seat](#) in a position where one has responsibility for important and difficult issues: *The acting managing director is in the hot seat*

[a cat on hot bricks](#) see

[a \(hot\) knife through butter](#) see

it or things hot for (someone) to make a situation unpleasant or impossible for (someone): *You might as well He'll just make things hot for you if you*

[hot](#) very hot: *I like soup to be piping*

[or go like hot cakes](#) see

hour

hours during the period when a shop, etc, would be normally be shut for business: *The pub owner has been selling alcohol after*

[hours](#) see

[the eleventh hour](#) see

[off the evil hour](#) see

(wee) small hours the hours immediately following midnight (1 a.m., 2 a.m., etc): *They danced until the wee small witching hour* midnight: *It's time we went It's the witching* aretraditionally supposed to be active at midnight.>

house

the house down to cause great amusement or applause: *The comedian's jokes brought the house (someone) out of house and home* to eat a great deal and so be expensive to feed: *When all the grandchildren stayed with their grandparents they ate them out of house and*

on like a house on fire see

round the houses to talk about unimportant or irrelevant issues and not get straight to the point or concentrate on what is important: *We knew that the managing director had called the staff together to announce redundancies, but he kept going round the* open house always to be ready and willing to welcome guests: *Why don't you pay them a They keep open*

to give (someone or something) house room to used to emphasize how much someone dislikes and would prefer to avoid someone or something: *Apparently, the chair which my gran offered me is a valuable antique, but I wouldn't give it house*

the house paid by the owner of shop, pub, etc: *The drinks are on the house to celebrate the birth of the*

one's house in order to make sure that one's affairs are well arranged and organized: *His will is perfectly He put his house in order before his*

as houses completely safe: *The children will be safe as houses with their*

hue

hue and cry a loud protest: *There was a hue and cry about the council's proposal to close the local old legal term meaning a*

summons for people to join in a hunt for a criminal.>

huff

a or the huff upset, offended or sulking: *Jade's in a huff because we went shopping without*

humble

[humble pie](#) to have to admit that one has been wrong: *He had to eat humble pie when his wife passed her driving He had said she wasn't good* originally to a dish made from the umble or offal of a deer that was eaten by the lower classes.>

hump

[over the hump](#) to have got past the worst part of a difficult situation: *Lisa was very upset about the break-up of her relationship with Joe, but seems to be over the hump now and has started going out with other*

[the hump](#) to become annoyed, offended or upset: *Fred's got the hump just because we forgot to ask him if he wanted to go to the football*

hunt

[high and low for \(someone or something\)](#) see
[with the hare and hunt with the hounds](#) see

hymn

[from the same hymn or song sheet](#) see

i

the i's and cross the t's see

ice

the ice to ease the shyness or formality of a social occasion: *The baby's laughter broke the ice at the lunch*

no ice to have no effect: *His charm cut no ice with her*

on the cake a desirable but unnecessary addition: *The garden's the icing on the cake. It's the size of the house that*

ice put aside for future use or attention: *Our expansion plans will have to be put on*

on thin ice to (to be) in a risky or dangerous position: *You're skating on thin ice by criticizing his*

tip of the iceberg a small sign of a much larger problem: *Painting the new house will cost about £1000 and that's the tip of the iceberg —we need new carpets and to the fact that the bulk of an iceberg is hidden underwater.>*

ill

gains possessions acquired dishonestly: *He got her jewels from her by blackmail and then sold his ill-gotten*

an ill wind (that blows nobody any good) in almost every misfortune there is something of benefit to someone: *There was a serious accident on the motorway and we might have been involved in it if our car hadn't broken down before we got onto the road. It's an ill wind .*

(something) *ill out* to be offended or annoyed at (something): *She took it ill out that we hadn't invited*

image

the spitting image of or the spit and image of (someone or something)_see

imagination

figment of one's imagination something which has no reality: *His cottage in the country is sadly a figment of his*

immemorial

time immemorial from a time beyond anyone's memory, written records, etc; for an extremely long time: *The family has lived in the village from time* legal phraseology the expression means "before the beginning of legal memory".>

in

in for (something) to be likely to experience (something, often something unpleasant): *The sky looks as if we're in for a*

in on (something) to be involved in (something), to know about (something): *Not many were in on the*

in with (someone) to be friendly with or in favour with (someone): *She's in with the*

it in for (someone)_see

ins and outs of (something) the details of (something): *I don't know the ins and outs of their*

inch

or come within an inch of (something) to be or come very close to: *He came within an inch of being killed by the falling*

inch a or *the (something)* completely (something): *The old man is every inch a*

(someone) an inch (and he or she will take a mile or an ell)_if someone yields in any way to (someone) he or she will make even greater demands: *If you give him an extra day to write his essay he will expect an extra week next time. Give him an inch and he'll take a ell* is an old form of measurement.>

Indian

Indian summer a time of fine, warm weather in autumn: *I've put away all my light clothes but we are having an Indian* from a feature of the climate of North America whose original inhabitants were called Indians.>

many chiefs and not enough Indians a surplus of people wishing to give orders or to administrate and a deficiency of people willing to carry out orders or do the work: *Their plans didn't work out largely because there were too many chiefs and not enough*

ink

red ink to of a company, to be in a serious financial situation: *Jim's firm has been bleeding red ink for months and it will almost certainly go into receivership*

innings

a good innings to enjoy a considerable period of life, success etc: *To die at 90 is to have had a good to cricket.*>

inside

(something) inside out see

insult

insult to injury see

interest

vested interest in (something) a personal and biased interest in (something): *She has a vested interest in campaigning against the proposed new It would be competition for an interesting condition* pregnant: *She's not drinking alcohol because she's in an interesting*

interest to an even greater extent than something has been done, etc, to someone: *He returned his insults with the world of banking.*>

iron

many or several irons in the fire to be involved in several projects, etc, at the same time: *One of his firms has gone bankrupt but he*

has several irons in the < Refers to a blacksmith heating pieces of iron before shaping them.>

(someone or something) with a rod of iron to to be stern or ruthless: All the children are scared of the head teacher. She rules them with a rod of

while the iron is hot to act at a point at which things are favourable to one: Your father is in a good Why don't you strike while the iron is hot and ask him for a loan to a blacksmith's work.>

iron hand in the velvet glove sternness or ruthlessness hidden under an appearance of gentleness: Her father looks very kindly but he frequently beats his It's a case of the iron hand in the velvet iron horse railway engines or trains: Travel was much more difficult before the invention of the iron

item

an item to be in a romantic relationship: Ralph and Carol are an item not just good

itch

itching to (do something) to want very much to (do something): He was itching to give her a an itching palm to be greedy for money: The shopkeeper always overcharges—she's got an itching

ivory

in an ivory tower to have a way of life protected from difficulty or unpleasantness: The writer lives in an ivory He doesn't realize how badly off his family the ivories to play the piano: There's a man in the pub who likes to tickle the white keys of a piano were once covered with ivory.>

J

jack, Jack

jack of all trades (and master of none) someone who can do several different kinds of job (but does not do any of them very well): *He's their gardener as well as their He's a jack of all jack in office* a pompous, dictatorial official: *That jack in office says that we will have to fill in all the forms*

[work and no play makes Jack a dull boy](#) see

you can say Jack Robinson extremely rapidly: *Your mother will be home before you can say Jack*

man jack [to](#) absolutely everyone: *Every man jack of you must attend* from the fact that Jack is a very common first name.>

all right, Jack my situation is satisfactory, the implication being that it does not matter about anyone else's situation: *The manager has got a pay increase and it's a case of I'm all right, He's not bothered about the workers'*

jackpot

[the jackpot](#) to have a great success, often involving a large sum of money: *He hit the jackpot when he married the boss's to the pool of money in poker.>*

jam

tomorrow the promise of better things in the future: *Governments often promise jam tomorrow but many people would prefer some improvements* a statement by the Red Queen in *Alice Through the Looking-Glass* by Lewis Carroll.>

[for jam or old rope](#) see

jam on it to want an even better situation, etc, than one has already: *She should be glad that she has a well-paid job but she*

wants jam on She wants longer to asking for jam on bread when bread on its own is quite sufficient.>

jazz

all that jazz used to describe other things which are similar to things which have been mentioned: *The family were very rich and the daughter had an expensive private education, took riding lessons, went on foreign holidays and all that*

Jekyll

Jekyll and Hyde someone with two completely different sides to his or her personality: *One day he is charming, the next he is very He's a real Jekyll and to the character in The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr a novel by Robert Louis Stevenson.>*

jelly

[to jelly](#) to become very nervous: *Jane says that she turns to jelly every time that she has to speak in*

Jeremiah

Jeremiah a pessimist: *My neighbour's a Jeremiah who says that the economic situation is going to get even biblical reference to the Lamentations of Jeremiah.>*

jet

jet set wealthy people who can afford to travel a great deal. to jet planes.>

jewel

[jewel in the crown](#) the most valuable or successful thing associated with someone or something: *The country has several successful industries, but the wine industry is the jewel in its*

job

[good job](#) see

job lot a mixed collection: *The furniture in my rented flat is a real job lot—some of it is in good condition but some of it is ready for the rubbish to auctioneering.>*

put-up job see

give up the day job see

(something) up as a bad job to stop doing (something) because one has little hope of success: *I tried to persuade her to stay but I eventually gave it up as a bad*

a job to have difficulty: *If you're trying to get a contribution from her you'll have a She has a reputation for being incredibly*

the job exactly what is required: *This cold drink is just the job in this*

for the boys used to suggest that jobs are being given to friends and relatives of people in power or authority, rather than to people who are qualified to get them; sometimes such jobs are unnecessary: *The managing director's wife is paid by the firm as a social consultant, whatever that is. It's a case of jobs for the boys, I*

the best of a bad job to obtain the best results possible from something unsatisfactory: *The house is in a terrible state of disrepair but we'll just have to make the best of a bad job and paint*

snow job see

Job

Job's comforter someone who brings no comfort at all but makes one feel worse: *She supposedly came to cheer me up but she was a real Job's comforter and told me how ill I* biblical reference to the friends of Job.>

to try the patience of Job so irritating as to make the most patient of people angry: *Their deliberate lack of cooperation was enough to try the patience of* biblical reference to Job who had to suffer many misfortunes patiently.>

jockey

for position to try to manoeuvre oneself into a favourable or advantageous position: *Very few people will be promoted and ambitious members of staff are jockeying for*

Joe

Bloggs or Public or Soap the ordinary, average person: Some politicians only bother about what Joe Bloggs thinks at election

join

[you can't beat them or 'em join them or 'em](#) see
[the club](#) see

joint

the joint to inspect premises carefully, especially with a view to later burglary: They weren't window-cleaners at They were burglars casing the

[\(someone's\) nose out of joint](#) see

joke

[no joke](#) to be a serious matter: *It was no joke when we missed the last*

a joke no longer amusing, rather serious or annoying: His remarks about women drivers are beyond a

a joke to make a funny remark, to tell a funny story: The comedian cracked a series of bad

joker

[joker in the pack](#) someone in a group who is different from the rest in some way and may cause problems or have an effect on a situation: *Peter knew that most of the committee supported his point of view and would vote for him, but he knew nothing about Gareth's view and thought that he might well be the joker in the to a pack of playing cards.>*

Jonah

Jonah someone who brings bad luck: His workmates regard him as a Jonah. Things always go wrong when he's biblical reference to Jonah 1:4-7.>

Jones

up with the Joneses to make an effort to remain on the same social level as one's neighbours by buying what they have, etc: *Paul's neighbours are going to Florida, so he and his wife will be going there next They spend their time trying to keep up with the jowl*

by jowl see

joy

of the joys of spring very happy and cheerful: *She was full of the joys of spring when she was planning her*

joy no success, no luck: *We looked for the missing glove but no*
(someone)_joy_of_(something) see

jugular

for the jugular to attack someone in the way that is likely to cause most harm or damage: *The interviewer realized that the politician did not want to talk about the recent financial scandal involving him, but she decided to go for the jugular and ask him some frank questions about*

judge

as a judge to be extremely sober, not to be at all drunk: *When the police stopped John he said that he was sober as a judge, but he was breathalysed and found guilty of drink*

in judgement to criticize (someone) severely and often unfairly: *You shouldn't sit in judgement on young women just because they're single mothers, especially when you know nothing about their*

juice

in one's own juice to suffer because of one's own foolish actions: *She'll just have to stew in her own She shouldn't have left her*

jump

jumping-off point a place from which to begin: *We have to start the investigation This is as good a jumping-off point as*

for the high jump see

or *stay one jump ahead* to be or keep slightly ahead of someone or something in some way: *Both of them are looking for clues but the policeman is one jump ahead of the private*
the jump on (someone) to start something before someone else does and so have an advantage: *We were about to launch a new product, but our main competitor got the jump on us by bringing out a very similar product the month before our*

[down \(someone's\) throat](#) see

[on the bandwagon](#) see

[out of one's skin](#) see

[the gun](#) see

[the rails](#) see

[the queue](#) see

to it hurry up: *Jump to it! You're going to be*

jungle

[law of the jungle](#) see

jury

[jury is still out](#) people have not yet reached a conclusion or made a decision about something: *The manufacturers are making great claims about their new anti-wrinkle cream, but the jury is still*

just

[one's just deserts](#) see

so very neatly arranged: *She likes everything in her kitchen to be just*

[the job](#) see

justice

[\(someone or something\) justice](#) (1) to show the true value of (someone or something): *The photograph doesn't do justice to her*
(2) to eat (a meal, etc) with a good appetite: *I really couldn't do justice to the I had eaten too much of the main*

justice to oneself to behave in a way that is worthy of one's ability: *The pupil didn't do justice to himself in the*

justice see

K

keel

or keep on an even keel see

keen

as mustard see

keep

or keep (something) in mind see

keeps permanently: *She's gone abroad for*

a level head or keep one's head see

an open mind see

(someone) at arm's length see

in with (someone) to remain friendly with (someone) or in (someone's) favour: *She keeps in with her aunt because the old lady is*

it up to carry on doing something as well as one is doing it:

There's been an improvement in your work—keep it from the game of shuttlecock, the aim of which was to keep the shuttlecock in the air.>

on at (someone) to urge (someone) constantly to do something, to nag (someone): *She kept on at him to get a new*

one's chin up see

one's cool see

one's distance see

one's end up see

one's hair on see

one's hand in see

one's head above water see

one's nose clean see

one's own counsel to keep one's opinions, problems, etc, secret: *I thought of telling him about my health fears but decided to keep my own*

oneself to oneself not to seek the company of others much, to tell others very little about oneself: *Our new neighbours keep themselves very much to*

[one's shirt on](#) see

[one's word](#) see

[pace with \(someone or something\)](#) see

[\(someone\) posted](#) see

[tabs on \(someone or something\)](#) see

[the peace](#) see

[the wolf from the door](#) see

[time](#) see

(something) to oneself to keep (something) secret: The child kept her worries about school to

[or lose track of \(something\)](#) see

[\(something\) under one's hat](#) see

[\(something\) under wraps](#) see

[up appearances](#) see

[up with the Joneses](#) see

keg

[sitting on a powder keg](#) see

ken

[one's ken](#) outside the range of one's knowledge or understanding: *Why he did it is beyond my <"Ken" used to mean range of vision.>*

kettle

[different kettle of fish](#) a completely different set of circumstances: *Your previous suggestion was turned down, but your latest one is a completely different kettle of*

pretty kettle of fish to an awkward or difficult situation: *We're lost without a This is a pretty kettle of*
pot calling the kettle black see

kibosh

the kibosh on (something) to spoil or ruin (something's) chances of success: My broken ankle put the kibosh on my holiday plans—no sunshine and swimming for

kick

and kicking see

kicks for thrills or fun: The children broke the windows for

a kick out of to get fun or a thrill out of something: He's a bully and gets a kick out of making younger children

oneself to be annoyed with oneself: I could have kicked myself when I realized my

one's heels same as cool one's heels see

(someone) in the teeth see

over the traces to defy rules that control one's behaviour: Her parents were very strict but she kicked over the traces and to a horse drawing a cart which gets out of control of the driver.>

the bucket see

(someone) upstairs to appoint (someone) to a job which is more senior than the present one but which has less power: *The export manager hasn't being doing his job very effectively recently but it would be difficult for the firm to get rid of him and so they've kicked him*

kid

(someone or something) with kid gloves to deal with (someone or something) very tactfully or delicately: *The boss is You'll have to handle him with kid gloves*

new kid on the block to the newest person in a place, activity, etc: *The other members of the football team are anxious to see how well*

the new kid on the block

Kilkenny

[like Kilkenny cats](#) see

kill

in at the kill to be present when something important or decisive happens, often something that is unpleasant for someone: *Many journalists dislike the financier very much and they're all planning to be in at the kill when he announces his to the death of the fox in a foxhunt.>*

[killed the cat](#) see

[the fattened calf](#) see

[the goose that lays the golden egg](#) see

[time](#) see

[two birds with one stone](#) see

[\(someone\) with kindness](#) to spoil (someone) to the extent that it is a disadvantage to him or her: *The old lady is killing her dog with kindness by over-feeding*

a killing to make a large profit: *He made a killing when he sold his*

[in for the kill](#) to act decisively with a view to defeating one's opponent: *Jack was determined to win the tennis match and, realizing that his opponent was tiring, swiftly moved in for the*
a kind of poor quality: *They provided a meal, of a*

[of a kind](#) see

[\(someone\) with kindness](#) see

[milk of human kindness](#) see

king

[cat may look at a king](#) see

[king's ransom](#) a vast sum of money: *They paid a king's ransom for that*

kingdom

kingdom come for a very long time: *Those two will gossip until kingdom to a phrase in the Lord's Prayer.>*

kingdom come to death: That bomb would blow us to kingdom above.>

kiss

goodbye to (something) to have to accept that you have lost (something) or that you are not going to get (something): *If you've lent money to Bill you can kiss goodbye to it; he owes a lot of people money and he never pays them*

of death something which causes the end, ruin or death of something: *His appointment as managing director was the kiss of death to the* biblical reference to the kiss by which Judas betrayed Jesus.>

kitchen

but the kitchen sink *to* used to emphasize how much luggage someone has: *I'll never get all these suitcases in the car; you must be taking everything but the kitchen*

kite

a kite to start a rumour about a new project to see how people would react if the project were put into operation: *I think the rumour going around about moving to a new building is a kite flown by* to the use of kites to discover the direction and strength of the wind.>

as a kite very excited: *The children are all as high as kites because they're going to the seaside later*

kitten

kittens to get very agitated or angry: *She'll have kittens when she sees the mess in the*

knee

(someone) to his or her knees to humble or ruin (someone): *The workers went on strike but they were brought to their knees by lack*

of to going on one's knees to beg for something.>

to a grasshopper see

bended knee see *bend*

knickers

one's knickers in a twist to become agitated: *Don't get your knickers in a twist* They'll be here soon.

knife

one's knife in (someone) to wish to harm (someone): *He's got his knife in her because she got the job his sister*

a (hot) knife through butter to used to emphasize how easily someone has dealt with a difficult situation: *There were many difficulties in the way of Amy getting to university, but she cut through them all like a hot knife through*

a knife edge in a very uncertain or risky state: *The financial state of the company is on a knife*

the knife in (someone) to do something that will harm, upset or cause problems for (someone): *Kim was feeling really miserable about losing her job when Adam stuck the knife in and told her that it was all her own*

knives are out for (someone) used to describe a situation in which several people are planning to harm or cause problems for (someone): *The minister has several enemies in the government and it looks as though the knives are out for*

night of the long knives a time when an act of great disloyalty is carried out, usually by the sudden removal of several people from power or employment: *She went in one morning to discover that she and her team had been* *It had been the night of the long* to 19 June 1934, when Adolf Hitler had a number of his Nazi colleagues imprisoned or killed.>

knob

knobs on used to indicate informally that something or someone is an extreme example of something: *All of the family are a bit mean, but the eldest son is a miser with knobs to brass or other fittings on pieces of furniture.>*

knock

[or knock the living daylights out of \(someone\)](#) see

[or come knocking at the door](#) see

[\(someone\) for six](#) see

[\(something\) into a cocked hat](#) see

[\(someone or something\) into shape](#) see

[\(someone\) off his/her perch](#) see

[\(something\) on the head](#) see

[spots off \(someone\)](#) see

[the stuffing out of \(someone\)](#) see

[or throw \(someone\) for a loop](#) see

school/university of hard knocks [to](#) used to indicate that someone has gained his/her experience from problems, difficulties and setbacks encountered in life: *All of you young people are fortunate to be studying for your degrees at the university of your I, like so many of my generation, have been educated at the university of hard*

knot

[a rate of knots](#) extremely rapidly: *She's getting through the work at a rate of* [to](#) a method of measuring the speed of ships.>

[the Gordian knot](#) see

[the knot](#) [to](#) get married: *After living together for years, Jill and Tom have decided to tie the*

[\(oneself or someone\) in knots](#) [to](#) get (oneself or someone) in a confused state: *The defence lawyer is tying the witness in*

know

the know knowing facts, etc, that are known only to a small group of people: *Someone in the know told me that he has*

takes one to know one see

all the answers see

a thing or two see

(something) backwards or like the back of one's hand see

(someone) by sight see

(something) inside out to know and understand (something) very well indeed: *If you want to find out anything about the history of the family ask Aunt Lily; she knows it inside*

one's onions see

one's place see

the ropes see

the score see

which side one's bread is buttered see

what's what see

where one stands see

to know one is born to lead a trouble-free and protected life: *She doesn't know she's She has a well-paid job and works very few hours compared to everyone*

to know whether one is coming or going to be very confused, often because one is very busy: *I don't know whether I'm coming or I've got all the Christmas preparations to do, I've just been given some extra urgent work and I've got visitors arriving*

to know which way to turn see

to want to know not to be interested in something, not to be willing to offer assistance or take action: *The police warned the factory owner that he should instal an alarm system, but he didn't want to know because he regarded it as being too*

knuckle

the knuckle or bone see

(someone) over the knuckles to scold or criticize (someone): They were rapped over the knuckles for being rude to

L

labour

labour of love a long or difficult job done for one's own satisfaction or from affection for someone rather than for reward:
Ironing all her husband's shirts is a real labour of

la-di-dah

upper-class: *The children laugh at the teacher's la-di-dah* the supposed sound of upper-class speech.>

lady

isn't over till the fat lady sings see

man a man who likes the company of women and tries to charm them: *He rarely goes out with his male He's a real ladies' man who prefers the company of*

bountiful a rich, generous, and often patronizing woman: *She likes playing lady bountiful to her badly off* to a character in George Farquhar's play, *The Beaux'*

a man who likes going out with women: *He still goes out with lots of women even now that he is He always was a*

lamb

ewe lamb see

two shakes of a lamb's tail see

a lamb to the slaughter meekly, without arguing or resisting, often because unaware of danger or difficulty: *Young soldiers went to fight in World War I like lambs to the* biblical reference to Isaiah 53:7.>

might as well be hanged for a sheep as a lamb see

dressed as lamb see

lame

[lame duck](#) see

a *lame dog over a stile* to give help to someone in difficulties: *The old lady has very little money but she still likes to help lame dogs over*

lamp

[of the lamp](#) of a piece of writing, to show signs of research and revision rather than originality: *He doesn't show much creativity in his essays. They smell of the*

land

[land of milk and honey](#) a place where life is pleasant, with plenty of food and possibilities of success: *The refugees saw their new country as a land of milk and* biblical reference to the Promised Land of the Israelites, as described in Exodus 3:8.>

[cuckoo land](#) see

[or land on one's feet](#) see

[in one's lap](#) see

[off the fat of the land](#) see

how the land lies [to](#) to look carefully at a situation before taking any action or decision: *I don't know how long I'll stay with my I'll see how the land* literally to sailors looking at the shore before landing.>

[land of Nod](#) see

lane

[a long lane that has no turning](#) every period of misfortune, unhappiness, etc, comes to an end or changes to happier circumstances eventually: *He'll find happiness one It's a long lane that has no*

[in the fast lane](#) a life which is very busy and active and usually contains a lot of stress and pressure: *Bill was a highly-paid stockbroker who worked long hours in the city, but he got tired of life in the fast lane and now runs a village post*

language

the same language to have similar tastes and views: *It's good to meet someone who speaks the same*

lap

into (someone's) lap see

the lap of luxury in luxurious conditions: *Film stars usually live in the lap of*

the lap of the gods see

in one's lap to have to deal with (something) which is not really one's responsibility: *This complaint should have gone to the customer service department; I don't know why it has landed in my*

large

as life in person, actually present: *We had just been asking where he was when he came in, large as works of art, particularly sculptural, which are life-size.>*

than life extraordinary, behaving, etc, in an extravagant way: *He is very quiet and shy but his wife is larger than*

large see

lark

up or rise with the lark to rise very early in the morning: *We got up with the lark to catch the*

as a lark see

a or in the last resort when all other methods have failed: *In the last resort you can sell your house to pay your*

one's last gasp see

one's last see

the last laugh see

the last word to make the last or decisive statement in an argument, etc: *His wife always has to have the last*

one's or its last legs near to collapse: *The firm is on its last legs after losing a major*

last straw same as *the straw that breaks the camel's*

last word the most fashionable or up-to-date example of something: *He has the last word in recording*

to one's last to continue to do the job that one is experienced in: *He's a computer specialist and he should stick to his last rather than trying to write crime* comes from the saying, "The cobbler should stick to his last", meaning that a shoemaker should concern himself only with making or mending shoes.>

late

late than never better for something to arrive, happen, etc, late than never to do so at all: *He eventually arrived at midnight but they all agreed better late than*

in the day when a project, activity, etc, is well advanced: *It's a bit late in the day to propose changes to the*

laugh

the last laugh to be victorious or proved right in the end, especially after being scorned, criticized, etc: *His neighbours teased him for entering the garden competition, but he had the last laugh when he won* the saying "He who laughs last laughs longest".>
and the world laughs with you (weep and you weep alone) when someone is cheerful or happy, other people share in his or her joy (but when he or she is sad or miserable, people tend to avoid him or her): *His friends all went to see him when he won the prize, but the following year when he came last in the competition, no one went near* *Laugh and the world laughs with you, weep and you weep*

like a drain or *laugh one's head off* to laugh very loudly: *He laughed like a drain when the bully tripped and*

on the other side of one's face to suffer disappointment or misfortune after seeming to be successful or happy: *They were*

sure his side had won but they had to laugh on the other side of their faces when the opposing side scored a late

(someone or something) out of court see

up one's sleeve to be secretly amused: *She thought she was impressing them but they were laughing up their sleeves at*

laughing matter a very serious matter: *His playing truant is no laughing*

laurel

to one's laurels to be careful not to lose one's position or reputation because of better performances by one's rivals: *The champion had better look to her* There are some very good young tennis players coming up through the reference to the laurel wreath with which the ancient Greeks crowned their poets and victors.>

on one's laurels to be content with past successes without trying for any more: *The firm used to have a good reputation but it has been resting on its laurels for too long.*>

law

a law unto oneself to behave as one wishes rather than obeying the usual rules and conventions: *He was the only one not wearing evening dress but then he's always a law unto*

down the law to state one's opinions with great force, to give orders dictatorially: *Her father lays the law down about which friends she should*

the law into one's own hands to take action against a crime or injustice without involving the police or courts: *The villagers took the law into their own hands and nearly killed the child's*

law of the jungle the unofficial rules for survival or success in a dangerous or difficult situation where civilized laws are not effective: *He's beating him up because he raped his* The law of the jungle applies in these

letter of the law see

long arm of the law see

lay

a ghost/lay the ghost of (something) see

(something) at (someone's) door see

down one's arms see

it on the line see

it on thick or *lay it on with a trowel* to to exaggerate greatly in one's praise, compliments, etc, to someone: *He was laying it on with a trowel when he was telling her how beautiful she*

(someone) low to make (someone) ill: *He's been laid low by a stomach*

odds see

or put (something) on the line see

waste see

oneself (wide) open to (something) see

leading question a question asked in such a way as to suggest the answer the questioner wants to hear: *The defence counsel asked his witness a series of leading*

(someone) by the nose see

light an important person in a certain group, field, etc: *She's one of the leading lights of the local dramatic*

the way see

(someone) up the garden path see

the lead to avoid doing one's work usually by inventing deceitful excuses: *He said the soil was too dry to dig but the head gardener knew he was swinging the* naval slang.>

down like a lead balloon see

leaf

a leaf out of (someone's) book to use (someone) as an example:

You should take a leaf out of your sister's book and start doing some

over a new leaf to to change one's behaviour, etc, for the better:
He was wild as a teenager but he's turned over a new leaf

league

in league with (someone) to have joined together with (someone), usually for a bad purpose: *He was in league with the men who broke into the*

be in the same league as (someone) not to be as able as (someone): *The new teacher's not in the same league as our previous* to the grouping of clubs in soccer, etc, according to ability.>

lean

on (someone) to use force on (someone) to persuade him or her to do something: *They must have leaned on him to get him to give them an*

over backwards same as bend over backwards see

leap

leap in the dark an action or decision the results of which cannot be foreseen: *It's foolish to take a leap in the dark and emigrate to a new country without a*

leaps and bounds very quickly or successfully: *The children are progressing by leaps and bounds in their new*

before you leap see

lease

(someone or something) a new lease of life to cause (someone) to have a longer period of active life or usefulness or to have a happier or more interesting life: *Her hip operation has given the old lady a new lease of*

leash

at the leash to be impatient or very eager to do something: *The children were straining at the leash to get out to to a dog on a leash straining to get its freedom.>*

least

said soonest mended the less one says in a difficult situation the less harm will be done: *I was so angry that I wanted to tell her what I thought of her, but least said soonest*

leave

(someone) in the lurch to leave (someone) in a difficult or dangerous situation without any help: *She walked out and left her husband in the lurch with three young* lurch refers to a position at the end of certain games, such as cribbage, in which the loser has either lost by a huge margin or scored no points at all.>

a nasty taste in the mouth see

or *let well alone* to make no change to something that is already reasonably satisfactory: *You've just made the television picture worse by trying to fix* You should have left well

French leave see

it or leave it see

leave of one's senses see

leech

to (someone) like a leech to be constantly with (someone) or constantly to follow (someone): *His new girlfriend sticks to him like a* His friends never see him leeches were used in medicine and were stuck firmly to patients to suck blood.>

leeway

up leeway to take action to recover from a setback or loss of advantage: *After his illness he had a lot of schoolwork to do in order to catch up on his classmates but he soon made up* refers to the distance a sailing ship is blown sideways off its course by the wind.>

left

two left feet to be clumsy or awkward with one's feet, e.g. when dancing: *I tried to waltz with him but he has two left*

right and centre everywhere, to an extreme degree: *He gives a bad impression of the company left, right and*

left hand does not know what his or her right hand is doing

(someone's) affairs are extremely complicated: *He has so many different business interests that his left hand doesn't know what his right hand is*

leg

a leg said to an actor or other stage performer as a means of wishing him or her good luck: *I hear the play opens tonight. Break a leg!* the theatre it is traditionally considered bad luck to wish an actor good luck in a direct way.>

an arm and a leg see

one's leg over especially of a man, to have sex with someone: *Rose wants a romantic relationship and she doesn't realize that Alf just wants to get his leg*

(someone) a leg up to give (someone) some assistance to achieve advancement: *The manager would still be working on the factory floor if the previous manager hadn't given him a leg*

hollow legs to be able to drink a great deal of alcohol: *Joe had twice as much to drink as anyone else and yet he didn't seem drunk; he must have hollow legs!*

legs to be likely to be successful or to work: *At first, the manager rejected the idea for a new product and then he began to think that it might have legs after*

it to run or go away quickly: *The two youths legged it before the police could ask them any*

to have a leg to stand on to have no defence or justification for one's actions: *The driver accused of causing the accident doesn't have a leg to stand on. An eye witness saw him knock down the old lady as she was crossing the*

one's or its last legs see

(someone's) leg to try as a joke to make (someone) believe something that is not true: *There's not really an escaped lion in the street. He's pulling your*

one's legs to go for a walk: *I'm stiff from sitting in the car for so I must stretch my*

legend

legend in one's own lifetime used to indicate that someone has become famous during his/her lifetime: *Many painters don't achieve fame until after they're dead, but Picasso was a legend in his own*

legend in one's own lunch time used humorously to indicate that someone has been famous for a very short time: *You might not remember her; she's that pop star who was a legend in her own lunch time a couple of years*

legion

name is legion there are a great many of them: *It's difficult to estimate how many people have Their name is* biblical reference to Mark 5:9.>

length

to great lengths to take absolutely any action in order to achieve what one wants: *He'll go to any lengths to get that job, including*

leopard

leopard never changes its spots a person's basic character does not change: *I don't believe that he was acting out of kindness. He has always been a selfish person and the leopard never changes his*

let

alone (someone or something) not taking into consideration (someone or something): *We haven't really enough room for her, let alone the three*

oneself go (1) to enjoy oneself without restraint: *He seems very formal but he really lets himself go at (2)* to stop taking trouble

over one's appearance: *She always used to be elegantly dressed but since her husband's death she has let herself*

[\(someone\) have it](#) see

(someone) in on something to share something secret with

(someone): *They let him in on their plans to*

[off steam](#) see

[\(something\) slip](#) see

[the grass grow under one's feet](#) see

well alone same as leave well

letter

[red-letter day](#) see

[letter of the law](#) the exact wording of a law, rule, agreement

clause: *According to the letter of the law, you are responsible for half*

the costs of the repairs, but in your financial circumstances it would

be unreasonable of him to expect you to pay biblical reference to II

Corinthians 3:6.>

the letter in every detail: You must follow the instructions to the

level

[level playing field](#) a situation which is completely fair to all

involved and in which no one has any particular advantage: *The*

job interviews were anything but a level playing Two of the three

people who were given jobs were related to members of the

management

[one's level best](#) see

[one's or its \(own\) level](#) to find out what situation, position, etc,

one is naturally suited to: *There's no point in expecting all the*

pupils to go to They have to find their own

the level honest, trustworthy: His father's a crook but he's on the

liberty

Hall a place where one can do as one pleases: It's Liberty Hall in

their house at the Their parents are away for the

liberties with (something) to treat (something) with too much freedom or with not enough respect: *The writer of the book thought that the makers of the film had taken liberties with her*
the liberty of (doing something) to dare to do (something) without permission or without being asked to: *I took the liberty of borrowing a pen from your I hope you don't*

licence

[licence](#) see

[licence to print money](#) to have the opportunity to get or spend a lot of money without doing very much in return for it: *The council are giving developers substantial grants to build in the area and many local people regard such a grant as a licence to print*

lick

lick and a promise a quick, not thorough, wash or clean: *She's given the kitchen floor a lick and a*

[\(someone or something\) into shape](#) to improve (someone or something) greatly to bring it up to standard: *The report he wrote was inadequate, but I helped him lick it into* to an old belief that bear cubs are born shapeless and have to be licked into shape by their mothers.>

[one's lips](#) see

[one's wounds](#) see

lid

or *take the lid off (something)* to reveal the truth about (something): *The sacked worker blew the lid off the company's tax*

[one's lid](#) see *flip*

the lid on (something) to keep (something) secret or keep (something) under control so that it does not get any worse: *The government was hoping to keep the lid on the story about the MP and a questionable financial deal, but it's all over the tabloids this*

the (tin) lid on (something) to finish (something) off, usually in an unpleasant way: *The recession put the tin lid on his already failing*

the lie to (something) to show that (something) is untrue: The letters the police found gave the lie to his denial of the

in or through one's teeth to tell lies obviously and unashamedly:

He was lying through his teeth when he told the police that he hadn't been near the scene of the

a lie to live a way of life about which there is something dishonest: His partner didn't know that he had committed bigamy and was living a

lie see

heavy on (someone) to be a burden or source of anxiety to (someone): The guilt of his crime lay heavy on

in wait for (someone) see

low see

how the land lies see

(something) lying down to accept an unpleasant situation without protesting or taking action against it: The workers have been dismissed unfairly but they're not taking it lying They're going to take legal

lie of the land the nature and details of a situation: Find out the lie of the land before applying for a job with that to sailors studying the nature of the coastline.>

life

dog's life see

matter of life and death see

legend in one's own lifetime see

new life into (something) to make (something) more lively, active or successful: The club needs new members to breathe new life into

to *life* to become active or lively: *The restaurants there don't come to life until late in the*
a *life* used to indicate to someone that you think that he or she has a boring, uninteresting life and should do something to change this: *Get a life! Don't spend yet another night in front of the television!*

on with your own life used as a cliché to advise someone to forget about the past and concentrate on the future: *It was dreadful that Carol changed her mind about marrying you, but you really must get on with your own life*

as life see

is just a bowl of cherries used ironically to indicate that life can be difficult and unpleasant: *The car won't start and the washing machine has broken down—isn't life a bowl of cherries!*

dear life or *for dear life's sake* to a very great extent, very rapidly, hard, etc: *We had to run for dear life to catch the*
the life of me if my life depended on it: *I can't for the life of me remember his*

(someone or something) a new lease of life see

the time of one's life see

a charmed life see

a *double life* to follow two completely different ways of life, one of which is usually secret and deceitful: *The salesman was leading a double He had one wife in London and one in*

or *live the life of Riley* to lead a comfortable and trouble-free life:

She married a rich old man and led the life of

on your life certainly not: "Are you going to accept that?" "Not on your

one's life in (someone's) hands to put oneself in a situation in which someone else has control over what happens to you: *I had never even met the doctor before and there I was putting my life in his*

life and limb to to risk death or physical injury, to take extreme risks: *Soldiers know they must risk life and limb in the course of their*

life to have wide experience, especially of varying conditions of life: *As a social worker she certainly sees*

one's life in one's hands to take the risk of being killed, injured or harmed: *You take your life in your hands when you cross that*
facts of life the facts about sex or reproduction: *The child is too young to understand the facts of*

life and soul of the party someone who is very lively and amusing on social occasions: *Although she is quite an elderly person, she was the life and soul of the*

to the life exactly like (someone): *The old man's Churchill to the*
or where there's life there's hope one should not despair of a situation while there is still a possibility of improvement: *The firm is in a pretty bad state financially but while there's life there's*

to one's lights see

(something) *to light* to reveal or uncover (something): *The police investigation has brought new facts to*

to light to be revealed or uncovered: *New evidence has come to*

the green light to (something) see

out like a light to go to sleep immediately: *After that hill walk I went straight to bed and went out like a*

one's light under a bushel to to be modest or silent about one's abilities or talents: *We discovered accidentally that she's a marvellous*

piano She's certainly been hiding her light under a biblical reference to Matthew 5:15, quoting Christ.>

the cold light of day when one looks at something practically and calmly: At the party we planned a world trip with our friends but in the cold light of day we realized that we couldn't afford

light see

at the end of the tunnel possibility of success, happiness, etc, after

a long period of suffering, misery etc: *He's been depressed about*

being Now he's been promised a job there is light at the end of the

the light (1) to understand something after not doing so: *She was*

having trouble with the maths problem but she suddenly saw the (2)

to agree with someone's opinions or beliefs after not doing so:

She did not believe in vegetarianism but then suddenly she saw the

(3) (also see the light of to come into existence: *I don't think the*

book he's writing will ever see the

or *throw light on (something)* to make (something) clearer, e.g. by

providing more information about it: *Can his parents shed any light*

on why he ran away?

light of (someone's) life the most important person or thing in

(someone's) life: *Her dogs are the light of her*

lights are on but nobody is at home used to indicate that someone

is either stupid or crazy: *I can't believe that the boy didn't*

understand what I The lights were on but nobody was

light-fingered to be likely to steal: *Lock your money and jewels I*

think she is

as a feather extremely light: *The sponge cake was as light as a*

light of (something) to treat (something) as unimportant: *He made*

light of his injury and worked

hands make light work see

lightning

the lightning rod for (something) to attract the blame or criticism for something although other people are, in fact, responsible: *The hotel receptionist was the lightning rod for all the guests' complaints, although she was not responsible for any of the things which had gone*

never strikes twice (in the same place) the same misfortune is unlikely to occur more than once: Having been burgled once we're hoping lightning won't strike

as lightning or like greased lightning extremely rapidly: *Quick as lightning he snatched my purse from my*

lily

lily-livered to be cowardly: *He's He won't accept a challenge to to an old belief that the liver of a coward had no blood in it.>*

the lily see

limb

on a limb in a risky and often lonely position; having ideas, opinions, etc, different from other people: *He went out on a limb and disagreed publicly with the scientific research of his to being stuck in an isolated position on the branch of a tree.>*

life and limb see

(someone) limb from limb to attack (someone) in a fierce and aggressive way, either in deed or speech: *When Dick sees the damage you did to his car he'll tear you limb from*

limbo

limbo in a forgotten or neglected position: *He's in limbo in a small department far from the head*

limelight

the limelight in a situation where one attracts a great deal of public attention: *Leading politicians must get used to being in the*

limit

the limit to be as much as, or more than, one can tolerate: *That postman's the He gets later and*

limits beyond what is allowed: *They told him not to go out with their sister but he can't resist someone that's off*

[sky's the limit](#) see

line

along the line at every point in an action, process, etc: *All along the line it was obvious that their marriage was in*

or on the lines of (something) similar to (something): *Our pay scale should be along the lines of that of the other parts of the*

in line for (something) to be likely to get (something): *He's in line for*

[in the front line](#) (1) to be responsible for dealing with demanding situations: *The nurses are usually in the front line when it comes to patients'* (2) to be involved in the latest development of something: *Professor Jack's team are in the front line of research into cancer*

[or come on line](#) to be ready for use, to be operating: *Our new production system has been delayed and it will only come on line next* computer reference.>

[\(way\) out of line](#) to behave in a way that is not acceptable: *You should apologize to You were way out of line when you got drunk and started criticizing her*

(something) into line with (something) to make (something) the same as or comparable with (something else): *The aim is to bring the agricultural policies of all the countries into*

[the line](#) to start behaving in a way which is unacceptable, offensive or extreme: *Janet's parents are usually okay about her coming home late, but she crossed the line when she stayed out all night and didn't phone*

the line some time in the future: *Jane has decided that she wants to leave school and get a job instead of going to university, but her parents are worried that she may regret the decision further down the*
a line under (something) to regard (something unpleasant) as being over and best forgotten so that people can move on: *Rod had an affair, but he and his wife have decided to draw a line under it and give their marriage another*

the line to fix a limit: *We can't invite We must draw the line*
(someone) a line to send (someone) a short letter: *I keep meaning to drop Mary a line to let her know about the*
into line to behave according to the relevant rules, regulations or traditions: *Dan's wife doesn't go to church, but when they visit his parents she's expected to fall into line and attend morning service in the village*

lines see

line see

it on the line to make (something) absolutely clear to someone: *If you want him to understand the seriousness of the position you will have to lay it on the line to*

or put (something) on the line to risk losing (something): *He laid his job on the line by supporting the*

one's pocket see

one's line of country not something which one knows a lot about or is interested in: *You should ask an accountant; finance is not my line of*

between the lines to understand or deduce something from a statement, situation, etc, although this has not actually been stated: *Her family says that she is well but, reading between the lines, I think that she is unlikely to* to a method of writing secret messages by writing in invisible ink between the lines of other messages.>

on the dotted line see

a line to exaggerate or boast about one's abilities, achievements, etc: *Beware of candidates who shoot a line at their*

out of line to behave differently from what is usually acceptable or expected: *There's no point in deliberately stepping out of line and wearing jeans to the formal to a line of soldiers on parade.>*

a hard line see

line of least resistance the course of action that will cause one least effort or trouble: *She won't disagree with the rest of the She always takes the line of least*

a fine line between (something) and (something) used to emphasize that there is a very slight difference between two particular things, one of which is bad or much less acceptable than the other: *Sara means well, but she has to learn that there's a fine line between offering help and*

the line to obey the rules or orders: *The new teacher will soon get the children to toe the to competitors having to stand with their toes behind a line when starting a race, etc.>*

linen

or wash one's dirty linen in public see

link

weak link in the chain refers to a person whose lack of skills are a liability to a project or institution: *Janice never fully understood anything she was told and, of all the people in the office, was the weak link in the*

lion

the lion in its den see

a person who tries very hard to become friendly with famous people: *When the actor became famous he tried to avoid to people*

formerly going to see the lions at the Tower of London as part of a sight-seeing tour of London.>

one's head in the lion's mouth to put oneself in a very dangerous or difficult position: *She put her head in the lion's mouth by asking her boss for a rise when he had just dismissed some other lion's share* a much larger share than anyone else: *His eldest son got the lion's share of the old man's* to one of Aesop's fables in which the lion, being a very fierce animal, claimed three quarters of the food which he and other animals had hunted for.>

(someone) to the lions deliberately to put (someone) in a dangerous or difficult position, often to protect oneself: *They were both responsible for the mistakes, but he threw his colleague to the lions by telling the manager it was her fault* to a form of entertainment in ancient Rome in which prisoners were thrown to wild animals to be attacked and killed.>

lip

a stiff upper lip to to show no emotion, such as fear or disappointment, when danger, trouble, etc, arises: *The boy was sad not to receive a present but his father had taught him to keep a stiff upper*

one's lips to look forward to something with pleasure: *He was licking his lips at the thought of his holiday* reference to licking one's lips at the thought of appetizing food.>

lips are sealed (someone) will not reveal something secret: *I know what he has got you for your birthday but my lips are*

lip-service to (something) to say that one believes in or agrees with (something) without really doing so and without acting as if one did: *She pays lip-service to feminism but she pays her female workers a lot less than her male*

my lips used by someone to emphasize that people should pay attention to what he or she is about to say: *Read my lips; I am*

never lending you my car again!

[many a skip 'twixt cup and lip](#) see

list

the lists to join in a contest or argument: My father and brother are arguing about holidays and my sister has now entered the

listen

[to \(someone or with only half an ear](#) see

litmus

[litmus test](#) something which assesses or demonstrates clearly what something is really like: *The gruelling early-morning training sessions are a litmus test of the commitment of the athletes to their*

[or knock the living daylights out of \(someone\)](#) to give (someone) a severe beating: *He'll knock the living daylights out of you if he finds out you lost him his*

and let live to get on with one's own life and let other people get on with theirs without interfering: I never complain about my I believe in live and let

[by one's wits](#) see

[from hand to mouth](#) see

[in sin](#) see

it up to have an enjoyable and expensive time: He was living it up on his trips at the firm's

[like a lord](#) see

[on one's nerves](#) see

[to tell the tale](#) see

[up to one's reputation](#) see

live wire an energetic, enthusiastic person: *She's a live wire who'll introduce new to a live electrical wire.>*

[living in a goldfish bowl](#) see

load

loaded question a question intended to lead someone into admitting to or agreeing with something when he or she does not wish to do so: *The accused was tricked into admitting his presence at the crime by a loaded question from the prosecuting to dice loaded or weighted so that they tend to always show the same score.>*

loaf

a loaf is better than no bread see

one's loaf to use one's brains, to think clearly: *He'll have to use his loaf if he is to do the navigating on our car*

lock

horns see

stock and barrel completely, with everything included: *They are moving overseas lock, stock and to the main components of a gun.>*

the stable door after the horse has bolted see

lock and key in a place which is locked for security: *She keeps her jewels under lock and*

log

as falling off a log see

like a log to sleep very soundly: *We slept like logs after our long*

loin

one's loins see

lone

lone wolf someone who prefers to be alone: *We asked him to join us on holiday but he went off somewhere by He's a real lone*

long

long shot see

or get long in the tooth see

the long bow see

back a long way see

[a long face](#) see

[come a long way](#) see

[long is a piece of string?](#) see

[the long run](#) in the end, after everything has been considered: *In the long run you would be better to buy a house than rent*

[a long lane that has no turning](#) see

long and the short of it the only thing that need be said, to sum the story up in a few words: *The long and the short of it is that she left*

[long arm of the law](#) see

[to have long for this world](#) see

look

askance at (someone or something) to regard with disapproval or distrust: *He always looked askance at the neighbour's offers of*

[before you leap](#) give careful consideration before you act: *Don't rush into changing Look before you*

[daggers at \(someone\)](#) see

[down one's nose at \(someone or something\)](#) see

down on (someone) to regard and treat (someone) as being inferior: *She looks down on people who work in*

in on (someone) to pay (someone) a brief visit, usually without prior notice or invitation: *I'll look in on the old lady on my way*

[sharp](#) see

[the other way](#) see

[the part](#) see

[to one's laurels](#) see

up (1) to improve: *Things are looking He's found a* (2) to pay (someone) a visit: *We decided to look you up as we were passing through your* (3) to find a definition: *I didn't know the word so I looked it up in the*

(someone) *up and down* to look at someone carefully and critically: *She looked him up and down and then said he wasn't suitable for the*

up to (someone) to regard (someone) with great respect or admiration: *He always looked up to his elder*

(someone) look small see

to get a look-in not to have a chance of winning, succeeding, being noticed, etc: *He entered the race but he didn't get a*

loop

or *throw (someone) for a loop* to to surprise or shock (someone) a great deal: *The unexpected job offer threw Jim for a*

of the loop not involved in, kept informed about, etc: *The ordinary members of the club are beginning to resent being left out of the loop when decisions are being made by the committee about new*

loose

a loose end see

loose to free oneself from the influence or power of (someone or something): *Sue has very domineering parents and she really needs to cut loose from them and start making her own*

loose used informally to suggest to someone that he or she try to relax and remain calm about something: *Hang loose—Alex is just trying to annoy you and start an argument!*

a screw loose see

the loose enjoying freedom and pleasure: *The girls from the boarding school were on the loose in the town at the originally to prisoners escaped from jail.>*

lord

as a lord extremely drunk: *He staggered home drunk as a*

like a lord to live in a rich and luxurious way: *He lives like a lord in a big house while his mother lives in a rented*

it over (someone) to act in a proud and commanding manner towards (someone): *He lords it over the poorer children in the*

lose

[a losing battle](#) see

[face](#) see

[ground](#) to lose one's advantage or strong position: *The political party is losing ground to its nearest*

[heart](#) see

[one's bottle](#) see

[one's cool](#) see

[one's edge](#) see

[one's grip](#) see

[one's head](#) see

[one's nerve](#) see

[one's rag](#) see

[one's touch](#) see

[one's way](#) see

out to suffer loss or disadvantage: *New workers lost out on the bonus*

[sleep over \(something\)](#) see

[the thread](#) see

[track of \(someone or something\)](#) see

cause an aim, ideal, etc, that cannot be achieved: *They are hopeful that the campaign to save the whale will not be yet another lost*

on (someone) not appreciated by or having no effect on

(someone): *The humour of the situation was lost on*

[a losing game](#) to go on with something that is obviously going to be unsuccessful: *The campaigners are still trying to stop the building of the new airport but they're playing a losing*

[the battle but lose the war](#) see

loss

one's losses not to spend any more time, money or effort on something on which one has already spent a lot to little benefit: *You've tried to help her and she's rejected It's time to cut your*

love

[labour of love](#) see

[for love nor money](#) not in any way at all: *We couldn't get a taxi for love nor*

no love lost between them hostile to each other: *They are brothers but there's no love lost between*

low

[or search high and low for \(someone or something\)](#) see

[a low profile](#) not to draw attention to oneself or one's actions or opinions: *She kept a low profile after the boss gave her a*

[\(someone\) low](#) see

[low](#) to stay quiet or hidden: *The criminals are lying low until the police hunt is called*

low-down information, especially of a secret or damaging nature: *The press have got hold of the low-down on the politician's*

lower

[your guard](#) see

luck

[on one's luck](#) experiencing misfortune: *He's helping a friend who's down on his*

[story](#) see

[one's luck](#) to risk failure by trying to gain too much: *He's pushing his luck by asking for yet more time*

[it lucky](#) to have good fortune: *The actor struck it lucky when he met a film director at a*

[pot-luck](#) see

one's lucky stars to be grateful for one's good fortune: *You should thank your lucky stars that you have a*
luck unfortunately: *We have to stay and work, worse*

lull

(someone) into a false sense of security to lead *(someone)* into thinking that all is well in order to attack when he or she is not prepared: *The workers were lulled into a false sense of security by the management's statement and then received their redundancy notices the following*

lunch

[legend in one's own lunchtime](#) see

[out to lunch](#) to be extremely foolish or crazy: *Grace must be out to lunch if she's lending Jill money; she'll never get it back!*

[no such thing as a free lunch](#) used to emphasize that everything has to be worked for or paid for in some way: *The politician said that he had not expected to be asked for any favours when he accepted the loan of the businessman's villa, but he must have known that there is no such thing as a free*

lumber

lumbered with (something) to be given an unwanted task or responsibility: *She's got lumbered with looking after the children all*

lump

it to put up with *(something)* whether one likes it or not: *I don't like the new arrangement but I can't change it and so I'll just have to lump*

lurch

[\(someone\) in the lurch](#) see

lute

[rift in the lute](#) see

luxury

[the lap of luxury](#) see

M

mackerel

[sprat to catch a mackerel](#) see

mad

[mad](#) see

[as a hatter](#) utterly insane, extremely foolish or eccentric: *The villagers thought the inventor of strange gadgets was mad as a used to involve the use of nitrate of mercury, exposure to which could cause a nervous illness which people thought was a symptom of insanity.>*

[as a March hare](#) insane, silly, extremely eccentric: *His neighbours regard him as being mad as a March hare because of the peculiar clothes he tend to leap around wildly in the fields during March, which is their breeding season.>*

maiden

speech the first speech made as a member of the British House of Commons: *The press were heavily critical of the politician's maiden*

voyage the first voyage undertaken by a ship: *The ship ran aground on its maiden*

main

[an eye to the main chance](#) see

[the mainbrace](#) see

[might and main](#) see

make

the making of (someone) to cause the improvement or successful development of (someone): *People said that being in the army would be the making of*

the makings of (something) to have the abilities or qualities necessary to become (something): *That young man has the makings of an excellent*

the making in the process of being formed or developed: Some of the members of the school debating society may be politicians in the a day or night of it to spend a whole day or night enjoying oneself in some way: *After dinner we decided to make a night of it and go to a*

[or pull a face](#) see

[a fool of \(someone\)](#) see

[a go of \(something\)](#) see

[a meal of \(something\)](#) see

[a name for oneself](#) see

[a pass at \(someone\)](#) see

[a play for \(someone or something\)](#) see

[a production of \(something\)](#) see

[a point of \(doing something\)](#) see

as if to (do something) to act as if one were about to (do something): *He made as if to hit*

[a stand against \(something\)](#) see

believe to pretend or imagine: *The children made believe that they were*

do with (something) to use (something) as a poor or temporary substitute for something: *The poor family had no carpet and had to make do with bare*

[eyes at \(someone\)](#) see

[good](#) see

[hay \(while the sun shines\)](#) see

[heavy weather of \(something\)](#) see

it (1) to be successful: *He was determined to make it before he was* (2) to arrive somewhere: *I will be at the meeting if I can*

make it in

it up to become friendly again after a quarrel: *The feuding families have made it*

light of (something) see

one's mark see

merry see

much of (someone or something) see

bringing either success or failure: *This is a make-or-break year for the*

one's peace with (someone) see

one's point see

the best of a bad job see

the grade see grade

the most of (something) see

tracks (for) see

up one's mind see

up to (someone) to flatter or try to please (someone) in order to gain favour. *The pupil made up to her teacher in the hope of getting a good*

one's way see

way (for someone or something) see

the make trying to make a profit for oneself: *Don't buy a car from He's always on the*

man

man of his word someone who always does as he has promised: *He'll be there if he said he would He's a man of his*

a marked man see

one's own man to be independent in one's actions, opinions, etc: *He's not his own man since he He simply agrees with what his wife*

man jack see

a man when he's down see

a sophisticated, fashionable man: *He likes football and beer but his brother's a*

[Friday](#) see

[of straw](#) a man who is considered to be of not much worth or substance: *He won't oppose the powerful members of the He is a man of*

to man frankly: *They need to talk man to man about their*

[man out](#) see

[man or woman](#) see

[man in the street](#) the ordinary, average person: *Politicians should pay more attention to the man in the*

[man of the moment](#) the person who is currently dealing with a situation: *The defence secretary is the man of the moment. He is taking part in talks to try to end the*

[man on the Clapham omnibus](#) see

a man everyone without exception: *The workers voted to a man to return to*

manger

[dog in the manger](#) see

manna

[from heaven](#) see

manner

[a manner of speaking](#) in a way, in a sense: *I suppose you could call him her guardian, in a manner of*

the manner born as if accustomed since birth to a particular way of behaviour, etc: *She comes from a poor family but she acts like an aristocrat to the manner* to a quotation from Shakespeare's

many

[had one too many](#) see

[hands make light work](#) see

[moons ago](#) see

map

(*somewhere*) *on the map* to cause (somewhere) to become well-known or important: *Finding gold there certainly put the town on the*

marble

marbles in one's mouth to speak with an upper-class accent: *Since she went to that school she sounds as though she has marbles in her*
one's marbles to become insane or senile: *The poor old man is losing his*

march

one's marching orders to be told to leave, to be dismissed: *She was given her marching orders for persistent late* to a military term.>

a march on (someone) to gain an advantage over (someone) by doing something earlier than expected: *We stole a march on them by launching our new product before they could launch a similar*
literally to moving an army unexpectedly while the enemy is resting.>

mare

mare's nest a supposed discovery of something, which turns out to be imaginary or completely different from what was expected: *The publicized new cure for cancer turned out to be a mare's*

marine

that to the marines I do not believe you: *You're working hard? Tell that to the* to the fact that sailors used to consider marines to be ignorant about the sea and so would believe anything they told them.>

mark

a marked man or *woman* to be in danger or trouble because people are trying to harm one: *He's a marked* *His wife's brother has just found out he's having an* <"Marked" means watched, as in sportand .>

or *wide of the mark* off the target or subject: *His guess was wide of the mark* to hitting the target in archery.>

up to the mark to reach the required or normal standard: *His work just isn't up to the*

mark to get started quickly on an undertaking: *If you want to buy his car you had better get off your mark* Someone else is to track events in athletics.>

the mark to be correct or accurate: *You certainly hit the mark when you said the house would be* to the target in archery.>

one's mark on (someone or something) to have an important and lasting effect on (someone or something): *As an actor he certainly left his mark on British*

one's mark to make oneself well-known, to make a lasting impression: *He wants to make his mark in the world of*

time see

the mark to do or say something which is unacceptable or offensive: *The pupil overstepped the mark when he called the art teacher by her Christian name in*

the mark quick to act: *You'll have to be quick off the mark if you want to get to the shop before it* literally to a runner starting quickly in a race.>

market

in the market for (something) to be interested in buying (something): *If you're selling your car you should contact Johnny; I know he's in the market for a second-hand*

marrow

or *frozen to the marrow* extremely cold: *We got chilled to the marrow waiting for the*

mass

masses the ordinary people, taken as a whole: *He wants to provide entertainment for the*

master

[master](#) see

[master](#) see

match

[shouting match](#) see *shout* a loud, angry discussion or argument about something: *Nothing was accomplished at the protest meeting in the village hall; it turned into a shouting*

[one's match](#) to find oneself against someone who has the ability to defeat one in a contest, argument or activity: *She has been winning the annual tennis match for years but she has met her match in that young*

[whole shooting match](#) see

matter

[hanging matter](#) see

[matter of life and or or death](#) something of great urgency, something that might involve loss of life: *Tell the doctor that it is a matter of life and*

a matter of course as part of a routine: *They'll clean your car as a matter of*

the matter be the problem, be what is wrong: *There is something the matter with this*

[laughing matter](#) see

meal

[a meal of \(something\)](#) to treat (something) as if it is more complicated or time-consuming than it is: *He's really making a meal of painting that*

[ticket](#) see

[meal](#) see

mean

[no mean feat](#) see

means

and means see

measure

good measure as something in addition to what is necessary: *He locked the door and for good measure put the chain*
(someone's) *measure* to have formed an impression or judgement of (someone): *You had his measure when you said he was not to be*

meat

meat and drink to (someone) be very important to (someone):
Reading is meat and drink to the old
man's meat is another man's poison people have different tastes: *I liked the film but you may* After all, *one man's meat is another man's*

Mecca

Mecca a place that is important to a certain group of people and is visited by them: *Liverpool is a Mecca for fans of the* to the birthplace of Mohammed to which Muslims make pilgrimages.>

medicine

dose or taste of one's own medicine see

medium

or a happy medium see

meet

(someone) halfway see

one's match see

one's Waterloo to be finally defeated: *The tennis champion met his Waterloo when he played the younger was defeated for the last time at Waterloo by Wellington.*>

melt

in the melting-pot to be in the process of changing: *The government's education policy is in the melting-pot* to melting down and reshaping metal.>

men

in (grey) suits see

mend

on the mend to be getting better: *He nearly died, but now he's on the*

said, soonest mended see

one's ways see

mercy

angel of mercy see

the mercy of (someone or something) wholly in the power or control of (someone or something): *The villagers are at the mercy of the cruel*

thankful for small mercies to be grateful for minor benefits or advantages in an otherwise difficult situation: *We have no meat or vegetables but we do have some Let's be thankful for small*

merry

merry to have a party, to have an enjoyable, entertaining time: *The students are making merry now that their exams are*

more the merrier see

message

the message to understand: *When he made cocoa his guests got the He wanted them to*

method

is method in his madness someone has a good, logical reason for acting as he does, although his actions seem strange or unreasonable: *We thought he was a fool to accept redundancy but the firm went bankrupt two months later. There was method in his reference to Shakespeare's Hamlet Act 2, scene ii.>*

mettle

one's mettle prepared to make a great effort: *You'd better be on your toes* The owner of the firm is making a tour of inspection

mickey, micky

to give someone a drink which has been drugged: *They gave him a Mickey Finn and kidnapped*

to make fun of or ridicule (someone): *The other pupils take the mickey out of her because of her*

Midas

Midas touch the ability to make money or be successful easily: *All his firms are extremely successful* He has the Midas touch to a Greek legend about a king of Phrygia whose touch turned everything to gold.>

middle

in the middle of nowhere see

(someone's) middle name see

moderate, midway between extremes: *His political views are*

midnight

to work or study until late at night: *The student had to burn the midnight oil to finish his*

might

and mighty see

might and main with maximum strength and power: *He rowed with might and main in the stormy*

mile

miss is as good as a mile see

miles away to be thinking about something else and so not concentrating on what is being said to you or what is going on around you: *Jack did say where he was But I didn't take it in; I was miles*

(someone) an inch and he or she will take a mile see

the extra mile to make a special effort and do more than you would usually do, more than you have been asked to do, etc, in order to achieve something: *Alan should pass his exams easily but, if he is prepared to go the extra mile and study harder, he could come*

recognize, etc, (someone or something) a mile off used to emphasize how easy it is to recognize or identify (someone or something) or how obvious (something) is: *I realized that Lisa was in the next I'd recognize her laugh a mile*

a very important event: *The discovery of anaesthetics was a milestone in medical* literally to a stone set at the edge of a road to indicate the number of miles to the next town, etc.>

a mile used to indicate the lengths to which someone would go to avoid something: *Jim would run a mile if Jane mentioned getting*
or stick out a mile to be extremely obvious: *It stuck out a mile that he was*

milk

land of milk and honey see
over spilt milk see

and water used to describe someone who is considered weak, ineffectual and lacking in personality: *Nora is so milk and water; she never expresses any opinions of her own and always agrees with her husband about*

milk of human kindness natural kindness and sympathy towards others: *He won't give anything to He's completely lacking in the milk of human* quotation from Shakespeare's Act 1, scene v.>

mill

millstone round one's neck a heavy burden or responsibility: *Our high mortgage is a millstone round our*
as a millpond extremely calm: *The sea was calm as a*
all grist to the or someone's mill see

through the mill to experience a series of difficult or troublesome events, tests or periods: *She's really been through the mill She's had one illness after the grinding of corn in a mill.>*

usual, not special: *They're wealthy but they live a run-of-the-mill kind of*

mills of God grind slowly (but they grind exceedingly small) the proper punishment or reward for someone's actions may be slow in coming but it will certainly come: His second wife has left him in the same way as he left his first The mills of God grind

million

in a million someone or something that is exceptionally good or special in some way: *The teacher is one in a She has helped many parents as well as*

mince

mincemeat of (someone or something) to defeat (someone) soundly, to destroy (something): The defence barrister made mincemeat of the prosecution's allegations against his

to mince matters to speak completely frankly without trying to be too kind: Her tutor didn't mince matters when he told her that her essay was very

mind

or go out of one's mind to be or become insane: *She must be out of her mind to go to live in that remote*

or keep (something) in mind see

(someone's) mind to amaze (someone), to excite (someone) greatly: The singer's performance really blew our

one's mind to enter one's mind briefly: *It crossed my mind that I hadn't seen him for a*

(someone) a piece of one's mind to scold or criticize (someone) angrily: *She gave the bus driver a piece of her mind for not*

gold mine see

minds think alike clever people tend to have the same ideas and opinions: *I see we both bought the same book for Great minds think alike!*

a good mind to (do something) to feel inclined to (do something):

I have a good mind to take the day

a mind of one's own to form one's own opinions, to be independent: *She won't vote for the party her husband tells her She has a mind of her*

a one-track mind see

half a mind to (do something) to feel slightly inclined to (do something): *I have half a mind to go and live in the*

one's right mind sane, rational: *Her family say that she cannot have been in her right mind when she signed the*

two minds undecided: *They're in two minds about moving*

an open mind see

up one's mind to reach a decision: *I can't make up my mind where to go on holiday this*

one's own business see

one's p's and q's see

to know one's own mind not to know what one really wants to do: *She doesn't know her own She can't decide where to*

of sight, out of mind see

of mind see

(someone) in mind of (someone or something) to remind (someone) of (someone or something): *She puts me in mind of her mother when she was that*

or set (someone's) mind at rest to free (someone) from anxiety and worry: *Call your mother and tell her that you're all right. It'll put her mind at*

one's mind to be temporarily forgotten: *I meant to phone you but it slipped my*

my mind in my opinion: *To my mind she would be better staying*
[weight off one's mind](#) see

mine

mine of information a rich or productive source of information: *The old man's a mine of information on local*

mint

mint condition used but in extremely good condition: *He'll buy your books only if they're in mint* the unused condition of a newly minted coin.>

minute

[to the minute](#) modern or fashionable: *He's up to the minute on information about* *She wears up-to-the-minute*

miscarriage

miscarriage of justice a mistaken verdict or decision in a court of law, etc: *The accused was released from jail after a* *The appeal court found that there had been a miscarriage of*

mischief

(oneself or someone) *a mischief* to hurt or harm (oneself or someone): *The child might do herself a mischief if she plays on that mischief* to cause trouble: *Her mother tried to make mischief between husband and*

misery

(someone) *out of his or her misery* to end a time of worry, anxiety or suspense for (someone): *Put the students out of their misery and give them their exam* a term for putting to death a wounded and suffering animal.>

miss

[miss is as good as a mile](#) if one fails at something it does not matter how close he or she came to succeeding: *He failed the exam by two marks but a miss is as good as a*
[near miss](#) see

(something) a miss not to go to or attend (something): *I think I'll give the party a*

[the boat](#) see

[missing a beat](#) see

mistake

no mistake without any doubt: *I was terrified and no*

mix

[mixed blessing](#) see

[bag](#) see

Mohammed

[the mountain will not come to Mohammed, then Mohammed must go to the mountain](#) see

moment

one's moments to have times of success, happiness: *She may live a boring life now but she's had her*

[a weak moment](#) see

for a moment not at all: *I didn't for one moment believe*

[the spur of the moment](#) see

[man of the moment](#) see

moment of truth a crucial time, a time when one has to make an important decision, face a crisis, etc: *It was the moment of She had to decide whether to marry him or*

money

[licence to print money](#) see

[run for \(someone's\) money](#) see

in the money to be well off, sometimes temporarily: *Let him pay for He's in the money for*

[right on the money](#) to be completely right: *Mark was right on the money when he said that Paul was a*

my money in my opinion, as my choice: *For my money I'd rather live in the city than the one would spend one's money on.*>

money to burn to have enough money to be able to spend it in ways considered foolish: *She must have money to burn if she can afford clothes like*

for jam or old rope to money obtained in exchange for very little work, effort, etc: *She gets paid very highly for writing two reports a*
It's money for slang.>

or distance, etc, is no object see

talks rich people have influence simply because they have money: *The local council should not alter their plans because of the local landowners, but money*

for love nor money see

one's money where one's mouth is to give money for a cause or purpose which one claims to support: *She is in favour of a new library being built but she won't put her money where her mouth is and contribute to the building*

money like water to to spend money very freely: *When he received his redundancy pay the family spent money like*

smart money is on (something) used to describe an event or situation which is very likely to take place: *The result of the election is likely to be close, but the smart money is on the current MP retaining his* money is used to refer to people who know a lot about investment, business deal, etc.>

good money after bad to spend money in an unsuccessful attempt to retrieve money which one has already lost: *Borrowing thousands of pounds from the bank to try to make that firm profitable is simply throwing good money after*

money at (something) to spend a lot of money on something, when this will not necessarily help, rather than spend time and

effort on solving the problem or improving the situation by more helpful means: *The government is being accused of throwing money at the health service instead of identifying what's*

[pays your money and you takes your choice](#) used to indicate the difficulty or impossibility of deciding which of two choices is the right one: *Both of those universities have excellent reputations; you pays your money and you takes your*

monkey

[a monkey on your back](#) to have a serious, long-lasting problem which makes your life unpleasant or unsuccessful: *Jim has a lot of debts and they're a real monkey on his back; after he's made his monthly loan payments he has hardly any money left to live business action likely to cause trouble, illegal or unfair activities: There seems to have been some monkey business in the accounts to give a monkey's not to care at all: He says he doesn't give a monkey's whether he gets the sack or*

[to the organ grinder, not his monkey](#) see organ

month

[month of Sundays](#) an extremely long time: *You'll never finish that piece of work in a month of*

[of the month](#) see

Monty

full Monty used to indicate that something is absolutely complete or comprehensive or that it contains everything that is usually involved in such an activity or situation: *Apparently, Pam's wedding's going to be the full Monty—a long white dress for the bride, morning dress for the men, four bridesmaids in matching satin and so*

moon

or *cry for the moon* [to](#) to ask for something that it is impossible to get: *The young woman is looking for a well-paid and*

*undemanding job but hasn't any She is crying for the
a moonlight (flit) to move away suddenly: They did a moonlight flit
to avoid paying the*

[in a blue moon](#) see

[moons ago](#) a very long time ago, sometimes used as a humorous
exaggeration: *John and I first met at university many moons
the moon extremely happy: They were over the moon to hear that
they had passed their*

[\(someone\) the moon](#) to make promises that have little hope of
ever being realised: *That photographer has promised Julie the moon
by telling her that her portfolio will make her*

moral

*support encouragement but not actual physical, financial, etc, help:
Her parents could not afford to give her money to help with her
college studies but they gave her their moral*

[the moral high ground](#) see

more

[more the merrier](#) the more people that are involved the better:
Come and join our outing to the It'll be fun—the more the

morning

*morning after the night before a morning when one is suffering
from a hangover caused by drinking too much alcohol the night
before: He looked absolutely terrible at this morning's It was
obviously a case of the morning after the night*

most

[the most of \(something\)](#) to take maximum advantage of (an
opportunity, occasion, etc): *Make the most of your last university
You won't get such a long holiday*

moth

[a moth to a flame](#) used to describe someone who finds someone
or something irresistibly attractive, even although the person or

thing might cause them harm or trouble: *Harry is a rogue and a womanizer, and yet women are drawn to him like moths to a mother*

[mother's or mummy's boy](#) a boy or man who depends too much on his mother; a weak, effeminate boy or man: *He's such a mother's boy that he probably won't marry till his mother*
milk something that one needs or enjoys very much: *Modern novels are mother's milk to*
[father and mother of](#) see

motion

through the motions to make a show of doing something, to pretend to do something: *I'm bored stiff but I'll have to go through the motions of enjoying*
[the wheels in motion](#) see

mould

[in the same mould as \(someone\)](#) to have the same good qualities or talents as (someone): *Have you heard Joan sing? We all think that she is in the same mould as Maria*

[the mould](#) to do something in a completely new and better way: *Many people say that the Beatles broke the mould of popular*
in the same mould (as someone) very similar (to someone): *She's cast in the same mould as her* They're both to the iron-working process.>

broke the mould when they made (someone) used to emphasize how special or exceptional someone is: *Kate was a wonderfully understanding and compassionate woman; they broke the mould when they made*

mountain

[a mountain to climb](#) used to emphasize how difficult it is going to be for someone to do or achieve something and how much effort

will be needed: *Sam has not had very much driving practice; he has a mountain to climb if he is going to pass his test first*

[the mountain will not come to Mohammed, then Mohammed must go to the mountain](#) a saying which indicates that if someone whom you want to see cannot or is unwilling to come to you, then you should make the effort to go to him or her: *Jane Wilson has just unexpectedly won a prestigious book prize and I wanted to interview her in the office, but, apparently, she lives in the heart of the country and can't Ah well, if the mountain won't come to Mohammed, then Mohammed must go to the* Often shortened to *if the mountain will not come to* it being assumed that the rest of the saying will be understood. It is also found in the form of *Mohammed must go to the* to a story about Mohammed in which he is asked to demonstrate his power by getting Mount Safa to come to him. When this did not happen, Mohammed is supposed to have said the words which form the saying.>

a mountain out of a molehill greatly to exaggerate the extent of a problem, etc: *It's not a very complicated She's just making a mountain out of a*

[mountains](#) to achieve something that seems impossible or extremely difficult: *The child is very ill, but his mother is praying for him and she believes that prayers can move*

mouse

as a church mouse [to](#) extremely poor: *Tom was poor as a church mouse when he first arrived in town, but now he owns a chain of*
as a mouse extremely quiet: *Her mother told the little girl to be quiet as a mouse while the baby was*

mouth

[all mouth and trousers](#) to talk a lot about doing something but never actually do it: *Tim's been saying for ages that he's going to*

get a loan from the bank and open his own small printing business, but he's all mouth and

[in the dumps or down in the mouth](#) see

[at the mouth](#) see

a big mouth to talk a lot, especially about things, such as secrets, that one should not: She told him where we're She's got a big

[a plum in one's mouth](#) see

[a nasty taste in the mouth](#) see

[of the mouths of babes and sucklings](#) used when a child says something that is surprisingly adult, true, wise, etc: *Jill's young son said that his father must like his secretary very much to spend so much time with* *Out of the mouths of babes and sucklings!*

[one's money where one's mouth is](#) see

[words into \(someone's\) mouth](#) see

[one's mouth off](#) to talk in a loud and often boastful or threatening manner: *He was shooting his mouth off about what he would do if he didn't get a pay*

[one's mouth water](#) used to emphasize how delicious something smells or looks: *Mum's making chocolate cake and the anticipation is making my mouth I can't wait for it to be ready!*

move

a move on to hurry: We had better get a move on or we'll miss the

[the first move](#) to be the person who acts first, especially in a situation where two people are romantically or sexually attracted to each other: *Sam and Laura have been sitting looking longingly each other all night, but both of them are too shy to make the first*

[heaven and earth](#) see

[in for the kill](#) see

[mountains](#) see

[the goalposts](#) see

to be able to move for used to emphasize how much of something there is or how many people there are: *Please don't give the children toys for Christmas; we can't move for toys in this mover*

movers and shakers refers to people with power and influence: *Mr Brown and Mr Black were the movers and shakers of their* derives from the poem "Ode" by Arthur O'Shaughnessy (1844–81), "We are the movers and shakers of the world forever".>

much

much of (someone or something) to pay (someone or something) a great deal of attention: *Their grandmother always makes much of the*

much of (something) to treat (something) as being of great importance: *They made much of the fact that I was late, although it was only by a few*

ado about nothing a great fuss about something very minor: *The boy only broke a very small window but the owner sent for the It was a case of much ado about Shakespeare's play of the same name.>*

of a muchness very similar: *The houses we looked at were much of a We're still*

much of a (something) not a very good (something): *She's not much of a*

to think much of (someone or something) see

up to much not very good: *The holiday hotel was not up to*

so much as without even: *They left suddenly without so much as saying*

muck

in to join in a task, etc: *If we all muck in we should finish by this army slang.>*

searching for scandalous information, usually with the intention of publishing it: *The Sunday newspaper was accused of muck-raking because of its attempt to discredit the new*

there's muck there's brass where there is dirt and ugliness in a place there is often industry and so wealth: *The boy objected to the ugly factory chimneys but his grandfather said, "Where there's muck there's*

mud

[as mud](#) see

[\(someone/someone's reputation\) through the mud](#) to damage (someone or someone's reputation) by saying bad things about him/her: *Some of the tabloids dragged her reputation through the mud by saying that she had been involved in a drugs scandal and now she is suing them for*

[mud in your eye!](#) a rather old-fashioned drinking toast to wish someone well: *This beer looks Here's mud in your eye!*

[sticks](#) used to indicate that, if something bad is said about someone, some people are likely to believe this and to go on believing it, even if it is not at all true or if it has been disproved: *The young man was cleared of the charge of theft and someone else was convicted, but mud sticks and he's still finding it difficult to get a*

[the waters](#) see

[name is mud](#) (someone) is in disfavour or is being criticized: *Your name will be mud if you don't go to her*

or *throw mud at (someone or something)* to say bad or insulting things about (someone or something): *The candidates in the election kept slinging mud at each*

see

mug

mug's game something that only foolish people would involve themselves in: *He has decided that marriage is a mug's*

mule

as a mule extremely stubborn: *The old lady is stubborn as a mule and will not accept help with her*

multitude

a multitude of sins to be able to apply or refer to a large number of different things: *In an office the term personal assistant can cover a multitude of* misquotation from the Bible, I Peter shall cover the multitude of sins".>

mum

mum to stay silent: *He was told to keep mum if anyone questioned him about the*

the word do not say anything: *We're planning a surprise party for her, so mum's the*

mummy

boy same as mother's boy see

murder

away with murder to do something bad, irresponsible, etc, without suffering punishment: *When their mother's away their father lets the children get away with*

could murder (something) used to indicate that you would very much like to have (something) to eat or drink: *It's so hot I could murder a glass of cold white*

blue murder *to* to scream extremely loudly: *Another child took her favourite toy and my daughter screamed blue*

muscle

one's muscles to act in a way which indicates that one has power and is contemplating using it: *The unions are showing signs of flexing their muscles, but the government is refusing to give in to any of their*

music

music to one's ears used to indicate that one is very pleased to hear something: *News of the increase in salary was music to my ears*
the music see

mustard

as mustard very eager and enthusiastic: *The trainee chef is keen as mustard*
cut the mustard not to be able to do or achieve something; not be good enough: *We auditioned several young women for the part, but not one of them cut the mustard*

muster

muster to be considered good enough: *We interviewed dozens of candidates for the post but none of them passed muster*
together of people in the armed services in order to make sure that their dress and equipment are in good order.>

mutton

dressed as lamb an older person, usually a woman, dressed in clothes more suitable for young people: *She thinks she looks very smart but she's mutton dressed as lamb*

N

n

the nth degree see

nail

nail in (someone's) coffin something which helps to bring about (someone's) downfall or destruction: *The customer's complaint about him was yet another nail in his coffin, and he was*

as nails see

the nail on the head to be extremely accurate in one's description, judgement, etc, of someone or something: *She certainly hit the nail on the head when she said he was*

(someone) to the wall see

one's colours to the mast see

(something) *on the nail* to pay (something) immediately: *He always pays his account on the*

name

name to conjure with see

(someone's) middle name used to emphasize how typical of someone something is: *I'm not surprised to hear that Helen did not tell the Liar is her middle*

(someone) *names* to apply insulting or rude names to (someone): *The other children called him names because he wore second-hand*
(someone's) *name* to prove that (someone) was not involved in a crime or misdeed of which he or she was accused: *He finally cleared his name by finding the real*

(someone or something) *a bad name* to damage the reputation of (someone or something): *All these complaints about late deliveries are giving the firm a bad*

name only not in practice: They're man and wife in name They don't live

[a name for oneself](#) to become famous or well-known: *She's already made a name for herself as a*

the habit of mentioning the names of famous or important people as though they were friends: She was trying to impress us by name-dropping but it was just

[name is mud](#) see

names to give the names of people, especially people who are guilty or accused of wrong-doing: The children are being bullied but they are afraid of naming

[the day](#) see

[names, no pack-drill](#) no names will be mentioned and so no one will get into trouble: *If the damage is repaired there will be no names, no* <“Pack-drill” refers to a form of army punishment in which the soldiers being punished were forced to march up and down carrying all their equipment.>

[name of the game](#) the important or central thing: *Persistence, that's the name of the game in*

[\(someone's\) name in vain](#) see

[name is legion](#) see

one's name in one's possession or ownership: He has scarcely a penny to his

of the name deserving to be so called: Any teacher worthy of the name would punish the

nap

[\(someone\) napping](#) see

narrow

[narrow squeak](#) see

[straight and narrow \(path\)](#) see

nasty

nasty piece of work to someone who is very unpleasant or behaves very unpleasantly: *Try not to argue with He's a really nasty piece of*
[a nasty taste in the mouth](#) see

native

native to live according to the customs, fashions, etc, of the foreign country in which one is living: *Although she's only been in India a short time she has gone native and wears a*

nature

[or obey the call of nature](#) see

[nature](#) see

[nature of the beast](#) the basic typical feature or quality of someone or something: *The illness got worse extremely quickly, but that is the nature of the*

navel

[one's navel](#) to be more concerned with oneself and one's own activities and problems than with other, often more important, problems: *The bosses seem to sit around contemplating their navels rather than thinking about what is going to happen to the large workforce if the company is taken*

near

[near miss](#) something unpleasant that very nearly happened, often referring to the near collision of two planes in the sky: *The chimney fell to the ground just beside It was a near*

[near thing](#) the act of just avoiding an accident, misfortune, etc: *We arrived at the station on time but it was a near*

nearest and dearest one's close family: *Even her nearest and dearest criticize*

neck

[millstone round one's neck](#) see

[pain in the neck](#) see

in (something) up to one's neck to be very much involved in something bad or illegal: *The police were convinced that he was up to his neck in*

down (someone's) neck see

it in the neck to be severely scolded or punished: *You'll get it in the neck if you're not home by*

the brass neck to (do something) to have the impertinence or brazenness to (do something): *She had the brass neck to expect us to pay for her cinema*

and neck exactly equal: *The two football teams were neck and neck at the end of the*

one's neck to put one's life, job, etc, in danger: *Firemen risk their necks to save other*

one's neck out to take a risk, or to do or say something that may cause trouble: *I know I'm sticking my neck out but hasn't your husband had too much to drink?*

or that, etc, neck of the woods this or that, etc, part of the country: *Why did you come to this neck of the woods?* a term for a remote community in the woods of the early 19th-century American frontier.>

need

must when the devil drives see

needful money: *We don't have the needful to pay the*

needle

looking for a needle in a haystack an impossible search: *Looking for a contact lens on this carpet is like looking for a needle in a*

pins and needles see

nelly

on your nelly! an informal, humorous way of expressing an emphatic negative: *Am I going to offer to work overtime? Not on your nelly!*

nerve

of nerves see

on (someone's) nerves to irritate (someone): His constant whistling gets on my

a nerve to be impertinent or brazen: They had the nerve to ask us for another loan when they still owed us

on one's nerves to be worried and anxious all the time: *Pam was badly abused as a teenager and she has been inclined to live on her nerves ever*

one's nerve to become scared, and so be unable to continue with an activity or course of action: *The diver lost his nerve on the high*

a nerve to refer to something about which someone feels particularly sensitive: *You touched a nerve when you mentioned drink-driving in front of Dave; he's just lost his licence for a*

of nerves a situation in which two opponents or enemies use psychological means, for example by frightening or threatening the other side, rather than by direct action: *At present, the hostility between the two nations is confined to a war of nerves but a full-scale military war cannot be ruled*

nest

cuckoo in the nest see

mare's nest see

nest-egg savings for the future: *She had to spend her nest-egg to pay her son's*

one's nest see

the nest to leave one's parental home and go and live elsewhere: Wendy couldn't wait to leave the nest and share a flat with friends, but she misses the comforts of

your own nest to do something which could have a bad effect on your own interests, activities or relationships: David has had several extra-marital affairs before, but always away from This time he's

fouling his own nest by having a girlfriend who lives a few houses away from him and his

net

one's net wide to to involve a large number of people or things, or a large area: We really want to get an exceptional person for this job and so we must cast our net wide when it comes to advertising through the net not to be found or identified: The welfare system is meant to help all those in financial need, but there are still many who slip through the net and don't have enough money to live

nettle

the nettle to set about an unpleasant or difficult task in a firm and determined manner: You must grasp the nettle and tell her that her work is not up to

never

land an imaginary land where conditions are ideal: They live in a never-never land and don't seem to realize how bad their financial situation to the idealized land in J M Barrie's play Peter the never-never by hire purchase: They're buying their furniture on the

new

whole new ball game see

blood see

broom someone who has just been appointed to a post and who is eager to be efficient, make changes, etc: Our office system works very well but the new manager is a new broom who wants to revolutionize the whole the saying "a new broom sweeps clean", a new broom being more effective than the old one.>

new see

new heart into (someone) see

new kid on the block see

over a new leaf see

news

the news to (someone) to tell (someone) about something, usually something unpleasant or sad, that has happened: *The policewoman had to break the news of her son's fatal road accident to*
news is good news if one has not received any information about someone or something then all is likely to be well, since if something bad, such as an accident, had happened one would have heard: *Our son is very late, but no news is good He's probably just been delayed on the*

news to me! used to indicate one's lack of knowledge about a piece of information and often also one's surprise, annoyance, etc: "Apparently, we are moving to new offices next "Well, that's news to me and I'm the one who'll have to organize the move!"

next

door to (something) very nearly (something): *Her recent actions have been next door to*

to nothing almost nothing, very little: *The second-hand furniture cost next to*

niche

a niche for oneself to succeed in creating a secure job or position for oneself or for something: *Rita has carved out a niche for herself as unofficial town historian and she's written several booklets about*

nick

good or poor nick in good or poor condition: *The car is in good nick for its*

the nick of time just in time, at the last possible time: *We arrived in the nick of time to save him from*

night

one-night stand see

a night owl to be in the habit of staying up late out of preference: *It's all right to ring Stella after midnight; she's a real*

night

nine

[nine days' wonder](#) something that arouses surprise and interest for a short time only: *His marriage to a much younger girl was a nine days' wonder* to a saying quoted by Chaucer—"Where is no wonder so great that it lasts more than nine days".>

[stitch in time saves nine](#) see

[to the nines](#) see

ninepins

down like ninepins (skittles) to become ill or damaged, or to be killed or destroyed rapidly, one after the other: *We may have to close the hospital because the medical staff are going down like ninepins with the flu bug that's going*

nineteen

[nineteen to the dozen](#) see

nip

(something) in the bud to put a stop or end to (something) as soon as it develops: *Her father tried to nip the romance in the bud by sending her to college in*

nit

down to the nitty-gritty to begin to deal with the basic practical details, problems, etc: *It's time to get down to the nitty-gritty and discuss the funding of the*

the act of finding very minor faults in something, quibbling: *He ignores all the major issues and spends his time to picking nits out of hair.*>

no

[no joke](#) see

[no picnic](#) see

end of (something) a great deal of (something): *There will be no end of trouble if the boss finds*

go unsuccessful, in vain: *We applied for planning permission but it was no*

holds barred see

pain, no gain see

time at all see

way under no circumstances: *There's no way that we'll get there in*

no prisoners see

noble

savage a primitive person brought up in primitive surroundings, thought of as being less corrupt, more worthy, more innocent, etc, than people brought up in a more civilized environment: *The explorer was a great believer in the concept of the noble savage and eventually went to live in the* a quotation by John Dryden, the English dramatist, and a theory developed by Jean Jacques Rousseau, the French philosopher.>

nobody

nobody's fool see

nobody's business very rapidly, energetically, etc: *We worked like*

nobody's business to finish the job in

nod

nod is as good as a wink to a blind horse to a hint is often all that is necessary to communicate thoughts or feelings: *The boss didn't tell me directly that he was dissatisfied with my work but I guessed from something he said; a nod is as good as a wink to a blind*

or *get the nod* to give or be given permission or approval for something: *We've been waiting ages for planning permission to build a new house and we've now been given the*

through on the nod of a proposal, to be passed by general agreement without having to be debated or voted on: *The proposal*

to hold a party for disadvantaged children was raised at a council meeting and went through on the [a nodding acquaintance with \(someone or something\)](#) to know (someone or something) slightly: *I have a nodding acquaintance with the history of the* to knowing someone well enough to nod in greeting to him or her.>

off to fall asleep, sometimes accidentally: *His lecture was so boring that the students nodded*

[land of Nod](#) sleep: *It's time the children were in the land of* to a place mentioned in the Bible in Genesis 4:16, and to the fact that nodding is associated with falling asleep.>

noise

noise an important person: *The big noises on the board are looking round the factory*

[vessels make most noise](#) see

[all the right noises](#) to say things which are considered the right response to a particular situation or the things which someone wants to hear: *I think I made all the right noises at the interview, but I won't know until tomorrow if I got the noises to talk about something, such as possible action, in an indirect or vague way: The council has been making noises about putting up a new pedestrian crossing in the high street, but they've been doing that for*

none

[none the worse](#) see

[the wiser](#) see

too not very: *He looks none too*

nook

nook and cranny absolutely everywhere: *We searched in every nook and cranny of the house for the last* in all the corners and cracks.>

nose

off one's nose to spite one's face to to do something that harms oneself, usually in order to harm someone else: *Refusing to work overtime because you quarrelled with your boss is cutting off your nose to spite your* You need the extra

one's nose to go straight forward: *You'll reach the village if you follow your nose all the way from*

up (someone's) nose to annoy or irritate (someone): Joan really gets up my nose; she's always boasting about her

a nose around to have a good look around a place, usually out of curiosity and when one is not supposed to be doing so: *Alice is supposed to be going into Mark's flat just to feed the cat while he's away, but I'm sure she'll have a nose*

a nose for (something) to have a talent or ability for finding or noticing something: *I'm taking Barry to the furniture auction with me; he has a nose for*

one's nose clean see

(one's or someone's) nose to the grindstone to keep (someone) working hard without stopping: *I'll have to keep my nose to the grindstone to finish this in*

(someone) by the nose to get (someone) to do whatever one wants: *He leads the other children in the class by the* to the ring on a bull's nose.>

down one's nose at (someone or something) to regard or treat (someone or something) with disdain or contempt: *She looks down her nose at people from the council housing*

parker someone who is too inquisitive about other people's affairs: *I'm tired of that nosey parker asking where I'm*

skin off my, etc, nose see

the nose exactly: *They arrived at six o'clock on the nose. That comes to £20 on the*

through the nose to pay a great deal of money for something:

You'll pay through the nose for a house in that

one's nose into (something) to pry into or interfere in other

people's affairs: I wish she'd stop poking her nose into my mother's

to the actions of a dog.>

one's nose a euphemism, sometimes used by women, meaning to

go to the toilet: *I must just powder my nose before we leave for the*

(someone's) nose out of joint to to make (someone) jealous or

offended by taking a place usually held by him or her, for

example in the affections of a person whom he or she loves: *The*

teenager's nose has been put out of joint by the new baby in the to

a person whose nose has been broken by being hit in the face.>

(someone's) nose in it to keep on reminding (someone) about

something he or she has done wrong: *I know I shouldn't have lent*

him money but there's no need to rub my nose in to rubbing a

dog's nose in its faeces with the intention of house-training it.>

further than the end of one's nose to be concerned with more than

just what is happening in the immediate present and in the

immediate vicinity: *He can't see further than the end of his nose, so*

he doesn't give any thought to how his children will feel about

leaving all their friends if he and his wife decide to

one's nose at (someone or something) see

up one's nose at (something) to treat (something) with dislike or

disgust: *The child was used to sophisticated food and turned up his*

nose at fish

(someone's) (very) nose (1) right in front of (someone) and so

easily seen: *The book which I couldn't find had been right under my*

nose all the (2) while (someone) is actually present: *She stole my*

suitcase from under my very

not

not on see

note

note famous or important: *They want someone of note to open the new*

the right note to to say or do something suitable for the occasion: *The clothes which the princess wore struck just the right note at the children's sports to playing a musical instrument.>*

nothing

to nothing to fail: *His plans to start his own business came to for nothing to be wasted or unsuccessful: All our efforts to save the old building went for*

nothing between the ears see

nothing on (someone) (1) not to be nearly as good, skilful, bad, etc, as (someone): *She may have a quick temper but I bet she has nothing on my* (2) to have no proof or evidence of (someone's) wrong doing: *The police have nothing on him, so they can't arrest nothing to do with (someone or something) to avoid contact with (someone or something): They have had nothing to do with each other since their*

to nothing see

to write home about see to

ventured, nothing gained to one cannot achieve anything if one does not make an attempt or take a risk: *It's not a good time to open a small business but there again, nothing ventured, nothing*

at nothing see

nothings see

is nothing to choose between (people or things) there is hardly any difference in quality, ability, etc, between (people or things): *Either of the candidates will do for the There's nothing to choose between them in qualifications or*

nothing to it it is very easy: *I'm sure that you can assemble the furniture yourself. There's nothing to*

nothing of (something) not to regard (something) as out of the ordinary, difficult, etc: *She thinks nothing of driving hundreds of miles every weekend to see her*

nothing of it do not worry about it. It does not matter: "I'm sorry that I took your coat by mistake." "Think nothing of it."

nowhere

in the middle of nowhere be in a place which is a long way away from a town or city, a lot of people, etc, often carrying the suggestion that the place is boring: *We used to live in London, but our parents decided they were tired of city life and brought us to live in this village in the middle of*

nowhere to make no progress, to have no success: *I tried to explain my difficulty to the passport office but I got absolutely near not nearly: They've nowhere near enough money to put a deposit on a*

nuclear

nuclear to become extremely angry: *Mum's going to go nuclear when she sees that stain on her white*

nudge

nudge, wink, wink used to indicate that there is some form of sexual innuendo or hidden reference in something that has been said: *I'm sure that Flora and Paul will find plenty of opportunities for après-ski activity on their holiday (nudge, nudge, wink, into common use influenced by a sketch by Eric Idle in the BBC TV series Monty Python's Flying*

number

number see

etc) days are numbered see

or have (someone's) number to find out or know what kind of person (someone) is and what he or she is likely to do: *I've got his He's a con-man who's trying to get money out of my*

penny numbers see

number is up (someone) is about to suffer something unpleasant, such as dying, failing, being punished, being caught, etc: *He has been stealing from the firm for years but his number is* The manager is conducting an

one oneself: *For once I must think of number*

opposite number see

safety in numbers see

nut

hard nut to crack to a difficult problem or person to deal with: *I don't know how we'll get there by public* That's a hard nut to nuts about (someone or something) to like (someone or something) a very great deal, to be wildly enthusiastic about (someone or something): *He's nuts about*

one's nut to get very angry: *The teacher will do her nut if you're late*

nuts to become extremely angry: *Beth will go nuts if I'm late* a nutshell briefly, to sum up: *The trial went on for days, but in a nutshell he was*

nuts and bolts of (something) the basic details or practicalities of (something): *He wants to buy a pub but he knows nothing whatsoever about the nuts and bolts of running a*

o

oak

[oaks from little acorns grow](#) a saying used to emphasize that even large and important things often begin in a small way: *Don's grandfather had a bookstall in the local market and later he became the owner of a whole chain of Great oaks from little acorns*

oar

[or stick one's oar in](#) to interfere in another's affairs, conversation, e.g. by offering unwanted opinions: *They would have settled their argument if she had not stuck her oar* refers to someone who is being rowed in a boat by others and who suddenly decides to take part in the rowing unasked.>

[on one's oars](#) to take a rest after working very hard: *After their exams, the students are resting on their oars before they start looking for holiday to rowing.*>

oat

one's oats not feeling well and so not eating much: *I've been off my oats ever since I had flu last of horses.*>

[one's wild oats](#) see

object

[distance, etc, is no object](#) it does not matter how much money, distance, etc, is involved in the particular situation: *The delivery service says that distance is no object in their "money is no object"* meant money or profits were not the main aim, but it came to be misapplied.>

occasion

[to the occasion](#) to be able to carry out whatever action is required in an important or urgent situation: *The child had never played the*

piano in public before but he rose to the

ocean

[drop in the ocean same as a drop in the bucket](#) see

odd

all the odds in spite of major difficulties: *Driving conditions were terrible but against all the odds we arrived in*

at odds with (someone or something) to be in disagreement with (someone or something), not to be in accordance with

(something): *His work performance is at odds with his brilliant*

[odds](#) to bet: *I'll lay odds that he won't turn to betting on horses.>*

no odds to be of no importance, to make no difference: *It makes no odds whether it rains or The party is*

[man out](#) someone or something that is different from others: *He's the odd man out in the He doesn't have black to someone left out of a game when the teams have been chosen.>*

and ends small objects of different kinds: *All our holiday packing is done apart from odds and ends such as*

and sods a mixed selection of people or things not considered important: *I knew most of the people at the party but there were a few odds and sods that I didn't*

[the odds](#) more than one would usually expect to pay: *The restaurant charges over the odds in the tourist to a betting term.>*

odour

odour of sanctity an air of excessive piety or virtue: *There's such an odour of sanctity about her that he's afraid to ask her*

bad odour in disfavour: *He's in bad odour with management for supporting the* a French term for the sweet smell reputed to be given off by the corpses of saints as opposed to the unpleasant smell from other corpses.>

off

[bets are off](#) see

or well off see *bad* or

off to begin to dislike (someone or something previously liked):

She went off cheese when she was

the offing about to or likely to happen, appear, etc: *He doesn't have a job yet but there are one or two in the* nautical term—refers to the whole area of sea that can be seen from a particular point on shore.>

the off season the time when a hotel or holiday resort has very few visitors: *The seaside town is very busy in the summer but very quiet in the off*

and on or on and off occasionally: *We've met for lunch off and on over the*

the off chance when there is a slight chance that something might happen: *I went to her house on the off chance that she was*

the cuff see

the hook see

the peg see

the rails see

the record see

the top of one's head see

the wall see

the off-chance (of or that) see

(someone) off his or her stroke see

oil

no oil painting to be not at all attractive: *George has had some very beautiful girlfriends over the years, but the woman he is about to marry is no oil*

the midnight oil see

and water used to emphasize how different two people or things are: *Sara and Kate are sisters and look quite alike, but, in personality, they are oil and*

the wheels to make something easier to do or obtain: *She got a visa quite knowing someone at the embassy oiled the turn more easily if oil is applied to them.*>

oil on troubled waters to to attempt to bring a state of calm and peace to a situation of disagreement or dispute: *When the children quarrel their mother always tries to pour oil on troubled oil floats on water it has the effect of making waves flat.*>

oil to obtain exactly what one wants, to be successful: *We've never found a comfortable holiday house but this year we struck*

ointment

fly in the ointment see

old

old hand someone who is very experienced (at doing something): *She's an old hand at serving in a*

old how see

ripe old age see

for old rope see

as the hills extremely old: *Some of the village traditions are old as the*

hat old-fashioned, no longer popular: *His ideas are considered old hat*

old maid a woman who has never married: *She was so frightened of being an old maid that she married the first man that proposed to*

master (a work by) any great painter before the 19th century, especially of the 15th and 16th centuries: *The art gallery has had to improve its security as several old masters have been stolen*

boy or girl a former pupil of a school: *That well-known actor is an old boy of our*

old-boy network a system in which jobs and other advantages are obtained on the basis of knowing the right people rather than on

ability or worth: *His father got him a job in a bank although he's hopeless with It was obviously a case of the old-boy* basic connection with such people is often that they were at school together.>

old country the country from which an immigrant or his or her parents or grandparents originally came: *The Swedish farmer enjoyed his new life in the USA, but his wife would often think about the old*

[old guard](#) the older members of a group who are old-fashioned in their opinions and tastes: *The old guard in the club voted against having women* translation of the name applied to the most experienced section of Napoleon's army.>

olive

branch a sign of a wish for peace: *He had a bitter quarrel with his wife then sent her a huge bouquet of flowers as an olive olive branch was an ancient symbol of peace.>*

omelette

[can't make an omelette without breaking eggs](#) a saying indicating that it is impossible to achieve something worthwhile without causing a few problems or difficulties: *It is unfortunate that the proposed new road goes through an area of natural beauty, but you can't make an omelette without breaking*

omnibus

[man on the Clapham omnibus](#) a term used in legal courts to mean the ordinary person: *The man on the Clapham omnibus is unlikely to visit an exhibition of ultra-modern*

on

[on line](#) see

[not on](#) used to indicate emphatic disapproval of or lack of acceptance of something: *The pupil's behaviour is just not on; he will have to be*

on to (someone) having discovered some previously secret or unknown information about (someone) or his or her activities: *The police are on to his*

[on stream](#) see

[and off](#) see

once

(someone or something) the once-over to look at or study (someone or something) quickly: *I know that you're in a hurry but would you give this report the once-over?*

and for all now and for the last time, finally: *Once and for all I am telling you to*

[in a blue moon](#) see

[only young once](#) see

one

[one-horse race](#) a competition, contest, etc, in which one person or side is certain to win: *There was no point in advertising the manager's*

It's a one-horse race because his assistant is bound to get

[one-night stand](#) a relationship, arrangement, etc, that lasts for one evening or night only: *She should be* *One-night stands can be single performance in one place given by a pop group, etc, on tour.>*

[quick one](#) see

at one with (someone) to be in agreement with (someone): *I am*

at one with her on the subject of

[one in the eye for \(someone\)](#) see

[one over the eight](#) see

[one up on \(someone\)](#) to have an advantage over (someone):

They've both applied for the post but with his qualifications he's one up on his

one over on (someone) to gain a victory or advantage over

(someone): The boys are brothers and they're both very competitive; they're always trying to get one over on each

a one-track mind to to think only of one subject all the time: *She has a one-track She can't stop thinking about getting*
had one to many to have had too much to drink: *Tom always tries to start a fight when he's had one to*

takes one to know one used to indicate that people who have faults of their own find it easy to spot such faults in others: *Pam is sure that Tim is lying and she could well be right, especially since she, herself, is an accomplished liar. It takes one to know*

one of those things see

be oneself to be feeling slightly unwell, to be more depressed, etc, than usual: *She's not been herself since the death of her*

one see

for the road see

in a million see

way and another see

a fast one on (someone) see

one that got away see

onion

one's onions to know a subject, one's job, etc: *He'll be able to fix the He really knows his*

open

open book see

open-and-shut case free from uncertainty, having an obvious outcome: *The trial will not take It's an open-and-shut*

open secret a supposed secret that is known to many people: *It's an open secret that he's having an affair with his friend's wife while the friend is working*

the open air outside, not in a building: *In summer, I love eating in the open air—as long as it doesn't rain!*

an open mind to to be willing to listen to other people's suggestions, ideas, etc, instead of just concentrating on one's own point of view: *The members of the jury are supposed to keep an open mind until all the evidence has been*

open house see

one's options open see

oneself (wide) open to (something) to put oneself in a position in which one is liable to be in receipt of (blame, criticism, accusations, attack, etc): *If you go out to dinner with one of the job applicants you'll be laying yourself open to charges of*

the floodgates see

season see

old wounds see

one's eyes open see

open arms see

opposite

opposite number the person in another company, country, etc, whose job or role corresponds to someone else's: *The British Chancellor of the Exchequer met with his opposite numbers in the EU at a conference in*

option

one's options open to delay making a definite decision so that all choices are available as long as possible: *Try to avoid replying to the job offer until you hear about the It is as well to keep your options*

option see

oracle

the oracle to produce the desired result, to obtain what one wants, especially by using cunning, influence or bribery: *We couldn't get tickets but her uncle's the theatre manager so she*

phoned him and that worked the to the oracle at Delphi in Greek legend.>

order

[tall order](#) see

[under starter's orders](#) see

[one's marching orders](#) see

[apple-pie order](#) see

[what the doctor ordered](#) see

[of order](#) (1) not working properly: *The coffee machine is out of* (2) not according to the conventions or rules of meetings, etc: *The chairman should have known to rule his interruption out of*

[order of the day](#) something that should be done, worn, etc, because conventional, common, fashionable, etc: *Hats will be the order of the day at the royal garden* originally to a list of items to be discussed in the British parliament on a particular day.>

organ

[to the organ grinder, not his monkey](#) used to emphasize that one wants to deal with someone in authority, not with someone associated with him/her who has no power: *They asked me if I wanted to talk to Mr Wilson's personal assistant, but I told them that I wanted to speak to the organ grinder, not the organ grinder* was a person who played a kind of musical instrument on wheels, known as a barrel organ, in the street and he often had a monkey on the barrel organ to attract people or to collect money.>

other

the other way [to](#) to ignore or disregard something wrong, illegal, etc: *The local policeman would look the other way when the village pub was open after*

other not known or decided: *Someone or other will have to by on the other side* see [to](#)

the other one see

out of line see

or go out of one's mind see

out to lunch see

out of the picture see

well out of (something) see

out to make public the fact that one is homosexual: *He came out when he began living with his*

out of the woodwork see

(something) out of your system see

out like a light see

out the window see

it out with (someone) see

jury is still out see

and about going around outside, e.g. after an illness: *He was confined to bed for weeks but he's out and about*

of the loop see

on a limb see

on one's ear see

at elbow see

for (something) wanting and trying to get (something): *She's only out for a good*

of hand see

of order see

of pocket see

of sight, out of mind see

of sorts see

of turn see

to (do something) determined to (do something): *She's out to cause*

it out on (someone) see

outside

the outside at the most: The drive will take an hour at the

over

all over (someone) to be extremely friendly and attentive to (someone): She was all over him as soon as she discovered he had

[over the hump](#) see

[isn't over till the fat lady sings](#) see

and done with completely finished, at an end: They once went out with each other but that's over and done

[my dead body](#) see

[the hill](#) see

[the odds](#) see

[the top](#) see

overboard

overboard (about or for someone or something) to be extremely enthusiastic about (someone or something): All the men have gone overboard for the new girl in the

overdrive

[into overdrive](#) to start to work extremely hard or to become extremely active: The final exams are next week and most of the students have gone into

owe

owe you one used to indicate that someone has done one some kind of favour and that one must return this some time: Thanks for giving me a lift to work when my car broke I owe you one!

owl

[a night owl](#) see

own

[one's own man](#) see

[into one's own](#) to have the opportunity to show one's good qualities, talent, skill, etc: She is a marvellous hostess and really comes into her own at dinner

one's (own) thing see

one's own back see

on with your own life see

one's own (1) to perform as well as one's opponents in a contest, competition, argument, etc: *The younger team held their own against the much more experienced* (2) to be surviving, to be holding on to life: *The accident is very bad but he is holding his*

one's own right see

P

p

one's p's and q's to to be very careful, to be polite and well-behaved: *You'll have to mind your p's and q's when you meet your girlfriend's mother for the first* refers to a warning to a printer to be careful of the letters p and q so as not to confuse them.>

pace

pace with (someone or something) to progress or develop at the same rate as (a person, subject or situation) with regard to social or financial standing, knowledge, etc: *Their salaries have not kept pace with those of workers in comparable* to going as fast as someone else in a race.>

(someone or something) through its or his or her paces to test the ability of (someone or something) by getting them to demonstrate what it, he or she is capable of: *He wants to see the car put through his paces before he buys* originally to assessing horses.>

the pace for to establish the rate at which, or the manner in which, an activity is carried out: *Their research team has made such rapid progress with cancer drugs that they have set the pace for the other* originally to horse-racing.>

one's paces to demonstrate one's abilities: *The sales manager went round with all the salesmen to watch them show their paces with the*

the pace to maintain progress in an activity at the same rate as others: *Small electronic firms find it difficult to stay the pace in these days of rapid technological*

pack

of the pack more successful than one's competitors or rivals: *Our new range of products will keep us ahead of the*

joker in the pack see

names, no pack-drill see

a punch see

one's bags see

like herring in a barrel see

like sardines see

it in to stop doing something, e.g. working at something: *I've nearly finished this project so I think I'll pack it in for*

(someone) packing to send (someone) away firmly and frankly: *She always sends door-to-door salesmen packing*

paddle

one's own canoe see

page

on the same page to be in agreement about what has to be achieved: *It is taking a long time to finalize the plans for the proposed new sports ground because not all of the committee are on the same*

paid

paid to (something) see

pain

pain in the neck someone or something that constantly irritates one: *I work with a real pain in the neck who's always*
one's pains as reward for one's trouble and effort: *She nursed the old man for years and got nothing for her pains when he*

pain, no gain to a saying used to emphasize the fact that the acquiring of something advantageous or desirable often involves something difficult or unpleasant, but it is worth it: *Pam's lost quite a lot of weight on her diet, but she's had to give up chocolate, which she* Still, no pain, no

pain of (something) at the risk of (some kind of punishment, etc): *The workers were told on pain of instant dismissal not to talk to the*

rival company about the new

paint

watching paint dry used to describe something extremely boring:
Tim loves playing cricket, but his wife refuses to go to any cricket matches because she says that it's like watching paint

oneself into a corner see

the town red to to go out and celebrate in a lively, noisy manner:
As soon as they finished their exams the students went out to paint the town

painting

no oil painting see

pale

the pale see

palm

(someone's) *palm* to give (someone) money, to bribe (someone):
We had to grease the hotel owner's palm to get our passports

an itching palm see

(someone) *in the palm of one's hand* to have (someone) in one's power and ready to do as one wishes: *The landowner has the local officials in the palm of his*

pan

flash in the pan see

of the frying pan into the fire see

pants

the pants off (someone) to defeat (someone) decisively: *Jill didn't play at all well in the tennis match and her opponent beat the pants off*

(someone) with his or her pants or trousers down see

paper

fight or find or organize or plan, etc, one's way out of a paper bag
to used to emphasize how bad or useless someone is at doing

something: *John has been left to organize the party, but, quite frankly, he couldn't organize his way out of a paper over the cracks to try to hide faults, mistakes, difficulties, etc, in a hasty or careless way in order to pretend that there are no faults, mistakes, etc: *The couple tried to paper over the cracks in their marriage and always appeared very loving in public but they divorced soon**

tiger someone or something that has the outward appearance of being powerful and threatening but is in fact ineffective: *The country's leader used to be feared by everyone but ever since the attempted coup he's been a paper*

par

or *not up to par* (1) not up to the usual or required standard: *Her work has been below par* (2) not completely well: *He's not been feeling up to par since he had the*

a par with (something) of the same standard as (something), as good as (something): *His painting is not on a par with that of his for the course what might be expected, what usually happens: *He came late to the party but that's par for the a golfing term meaning the number of strokes that would be made in a perfect round on the course.>**

parade

on (someone's) parade see

paradise

fool's paradise see

parrot

repeating words or ideas without understanding what they mean: *The student learns her notes parrot-fashion but can't apply them when it comes to writing*

as a parrot see

part

my, etc, part as far as I, etc, am concerned: For my part I prefer autumn to

[the part](#) to have the appropriate appearance of a particular kind of person: *If she wants to be a top executive, she must look the and parcel (of something) something that is naturally or basically part (of something): Stress is part and parcel of a senior (something) in good part to accept (something) without being angry or offended: She took the other children's teasing in good*

(someone's) part to support (someone) in an argument, debate, etc: She always takes her brother's part when he quarrels with their [parting of the ways](#) the point at which people must go different ways, take different courses of action, make different decisions, etc: The sale of their company was the parting of the ways for the two business biblical reference to Ezekiel 21:21.>

party

[\(something\) to the party](#) to make some kind of contribution to an activity, event, or situation: *We need someone on the committee who will bring some new ideas to the party piece an act, joke, speech that someone frequently performs in public: The managing director always gives the same welcoming speech to new It's his party*

[life and soul of the party](#) see

party line the official opinions, ideas, attitudes, etc, as set down by the leaders of a particular group: The politician refused to follow the party

party's over a pleasant or happy time has come to an end: This used to be a pleasant department but the party's over The new manager is very strict and

pass

[to a pretty pass](#) see

(something) *pass* to choose to disregard (something): *He was very rude to me but I let it I could see he was*

[a pass at \(someone\)](#) to try to start a romantic or sexual relationship with (someone): *He made a pass at the girl at the next* a fencing term, meaning to thrust with a foil.>

away to die: *The old lady passed away in the*

[by on the other side](#) to ignore someone in trouble and not help him or her: *When he was made homeless he did not expect his friends to pass by on the other* biblical reference to the parable of the Samaritan, Luke 10.>

for (someone or something) to be mistaken for (someone or something): She could easily pass for her

[muster](#) see

out to faint: She passed out in the extreme

[the hat round](#) see

(something) *up* not to accept (something): *I'm going to have to pass up her I have another*

[that pass in the night](#) see

passage

[bird of passage](#) see

past

[blast from the past](#) see *blast*

etc, would not put it past (someone) to (do something) I, etc, think (someone) is quite capable of (doing something bad): I wouldn't put it past him to steal money from an old

one's or its best or past it less good, etc, than when one, or it, was not so old: The runner is still fast but he's past his

[master](#) someone extremely talented or skilful: *He is a past master at the art of charming*

pasture

new or fresh fields and pastures new to used to indicate a new and different place or situation: *Fred is tired of his present job and is thinking of looking for pastures* Now that Sara has graduated she feels the need for fresh fields and pastures new so she is looking for a job longer version of the phrase is a misquotation of “fresh woods and pastures new” from John Milton’s poem “Lycidas”.>

pat

pat on the back an indication of praise or approval: *She got a pat on the back for her handling of the difficult*

patch

[a bad patch](#) see

to be a patch on (someone or something) not to be nearly as good as (someone or something): *Her cooking isn't a patch on her*
it or things up to become friends again after a quarrel: The two sisters haven't spoken to each other for years but we're trying to get them to patch things

path

a path to (someone's) door to visit (someone) very frequently or in large numbers: *The world's press beat a path to the door of the new tennis*

patience

[to try the patience of Job](#) see

pave

[the way for \(something\)](#) to make it possible or easier for (something to happen): *The student's research paved the way for the development of the new*

pay

[\(someone\) back in his or her own coin](#) see

[court to \(someone\)](#) see

[dividends](#) see

[lip-service to \(something\)](#) see

one's way see

the piper see

through the nose see

paid to (something) to prevent (an action, plan, etc) from being carried out: *She was planning to come uninvited to our party but we put paid to that by changing the*

Peter to pay Paul see

will be the devil to pay see

pays your money and you takes your choice see

pea

two peas in a pod exactly or extremely alike: *The twins are like two peas in a*

peace

the peace to prevent disturbances, fighting, quarrelling, etc: *The police were on duty at the football match to keep the*

one's peace with (someone) to become, or try to become, friendly with (someone) again after a period of disagreement: *She made peace with her family before she*

peacock

as a peacock extremely proud: *He's proud as a peacock of his baby*

pearl

pearls before swine see

of wisdom something wise or helpful, often used ironically: *I'm sure that my father will be giving me a few pearls of wisdom before I go off to*

peck

one's pecker up to remain in good spirits: *Keep your pecker You'll get a job* <"Pecker" means beak or nose.>

pedestal

(someone) on a pedestal to treat (someone) with great respect and admiration: *She put her music teacher on a to the practice of*

putting statues of famous people on pedestals.>

peep

[peeping Tom](#) see

peg

(someone) down a peg or two to make (someone) more humble: He was boasting about his wealth but she took him down a peg or two by reminding of his poverty-stricken to tuning musical instruments.>

[the peg](#) of clothes, ready to wear, not made for one specially: *He's so tall it is difficult for him to buy clothes off the square peg in a round hole* used to describe someone who does not fit into a particular situation or environment and feels uncomfortable in it: *Mary's family are all very interested in sport and Jim has no interest whatsoever in it; he feels like a square peg in a round hole when they all get*

penny

penny for them or your thoughts used to ask someone what they are thinking about: *You were lost in A penny for*

[a pretty penny](#) see

for a penny, in for a pound if one is going to do something one might as well do it boldly and thoroughly: *We've very little money but if we're going on holiday we might as well go somewhere In for a penny, in for a*

[penny numbers](#) a very few, a very little at a time: *They came to the jumble sale in penny to a method of selling encyclopedias, etc, in parts, originally at a penny per part.>*

to have a penny to one's name to have no money at all: *When he died he didn't have a penny to his*

wise and pound foolish being careful with small items of expenditure and extravagant with large ones: *She always buys the*

cheapest food and then goes on world cruises. She really is penny wise and pound

[a penny](#) to urinate: *Their little girl wants to spend a the former price of admission to a public toilet.>*

[penny drops](#) I, etc, suddenly understand: *At first she didn't know what he was talking about but then the penny to a coin in a slot machine.>*

up like a bad penny to reappear or keep reappearing although not wanted or welcome: *Her son turned up like a bad penny to borrow money from*

[a penny](#) of little value because very common: *China bowls like that are two a There's no point in selling*

perch

[\(someone\) off his/her perch](#) to cause someone who has achieved great success or status to fail or lose status: *Tony has been club tennis champion for five years in a row, but he's been knocked off his perch this year by a much younger*

perfect

[pink of perfection](#) see

period

piece something or someone that is exceptionally typical of the time when he or she was born or it was made: *She has a houseful of Victorian furniture—all period*

petard

[with one's own petard](#) to be the victim of one's own action which was intended to harm someone else: *My neighbour was hoist with his own He put broken glass on the top of his wall to prevent trespassers and then cut his hand on to Shakespeare's Act 3, scene iv. A petard was a kind of bomb used by military engineers.>*

petrel

[stormy petrel](#) see

Philistine

Philistine someone who is not interested in artistic or intellectual pursuits: *Don't ask her to go to the She's a real Philistine* were a fierce race of people who fought against the Israelites in biblical times.>

phoenix

[like a phoenix from the ashes same as rise from the ashes](#) see

phrase

[coin a phrase](#) literally, to say something new and inventive, but used usually to introduce a cliché or a common saying or expression: *They made up after the quarrel and everything in the garden was lovely, to coin a*

pick

[a bone to pick with \(someone\)](#) see

and choose to choose very carefully from a range of things: Surely there are enough dresses here for you to pick and choose

[\(someone's\) brains](#) see

[holes in \(something\)](#) see

[up the gauntlet](#) see

[up the tab \(for something\)](#) see

picnic

[no picnic](#) used to emphasize how difficult or unpleasant something is: *It's no picnic getting to their house by public*

picture

[out of the picture](#) to be no longer involved in something: *June used to go out with Rick, but she's out of the picture now and he's got a new*

[big picture](#) the whole situation, not just some details: *I know the job which you've been offered is better paid, but you've got to look at the big You would work more hours and have to travel further to get*

the picture to understand what is being explained or described:
Believe me, the flat's in an area where you wouldn't want to live; you need about five locks on your front door and bars on your window, you can't leave your car outside without the wheels being removed, and it's best to stay indoors at Get the picture?

(someone) in the picture to give (someone) all the information and detail about a situation: *Could you put me in the picture about what's been happening while I've been on*

pie

a finger in every pie see

a finger in the pie see

as pie exceptionally pleasant or friendly, often unexpectedly: *Mary usually completely ignores me, but she's found out that I am Matt's sister and was nice as pie to me*

pie in the sky something good expected or promised in the future which is unlikely to come about: *He is planning a trip round the world but it's pie in the He'll never save that much to a quotation from a poem by the American poet Joe Hill.>*

piece

nasty piece of work see

piece of cake see

long is a piece of string? see

(someone) a piece of one's mind see

to pieces unable to continue coping with a situation, life, etc: *She goes to pieces in an*

piece of work see

one's piece to say what you think about something, although this might not be very popular: *Sue insisted on saying her piece, but she was the only one who was not in favour of the scheme and no one paid much attention to*

pig

a pig in a poke to buy (something) without examining it carefully or without knowing its worth: *The second-hand washing machine she bought doesn't* *She bought a pig in a* referring to a fairground trick in which a prospective customer was sold a cat in a bag thinking that it was a piglet.>

a pig of oneself to eat greedily, to eat a great deal: *The food was so good that we all made pigs of*

a pig's ear of (something) to make a mess of (something) to do (something) very badly or clumsily: *She made a real pig's ear of knitting a*

[might fly](#) it is extremely unlikely that that will happen: *You think he'll marry her? Pigs might*

pigeon

[or set the cat among the pigeons](#) see

not my pigeon that is not my responsibility or area of interest: *The accounts are not in order but that's not my* We have an “not my pidgin”, with its origins in pidgin English.>

pikestaff

[as a pikestaff](#) very obvious: *The motive for his crime is plain as* was originally “packstaff”, a staff for holding a traveller's pack and lacking any ornamentation. This sense of plain has been confused with that of plain meaning “clear”.>

pill

[bitter pill to swallow](#) see

[the pill](#) see

pillar

[pillar to post](#) from one place to another, often repeatedly: *The authorities sent us from pillar to post in search of a* originally to the game of real tennis.>

pilot

on automatic pilot to do something without thinking about what you are doing, because of tiredness, distress, etc, usually succeeding in doing it correctly because you have done it before: *Jill went on doing the housework when she heard about the death of her dog, but she was on automatic*

pin

two pins given the least encouragement or reason: *For two pins I'd take the day*

pins and needles in a state of anxiety or suspense: *We're on pins and needles waiting to find out who's*

back one's ears see

one's hopes on (someone or something) see

could have heard a pin drop there was silence: *You could have heard a pin drop after she made the*

pinch

a pinch if it is absolutely necessary: *At a pinch we could accommodate three of*

the pinch to have financial problems: *We were all right last year but the firm is feeling the pinch this*

(something) with a grain or pinch of salt see

pink

tickled pink see

the pink in good health: *The family have all been ill but we're in the pink to the pink complexion of some healthy people.>*

pink of perfection absolute perfection: *If her cakes are not in the pink of perfection she throws them to a quotation from Oliver Goldsmith's play, She Stoops to*

pip

at the post beaten at the last minute: *I thought we would get the house for the price we offered but we were pipped at the post by someone who suddenly offered originally to horse-racing. A horse is*

pipped at the post if another horse passes it right at the end of the race.>

pipe

the pipeline in preparation, happening soon: *There are some new jobs in the pipeline but appointments will not be made until next to crude oil being piped from the well to the refineries.>*

the piper to provide the money for something and therefore be entitled to have a say in the organization of it: *Father should be allowed a say in where we go on After all he's paying the to the saying "He who pays the piper calls the tune".>*

dream a wish or idea that can never be realized: *She talks of buying a cottage in the country, but it's a pipe She has very little to visions experienced by opium smokers.>*

hot see

that in your pipe and smoke it! See how you like that!: *I know you think you're better at French than I am, but I've just heard that I passed the exam and you Put that in your pipe and smoke it!*

pistol

a pistol to (someone's) head *to* to use force or threats to get (someone) to do as one wishes: *He had to sell the firm to get some The bank was holding a pistol to his*

pit

one's wits against (someone) see

pitch

as pitch extremely black: *The night was black as*

(someone's) pitch see

place

into place to become understood when seen in terms of its relationship to other things: *The reason for her fear of men fell into place when we realized that she had been abused by her father as a*

places to be successful in one's career: *That young research worker is going*

the first place (1) in the beginning, to start with: *I regret I didn't want to go in the first* (2) as the first point in an argument, etc: *We can't cope with so many In the first place we have not got enough*

one's place to accept the lowliness of one's position and act accordingly: *It was made clear to the trainee teacher that she should know her place in the*

place in the sun a situation in which one will be happy, successful, well off, etc: *Sue thought that she would find a place in the sun when she emigrated, but, in fact, she couldn't find a decent job and was*

of place see

oneself in (someone's) place to imagine what it would be like to be in (someone else's) circumstances: *I know you don't approve of strikes but put yourself in the workers' What else could they do?*

(someone) in his or her place to remind (someone) angrily of the lowliness of his or her position or of his or her lack of experience, knowledge, etc: *He tried to take over the running of the meeting but the chairman soon put him in his*

plague

(someone or something) like the plague used to emphasize how keen one is to keep away (from someone or something): *Harry*

absolutely detests socializing; he avoids parties like the

plain

[as a pikestaff](#) see

[sailing](#) easy progress: *Making alterations to the building will be plain sailing if we get planning confused with “plane sailing”, a method of making navigational calculations at sea in which the earth’s surface is treated as though it were flat.>*

plate

[\(something\) handed to one on a plate](#) to get (something) without having to put any effort into it: *Her schoolfriend works at weekends for money to buy clothes, but she has a clothes allowance from her father. She has everything handed to her on a*

platter

(something) handed to one on a silver platter [to](#) to get or be given (something) without having to put any effort into it: A friend of Sally’s father has offered her a well-paid job in Rome; it was handed to her on a silver platter while the rest of us have spent ages replying to advertisements and filling in application

play

[level playing field](#) see

[work and no play makes Jack a dull boy](#) see

into play to begin to use or employ: He had to bring all his powers of persuasion into play to get her to

[play](#) see

[play](#) see

[a play for \(someone or something\)](#) to try to obtain (someone or something): *He’s making a play for his friend’s*

[games](#) see

[one’s ace](#) see

[a losing game](#) see

[a straight bat](#) see

(something) down to try to make (something) appear less important, grave, etc: *Management are trying to play down the seriousness of the firm's financial*

out (1) exhausted: *The children are played out after the* (2) no longer having any interest, influence, usefulness, etc: *His ideas on education are played*

fast and loose with (something) see

for time see

gooseberry see

hard to get to make it difficult for someone to get to know one in order to make him or her more keen to do so: *She regretted playing hard to get when he started going out with another*

havoc with (something) see

it by ear see

possum see

second fiddle (to someone) see

the devil's advocate see

the field see

the game see

one's trump card see

(someone) *up* to cause trouble to or annoy (someone): *The children always play their father up when he's looking after*

up to (someone) to flatter (someone) and pay (someone) a great deal of attention for one's own advantage: *She's playing up to her father because she wants him to buy her a new*

with fire see

please

as Punch see

plot

plot thickens the situation is getting more complicated and more interesting: *He is having an affair with his secretary and it turns out*

that his wife is having an affair with her The plot to a quotation from George Villiers' play The

plug

the plug on (something) to stop supporting (something), to stop (something) from continuing: *The local council has pulled the plug on the theatre company by discontinuing the grant which it has been*

plum

a plum in one's mouth to speak with what is regarded as an upper-class accent: *The rest of the office workers dislike Laura because she is very snobbish and speaks with a plum in her*

plunge

the plunge to go ahead and do something, especially something difficult or risky, especially after having spent some considerable time thinking about it: *Fiona has been talking about buying a flat for years and she has now taken the*

poacher

turned gamekeeper to used to describe someone who has changed their job, attitude, opinion, etc, and now holds completely opposite views: *Tom had no regard for the law when he was young but now he's a policeman; a classic case of the poacher turned gamekeeper!*

pocket

(someone's) *pocket* under the control or influence of (someone): *The board will vote with the managing He has them all in his* one's pocket to make money for oneself dishonestly: *The boss found out that he had been lining his pocket by taking bribes from* of pocket having made a loss: *Not only did the dance not make a profit, but the organizing committee were all out of*

poetic

justice deserved but accidental punishment or reward: *The burglar left his bag of stolen jewellery on the That was poetic*

licence the disregarding of established rules of form, grammar, fact, etc, by writers to achieve a desired effect: *The poet uses no capital letters or punctuation and includes other forms of poetic licence in his*

point

sore point see

the point see

or *get to the point* to reach the most important part of a discussion, etc: *I wish the lecturer would stop rambling on and get to the*

a point of (doing something) to be exceptionally careful about (doing something): *She makes a point of visiting her elderly parents at least once a*

one's point to state one's opinion clearly: *Now you've made your point please give others the chance to*

the finger at (someone or something) see

a point see

point of no return the stage in a process, etc, when it becomes impossible either to stop or change one's mind: *The divorce papers have been They've reached the point of no* referred to the point in the flight of an aircraft after which it did not have enough fuel to return to its place of departure.>

to a point to some extent but not completely: *I agree with your views up to a point but I do have*

poison

(someone) a poisoned chalice see

letter an anonymous letter saying bad things about someone: *She received a poison-pen letter saying her husband was an*

pole

poles apart see

pony

dog and pony show see

shanks's pony see

poor

as a church mouse see

pop

the question see

port

port in a storm any solution to a problem or difficulty will suffice: *I don't like asking my parents for a loan but my rent is overdue. It's a case of any port in a*

possum

possum to pretend to be asleep, unconscious or dead: *He played possum when the children crept into his He was too tired to play with possum pretends to be dead when it is under threat of attack from another animal.>*

as a post see

pillar to post see

at the post see

(someone) posted to keep (someone) informed about developments in a situation: *The boss wants to be kept posted about the export deal when he's on*

pot

to *pot* to get into a bad or worse state: *The firm went to pot when the old man to meat being cut up and stewed in a pot.>*

the pot boiling to keep something going or operating: *The protesters against the new road were discouraged when their leader left, but realized that it was important to keep the pot boiling if they wanted to preserve their*

pot-luck to have a meal at someone's house, etc, without having anything specially prepared for one: *You're welcome to stay to*

dinner but you'll have to take to take whatever happens to be in the cooking-pot at the time.>

pot calling the kettle black to someone criticizing (someone) for doing (something) that he or she does himself or herself: His father scolded him for being untidy although he himself leaves things lying around—a case of the pot calling the kettle

or a watched pot never boils when one is waiting for something to happen, the time taken seems longer if one is constantly thinking about it: Stop thinking about when the letter with your exam results is going to arrive. It won't make the postman come any sooner. A watched pot never

potato

potato see

pound

or have one's pound of flesh see

pour

never rains but it pours when something goes wrong it goes wrong very badly or other things go wrong too: I forgot where I parked the car and then I got a parking It never rains but it

oil on troubled waters see

powder

sitting on a powder keg to be in a very risky or dangerous situation in which something could easily go wrong quite suddenly: The government realize that they are sitting on a powder keg and that the rebels could try to gain power at any

one's powder dry see

one's nose see

power

power to (someone's) elbow may (someone) be successful: I hear that he's started a charity for handicapped More power to his

power behind the throne the person who is really in charge of or in control of an organization, etc, while giving the impression that it is someone else: *He is the chairman of the company, but his wife is the power behind the*

powers that be the people in charge, the authorities: *The powers that be have decided that the shop assistants should wear a*

practice

makes perfect if one keeps on trying to do something one will eventually be good at it: *They say that practice makes perfect, but I'll never be good at*

practice see

practise

what one preaches to act in the way that one recommends to others: *He tells the children to come home on time but he's always late He should practise what he*

praise

(someone or something) to the skies see

(someone's or something's) praises to praise (someone or something) with great enthusiasm: *She keeps singing the praises of her new washing*

prayer

a wing and a prayer see

preach

to the converted see

what one preaches see

premium

at a premium to be much in demand and, therefore, difficult to obtain: *Tickets for the concert are at a The band is very financial term meaning literally "sold at more than the nominal value".>*

prepare

the ground see

presence

of mind the ability to keep calm and think and act sensibly whatever the situation: *She had the presence of mind to throw a wet cloth over the pan when it caught*

present

no time like the present see

press

pressed for (something) to be short of (something, such as time or money): *I'm sorry I can't stay, I'm really pressed for (someone) into (doing something)* to force (someone) or persuade (someone) against his or her will to (do something): *She's press-ganged us into being in charge of a stall at the* press gang was a group of sailors in the 18th century who seized men and forced them to join the navy.>

(someone or something) into service to make use of (someone or something), especially in an emergency or on a special occasion: *My vacuum cleaner has broken down and so I'll have to press the old one into*

pressure

group a group of people who try to bring the attention of the authorities, etc, to certain issues, usually with a view to influencing them into making some changes: *She's part of a pressure group that is campaigning for more state nursery*

pretence

false pretences see

pretty

pretty kettle of fish see

to a pretty pass to get into a bad state: *Things have come to a pretty pass if the firm is making people*

a pretty penny to cost a large amount of money: *His new car must have cost a pretty*

pretty to be in a very comfortable or advantageous position: *She's the boss's She's sitting pretty while the rest of us are worried about our*

prey

a prey to (something) regularly to suffer from (something): She has been a prey to headaches all her
on (someone's) mind to cause constant worry or anxiety to
(someone): The accident in which he knocked over a child preyed on his mind all his

price

a price at a very high price: You can get a drink in the hotel—at a price!

price on (someone's) head a reward offered for the capture or killing of (someone): The escaped convict was never found even though there was a price on his

price (something)? what do you think of (something)? What is the value of (something)?: He's been charged with drink What price his lectures on the dangers of alcohol abuse now?

prick

against the pricks to show opposition to those in control or power: The ordinary people will start kicking against the pricks if the government raise interest rates cattle kicking against being driven forward by a sharp stick.>

up one's ears see

pride

goes before a fall being too conceited often leads to misfortune: The tennis player who was boasting about how good she was got It just goes to show that pride goes before a

of place the most important or privileged position: *Her son's photograph has pride of place on her*

one's pride to behave in a more humble way than one usually does or than one would wish to do: *She had no money for food and so she swallowed her pride and asked her father for*

prisoner

no prisoners to to act in a very determined way without being affected or held back by any feelings of compassion, politeness, etc: *Helen has set her heart on being promoted and she will take no prisoners in her efforts to get that*

prime

cut off in one's prime to die or be killed in one's youth or at the most successful period in one's life: *They mourned for the soldiers cut off in their*

mover someone or something that gets something started: *She was the prime mover in the campaign against the new*

the pump see

print

small print see

private

eye a private detective: *He hired a private eye to discover the identity of his wife's*

pro

pros and cons the arguments for and against: *The council will consider the pros and cons of the new road at a meeting* "pro", for, and "contra", against.>

production

a production of (something) to make (something) appear to be much more complicated than it actually is: *I don't know why Janet made such a production of making All she gave us was cornflakes and a cup of*

profile

a low profile see

promise

[\(someone\) the moon](#) see

proof

proof of the pudding is in the eating the real worth of something is only found out when it has been into practice or use: *The present government's theories on education are all very well, but the proof of the pudding will be in the*

proportion

[of proportion](#) the ability to decide what is important, etc, and what is not: *She has no sense of She went into hysterics just because she got a small stain on her*

proud

[\(someone\) proud](#) to treat (someone) exceptionally well or lavishly: *I must say they did the old age pensioners proud at their Christmas*

public

[spirit](#) a wish to do things for the good of the community as a whole: *He's full of public He even picks up the litter in the*

pull

[pulling teeth](#) see

[a face](#) see

[a fast one on \(someone\)](#) see

(something) off to be successful in (something): *We were all surprised when he pulled off a victory against the golf*

[one's punches](#) see

[one's socks up](#) see

[one's weight](#) see

[out all the stops](#) see

[rank](#) see

[strings](#) see

the other one! used to emphasize to someone that you do not believe him or her: *Tony told me that the boss had apologized to him, but I said, "Pull the other one!"* Sometimes the phrase is extended to "pull the other one; it's got bells on!" reference to the phrase "pull (someone's) leg".>

the plug on (something) see

through to survive, to get better: We thought that he was going to die after the operation, but he pulled

pulse

one's finger on the pulse to keep oneself informed about recent developments in a situation, organization, etc, or in the world: *The old man has retired but still keeps his finger on the pulse by reading all the company to a doctor checking the rate of someone's pulse for health reasons.>*

pump

the pump to take some kind of action to help something happen or succeed, often by contributing money: *Sally has an idea for a new magazine and is looking for investors to prime the*

Punch

as Punch extremely pleased or happy: *The little girl was pleased as Punch with her new to the puppet show character who is usually portrayed smiling gleefully.>*

punch

(someone) to the punch to do (something) before someone else does: *Rob's writing a book on the history of the town to celebrate its centenary, but he's been beaten to the punch by another author whose book is being published next*

a punch to be very powerful: *The cocktail that Sam mixed really packed a*

one's punches to be less forceful or harsh in one's attack or criticism than one is capable of: *The manager rarely pulls his punches when he is criticizing someone's striking blows in boxing without using one's full strength.>*

above one's weight see

with the punches not to let difficulties or problems discourage one or have a bad or upsetting effect on one: *Judy's boss keeps criticizing her for very little, but she's going to try to roll with the punches until she finds another*

pup

(someone) a pup to deceive (someone), often to sell or recommend something that turns out not to be as good as he or she thought: *That computer keeps breaking I think we've been sold a*

pure

as the driven snow exceptionally virtuous or moral: *She was pure as the driven snow but her sister was completely to snow that has been blown into heaps by the wind and has not yet become dirty.>*

purpose

cross purposes involved in a misunderstanding because of talking or thinking about different things without realizing it: *No wonder I couldn't understand what she was talking We were talking at cross*

a or the purpose to be useful in a particular situation, to fulfil a need: *I really need a lever for this but a knife will serve the*

purse

the purse strings to to be in charge of financial matters: *It is the owner's son who controls the purse strings in the firm, and he is reluctant to spend money on new*

can't make a silk purse out of a sow's ear see

push

a *push* used to indicate that something can be done if it is absolutely necessary, but it will not be easy: *At a push, we could accommodate five people, if someone sleeps on the*

[\(someone\) the push](#) to dismiss (someone): *Pete said that he resigned, but he got the push for hitting another member of one's luck* see

off to go away: It's getting I'd better push

[\(someone\) over the edge](#) see

[the boat out](#) see

[push comes to shove](#) when a situation reaches a critical stage or a stage at which action must be taken: *When push comes to shove, Jane's father will lend her*

put

put upon to be made use of for someone else's benefit, to be taken advantage of: *Some mothers are really put upon by their daughters, who expect them to baby-sit every*

[a brave face on it](#) see

[a gloss on \(something\)](#) see

[\(someone\) in mind of \(someone or something\)](#) see

[\(someone\) in his or her place](#) see

[\(someone\) in the picture](#) see

it on to feign, to pretend: *She said that she had sprained her ankle but she was putting it*

[\(someone's\) nose out of joint](#) see

[one across \(someone\)](#) see

[one's finger on \(something\)](#) see

[the cat among the pigeons](#) see

[\(something\) to bed](#) see

[job](#) something done to deceive or trick (someone): *The police pretended to believe him but it was a put-up They were trying to get him to*

pyjamas

[cat's pyjamas](#) see

putty

in (someone's) hands easily influenced or manipulated by (someone): *She'll do whatever he* *She's putty in his* is a malleable substance.>

Pyrrhic

[Pyrrhic victory](#) a success that cannot be enjoyed because of what it has taken to achieve it: *She was eventually awarded compensation for unfair dismissal but the money all went on legal* *It was indeed a Pyrrhic* the costly victory of Pyrrhus, King of Epirus, over the Romans at Heraclea in 280

Q

q

one's p's and q's see

QT

the QT secretly: Tom borrowed his mother's car on the QT while she was away at a conference, and he's had an abbreviation of "quiet".>

quantity

unknown quantity someone or something of which very little is known: *One of the players in the tournament is an unknown to a mathematical term.>*

quarters

close quarters nearby, at or from a short distance away: *At close quarters she looks*

queer

queer fish see

Queer Street in financial difficulties: *If we both lose our jobs we'll be in Queer* changed from Carey Street in London where the bankruptcy courts were.>

(someone's) pitch to upset (someone's) plans or arrangements: *He was going to ask her out but his best friend queered his pitch by asking her* here refers to the site of a market stall. Originally to "queer someone's pitch" was to set up a stall next to one selling the same kind of goods.>

question

loaded question see

question mark over (something) doubt or uncertainty in relation to (something): *Paul has hurt his ankle and there is a question mark over whether he will be able to play in tomorrow's*

vexed question see

the question see

of the question not possible: *Further salary increases are out of the question*
the question to ask (someone) to marry one: *He popped the question on her*

question see

sixty-four (thousand) dollar question see

queue

the queue to go ahead of others in a queue without waiting for one's proper turn: *She jumped the queue and went straight up to the shop*

qui

the *qui vive* very alert: *The child was on the qui vive and heard her father's challenge of a French sentry, Qui meaning "(Long) live who?"* and the equivalent of "Whose side are you on?">

quick

quick one a quick drink: *The pubs will be closing soon but there's time for a quick*

(someone) to the quick to hurt (someone's) feelings very badly: *She cut him to the quick when she rejected his quick is the sensitive skin under the nail.>*

as lightning see

on the uptake see

quid

in a fortunate position: *If you get a job with that firm you'll be quids*

quit

it quits to agree that neither person owes the other one anything and that neither one has any kind of advantage over the other: *You paid for lunch and I paid for Let's call it*

quite

something something special or remarkable: *Her new hat is quite*

R

R

three Rs reading, writing and arithmetic, thought of as the essential basics of education: *The teacher does not spend much time on the three*

race

race see

rat race see

to rack and ruin to fall into a state of disrepair or into a worthless condition: *The estate has gone to rack and ruin because the landowner has no* <“Rack” means destruction.>

the rack in distress, under strain: *He's on the rack worrying about losing his rack* was an instrument of torture on which a person's body was stretched in both directions at once.>

one's brains see

rag

a red rag to a bull see

one's rag to lose one's temper: *The teacher completely lost her rag and shouted at the*

(someone) ragged to cause (someone) to be exhausted: *The children can't get out to play because of the rain and they've been running me ragged all*

rage

the rage very fashionable or popular: *Mini skirts were all the rage*

rail

the rails suddenly to go wrong: *The system seemed to be running smoothly but it's now jumped the*

the rails not sensible, disorganized, deranged: *He used to be one of our best workers but he seems to have gone a bit off the to a train leaving the track.>*

rain

or put away or save (something) for a rainy day to keep (something, especially money) until one really needs it: *The old lady does not have enough food but she insists on keeping a large sum of money for a rainy* most jobs, such as farm jobs, were dependent on the weather. Since they could not be carried out in rainy weather no money was earned then.>

as rain perfectly all right, completely well: *She's had a really bad bout of flu but she's right as rain*

on (someone's) parade to spoil (someone's) plans or special occasion: *Jenny was going to tell her parents that night that she had failed her final university exams, but she knew that her sister was going to announce her engagement and didn't want to rain on her in origin and a reference to rain spoiling a parade of decorated floats, etc.>*

or shine whatever the weather: *He plays golf rain or*

like cats and dogs see

a rain check on (something) to used to indicate that you are unable to accept an invitation but would like to postpone it until a later date: *I'll have to take a rain check on lunch on Saturday because I'm going shopping with my What about next Saturday?* in origin and a reference to the part of a ticket that you keep when a sports fixture cannot take place because of bad weather, so that you can use it for entry to the fixture when it does take place.>

rainbow

after rainbows see

pot of gold at the end of the rainbow see

raise

Cain see

some/a few eyebrows see

the wind see

rake

as a rake extremely thin: *She eats huge amounts but stays thin as a*

ram

(something) down (someone's) throat see

rampage

or go on the rampage to rush about wildly or violently: *The crowd went on the rampage and some people were trampled to*

rank

ranks to act together and support each other as a defensive measure: *The dead patient's husband tried to enquire into the cause of her death but the doctors closed ranks and would tell him*

rank to make unfair use of a position of authority to make someone else do as one wishes or to give one some kind of advantage: *The politician was last in the queue at the airport, but he pulled rank and was checked in*

rank and file the ordinary people or the ordinary members of an organization, etc: *The union leaders should pay attention to the views of the rank and* and files were the horizontal and vertical lines in which battalions of soldiers were drawn up on parade.>

ransom

king's ransom see

(someone) to ransom to demand something (from someone) by threatening to take harmful action if it is not given: *The newspaper said that the firemen were holding the government to ransom by threatening to go on to hold someone as a hostage until a sum of money is paid for his or her release.>*

rant

and rave to shout angrily: Her father's ranting and raving about how late she came

rap

the rap for (something) to take the blame or punishment for (something): He committed the crime but his friend took the rap for

rarin'

to go extremely eager to begin or set off: I promised to take the children on a picnic and they're rarin' to for "rearing", as done by a horse.>

rat

a drowned rat soaking wet: They came in from the storm like drowned

on (someone) to report or betray (someone): The head knew that they had played truant because another pupil had ratted on

[a rat](#) *to have a suspicion that something is wrong or that one is being deceived: I smelt a rat when he did not invite me into the to the behaviour of a terrier hunting rats.>*

[rat race](#) *the fierce competitive struggle for success in business, etc: He's given up the rat race and gone to live on an nautical phrase for a fierce tidal current.>*

rate

[a rate of knots](#) *see*

rattle

[\(someone's\) cage](#) *see*

raw

[raw deal](#) *see*

the raw in the natural state, without civilization, comfort, etc: He chose life in the raw rather than city life, and now lives in a hut in the

(someone) on the raw to hurt or anger (someone): You touched him on the raw when you mentioned his He's lost contact with

razor

as a razor very intelligent and quick-witted: *The child is sharp as a razor*
Watch what you say in front of

read

my lips see

the runes see

(something) as read to assume (something): *You can take it as read that all the candidates are suitably*

real

real McCoy something genuine and very good as opposed to others like it which are not: *This lasagne is the real McCoy, not something out of a tin*
from Kid McCoy, an American boxer who was called The Real McCoy to distinguish him from other boxers of the same name.>

reason

stands to reason that it is logical or obvious that: *It stands to reason that she would be in Her leg is*

etc, not to reason why it is not for us, etc, to question orders: *If the boss says to come in early tomorrow we had better do Ours not to reason*

reason to be persuaded by someone's advice, etc, to act or think sensibly: *She managed to get her little boy to see reason and come in out of the*

reason within sensible limits: *You can choose your birthday present—within*

rhyme or reason see

rebound

the rebound while suffering from the disappointment of the end of a relationship: *She married him on the rebound from a broken*

record

the record to do something better, faster, etc, than it has been done before: *The sprinter has broken the world*

the record so that it will be noted: *For the record, I do not agree with the committee's*

[the record](#) not to be made public: *Don't say anything off the record to that He'll just publish it*

record noted officially: *The politician is on record as saying that he won't*

[the record straight](#) to put right a mistake or misunderstanding: *He thought that I had voted against him but I was able to set the record*

[track record](#) see

red

[red herring](#) see

[red-letter day](#) a day when something particularly pleasant or important happens: *It will be a red-letter day for her when her husband comes home from the* the fact that important dates in the year are sometimes shown in red on calendars.>

[red ink](#) see

[\(someone\) red-handed](#) to find (someone) in the act of doing something wrong or unlawful: *We caught the thief red-handed with the stolen necklace in his* to finding a murderer with the blood of a victim on his or her hands.>

the red in debt, overdrawn: *My bank account is in the red but it's nearly* the use of red ink to make entries on the debit side of an account.>

a red rag to a bull [to](#) certain to make (someone) angry: *Any criticism of the government is like a red rag to a bull to the old* the widespread belief that bulls are angered by the sight of the colour red.>

red alert ready for an immediate danger: *The area was put on red alert because of the forest* a military term for mobilizing civilians during an air-raid.>

[the town red](#) see

very enthusiastic or dedicated: *She's a red-hot fan of the*

[tape](#) the rules and regulations, official papers, etc, that are thought to characterize government departments: *With all the red tape it could take quite a long time to get a* the red tape used by government offices to tie bundles of papers.>

[red](#) to get very angry: *She saw red when she witnessed him kick the red carpet* see

reed

[broken reed](#) someone who is too weak or unreliable to be depended upon: *She has to work to support her five children because her husband is a broken reed after his nervous*

region

the region of (something) about, approximately: *The price will be in the region of*

rein

free rein to (something) to allow complete freedom to (one's imagination, emotions, etc): *She gave free rein to her creative powers in her recent* to a horse that is allowed to go as fast as it likes.>

[a tight rein on \(someone or something\)](#) to keep strict control over (someone or something): *We must keep a tight rein on our expenditure this* to a horse strictly controlled by the rider.>

reinvent

[the wheel](#) see

reputation

up to one's reputation to behave in the way that one is reputed or expected to behave: *He lived up to his reputation as a womanizer by making a pass at our*

resort

a or in the last resort see

resistance

line of least resistance see

resource

(someone) to his or her own resources to let (someone) find his or her own way of solving a problem, entertaining himself or herself, etc: *You can't be responsible for her all the time. You'll have to leave her to her own resources some*

respect

no respecter of persons not to be influenced by the standing, importance, money, etc, of people: *Illness is no respecter of*

rest

to rest to stop: *The child's train came to rest just in front of it a rest* used to tell someone to stop going on and on talking about a subject that is annoying or boring: *Give it a rest! We know that you lost the match unfairly, but there's no use complaining to us about*

(someone) to rest to bury (someone): *We laid the old man to rest assured you can be quite certain: Rest assured we will do a good*

on one's laurels see

on one's oars see

rest is history see

retreat

a (hasty) retreat see

return

to the fold to come back to one's family, an organization, a set of principles or beliefs, etc, which one has previously left: *He left the firm to work overseas but he has now returned to the* to a sheep returning to the sheep-pen.>

[point of no return](#) see

rhetorical

[question](#) a question which does not require an answer: *What happened to the summers of our youth? Don't answer—that was a rhetorical question!*

rhyme

rhyme or reason [to](#) without any logical or sensible reason or explanation: *His attitude to his children is without rhyme or*

rich

as Croesus extremely rich: *He can well afford to pay for the* He's rich as was a very wealthy ruler of the kingdom of Lydia.>

[it rich](#) to obtain wealth, often suddenly or unexpectedly: *He struck it rich when he went to work for the old* She left him all her

riddance

riddance to (someone or something) I am glad to have got rid of (someone or something): *Good riddance to* He was just a

ride

riding for a fall to be on a course of action that is likely to lead to unpleasant results or disaster for oneself: *Just because she's a friend of the manager she thinks she can come to work as late as she* She's riding for a originally to hunting.>

[along for the ride](#) to do something that other people are doing just for enjoyment or interest, not because one is seriously involved in it: *Jim and Mary are going on an archaeological dig this weekend and I'm going along for the*

a rough ride to receive harsh treatment or suffer an unpleasant experience: *I hear he had rather a rough ride at his*

out (something) to survive until (something difficult) is over: Many small companies did not ride out the literally of a ship keeping afloat during a storm.>

[roughshod over \(someone\)](#)_see

[high](#)_see

[\(someone\)_for a ride](#) to deceive or trick (someone): *He was taking her for a ride by pretending to be wealthy when he's actually*
American gangsters' slang for killing someone, from the practice of killing someone in a moving vehicle so as not to attract attention.>

rift

[rift in the lute](#) a slight difficulty or disagreement that might develop into a major one and ruin a project or relationship:
They've only been divorced for a short time but I noticed a rift in the lute right at the beginning of their to a quotation from Tennyson's epic poem, "Idylls of the King".>

right

[right on the money](#)_see

rights rightly, justly: *By rights he should not be in a senior*
[or keep on the right side of \(someone\)](#) to act in such a way that (someone) feels or continues to feel friendly and well-disposed towards one: *It is important to keep on the right side of your girlfriend's*

[one's right arm for \(something\)](#)_see

[one's heart in the right place](#)_see

[one's own right](#) independently, because of one's own social position, ability, work, etc: *She is a princess in her own right, not because her husband is a*

[one's right mind](#)_see

[left hand does not know what his or her right one is doing](#)_see

[right and centre](#)_see

all the right noises see

or *Miss Right* the perfect man or woman for one to marry: *She's turned down several proposals of She says she's waiting for Mr right in the head* deranged, insane, mentally handicapped: *The young man who attacked her is not right in the*

the right track see

(something) right to repair, to make all right, to rectify: *The machine has been put The misunderstanding has been put*

(someone) right to cause (someone) to realize his mistake, incorrect beliefs, etc: *He thought they were still married but I was able to put him*

arm see

as rain see

man or woman someone's most valuable and helpful assistant:

The chief mechanic is the garage owner's right-hand

off immediately: *They told me the name of the nearest supplier right*

(someone) right to be something unpleasant that (someone)

deserves: *It serves her right that he has left She was having an affair with his best*

(something) to rights to bring (something) into a correct,

organized, desired, etc, state: *The filing system is chaotic but we'll soon set it to*

the right note see

ring

dead ringer someone who looks extremely like someone else: *He's a dead ringer for my younger* from the use of the phrase to mean a horse, similar to the original, illegally substituted in a race.>

a ringside seat to be in a position to observe clearly what is happening: *His mother's had a ringside seat at their marital quarrels* for refers to boxing.>

a bell see

down the curtain (on something) see

the changes see

true to sound true, to be convincing: *Something about his account of the accident did not hold*

riot

the riot act to (someone) to scold (someone) severely and warn him or her to behave better: Their mother read the riot act to the children about the state of their Riot Act of 1715 was read to unlawful gatherings of people to break the gathering up. If the people refused to disperse action could be taken against them.>

living extravagant, energetic behaviour: After the riotous living of Christmas I'm glad to take things

riot to get out of control: *The children run riot in her Wild roses run riot in her*

rip

it rip to do something with a great deal of energy or with a lack of restraint: The children's choir were singing some kind of marching song and they really let it

ripe

ripe old age see

rise

up with or rise with the lark see

and shine to get out of bed and be lively and cheerful: It's time to rise and

from the ashes see

to the bait see

to the occasion see

a rise out of (someone) to tease or make fun of (someone) so that he or she gets annoyed: You should try to ignore it when he takes a rise out of

risk

life and limb see

one's neck see

the risk of (something or doing something) to do (something) that involves a risk of (something or doing something): He runs the risk of killing himself when he drives so

river

(someone) down the river to to betray or be disloyal to (someone): He sold his friend down the river by telling the police that she had been present at the historically to selling slaves from the upper Mississippi states to buyers in Louisiana where working and living conditions were much harsher.>

road

roads lead to Rome see

the show on the road see

the road start out on a journey: *If we're to get there by nightfall we'll have to hit the road*

for the road one last drink before leaving: *Don't go Let's have one for the*

roaring

a roaring trade in (something) to be selling a lot of (something):

We're doing a roaring trade in ice-cream in this hot

drunk extremely, and often noisily, drunk: They all got roaring drunk after their team

rob

robbery see

Peter to pay Paul to pay (someone) with the money that should go to pay a debt owed to (someone else): *He paid the gas bill with the rent money, which was just robbing Peter to pay to Saints Peter and Paul who share the same feast day, 29 July.>*

rock

a rock and a hard place in a situation in which one is faced with a choice between two equally unpleasant or unacceptable alternatives: *I was between a rock and a hard I had missed the last bus and either had to stay at the bus stop until the first bus in the morning or walk many miles in the dark and*
the rocks (1) in difficulties, in danger of being destroyed or ruined: *Their marriage is on the* (2) of a drink, served with ice cubes: *He asked for a whisky on the*
as a rock extremely steady, motionless: *The surgeon's hand was steady as a*

rocket

rocket science used to indicate that something is quite easy and does not require much intellect or skill: *I only asked her to look after the reception desk for ten minutes while I took a It wasn't rocket science!*

rod

the lightning rod for (something) see

a rod for one's own back to do something which is going to cause harm or problems for oneself in the future: *If you charge too little for your work now you will be making a rod for your own Your employers will not want to raise the amount they are paying*

(someone or something) with a rod of iron see

the rod and spoil the child if a child is not punished for being naughty it will have a bad effect on his or her character: *She lets that child do what he likes and she will regret it. It will be a case of spare the rod and spoil the*

rogue

rogue's gallery a police collection of photographs of known criminals: *When she was attacked the police asked her if she recognized anybody in their rogue's*

roll

rolling stone (gathers no moss) a person who does not stay very long in one place (does not acquire very much in the way of possessions or responsibilities): *He has no furniture to put in an unfurnished He's a rolling*

[roll in the hay](#) an informal way of describing having sex, especially when this is not part of a serious relationship: *Jane doesn't know that Robert had a roll in the hay with her best friend before she and he got*

on a roll used to indicate that things are going well and that good progress is being made: *Sales were disappointing last year, but we're on a roll now. We'll soon have to take on more sales*

rolling in it or in money to have a great deal of money: *He lives in a very small flat although he's rolling in*

[rolling in the aisles](#) to be laughing very heartily: *The comedian had the audience rolling in the*

[will roll](#) see

on may (a particular time) come soon: *Roll on the return to school! The children are driving me*

Rome

[roads lead to Rome](#) all ways of fulfilling an aim or intention end in the same result and so it does not matter which way one uses: *You might not like my method of fund-raising but all roads lead to*

[while Rome burns](#) to do nothing while something important is being ruined or destroyed: *By doing nothing about the rate of unemployment the government is being accused of fiddling while Rome* Emperor Nero was said to have played on a lyre while Rome was burning.>

was not built in a day a difficult task cannot be completed quickly: *The new company has very few orders yet, but Rome was not built in a*

in Rome do as the Romans do one should follow the customs, behaviour, etc, of the people one is visiting or living with: *He should try to eat some Spanish food instead of looking for somewhere that sells English* When in Rome do as the Romans saying of St Ambrose.>

romp

[home](#) see

roof

a roof over one's head to have somewhere to live: *It's just a small room in a flat but at least it's a roof over your*

[the roof same as hit the ceiling](#) see

rooftop

[\(something\) from the rooftops](#) to tell a great many people about (something): *Pam was so excited about winning the prize that she went around shouting it from the*

room

[to be enough room to swing a cat](#) see

[to give \(someone or something\) house room](#) see

roost

[come home to roost](#) see

[the roost](#) to be the person in charge whose wishes or orders are obeyed: *The son rules the roost in that The father hardly ever*

root

and branch thoroughly and completely: *The government should get rid of that out-dated law* root and

[to the spot](#) see

(something) out to destroy or get rid of something completely: *The new regime was determined to root out any*

[grass roots](#) see

rope

(someone) *enough rope (and he will hang himself)* let (someone foolish) act as he or she pleases and he or she will bring about his or her own ruin, downfall, misfortune, etc: *I know he's running the department badly but don't Give him enough rope and he will hang*

the ropes to know the details and methods associated with a business, procedure, activity, etc: *This is his first day as He'll soon get to know the*

for old rope see

the ropes used to describe a situation which is very close to failure or defeat: *I can't see Frank's business lasting; it's been on the ropes for several*

(someone) *in* to include (someone), to ask (someone) to join in, often against his or her will: *I've been roped in to help with the running of the school to lassoing cattle in the American West.>*

(someone) *the ropes* to teach (someone) the details and methods involved (in something): *You'll soon know your way around the Your sister will show you the*

rose

of roses see

up smelling of roses to come out of a situation with some kind of advantage when it was expected to result in blame or harm for one: *All the other pupils were punished for their part in the prank, but Julie somehow managed to come up smelling of coming up roses* everything is turning out to be successful or happy: *The business was doing badly last year but now everything's coming up*

at (someone or something) through rose-coloured or rose-tinted spectacles or glasses to view (someone or something) in an extremely optimistic light: *She doesn't see his She looks at him through rose-coloured*

rough

up rough to get very nasty: *He always seemed so pleasant but he cut up rough when he didn't get his own*

(someone) the rough edge of one's tongue to scold or criticize (someone) severely: *I'll give that child the rough edge of my tongue for letting the dog*

some/a few rough edges see

rough to live without proper housing, often outside all the time, and without the usual amenities: *The escaped prisoner lived rough before he was*

roughshod over (someone) to treat (someone) without any respect and without any regard for his or her views or feelings: *He never listens to anything anyone else He just rides roughshod over them and carries out his own* are roughshod to give a better grip on icy, etc, roads.>

and ready (1) not polished or carefully done or made, but good enough: *His cooking is a bit rough and ready but the food tastes all* (2) not having polished manners: *The villagers made us welcome but they were a bit rough and*

and tumble disorderly struggle: *He was too timid for the rough and tumble of the business* boxing slang for a fight in which the usual rules do not apply.>

the rough with the smooth to accept the disadvantages as well as the benefits of a situation: *The baby cries all night but she's adorable and you have to take the rough with the*

round

round to (something) to find time and opportunity to do (something), to do something when one can: *I never seem to get round to writing*

round the houses see

the rounds to be passed from person to person: *I believe there's flu going the*

round figures or *numbers* to the nearest whole number, especially one that can be divided by ten: *He would prefer the quote in round figures, i.e.*

[the twist](#) see

trip the journey to somewhere plus the journey back: *The round trip to my parents' home will take about five*

row

[amount to a row of beans](#) see

rub

(something) in to keep reminding someone about (something which he or she would rather forget): *I know I shouldn't have offended her, but there's no need to rub it*

[\(someone's\) nose in it](#) see

off on (to) (someone) to be passed to (someone), to affect (someone): *Some of his rudeness seems to have rubbed off onto his*
[salt in the wound](#) see

[shoulders with \(someone\)](#) see

(someone) up the wrong way [to](#) to irritate (someone): *He always seems to rub people up the wrong way* to rubbing an animal's coat up the wrong way.>

the rub that's the problem: *We need an assistant but we need to find the money to pay* *There's the* to a quotation from Shakespeare's Act 3, scene i.>

Rubicon

[the Rubicon](#) see

rude

[a rude awakening](#) see

ruffle

[\(someone's\) feathers](#) see

rug

the rug (out) from under (someone) suddenly to stop giving important help or support to (someone), to leave (someone) in a weak position: *The landlord pulled the rug from under her by asking her to leave when the baby was*

ruin

[to rack and ruin](#) see

rule

[rules](#) see

[of thumb](#) a rough or inexact guide used for calculations of some kind: *I just measured the windows by rule of*

[\(someone or something\) with a rod of iron](#) see

[the roost](#) see

[exception proves the rule](#) see

[golden rule](#) see

run

[dry run](#) see

[run for \(someone's\) money](#) a creditable or worthy performance or opposition: *They thought they would defeat us easily but we gave them a run for their money and nearly* racing term indicating that the horse one has backed has actually raced although it has not won.>

[running battle](#) see

[up and running](#) see

cup runneth over someone feels very happy: *Her cup runneth* Her son has returned safe and unhurt from the biblical reference to Psalms 23:5.>

[the ground running](#) see

[the long run](#) see

the running with a chance of success: *We don't know if he'll get the job but he's certainly in the running for*

the running to be the leader, to set the pace, fashion or standard:
The large firms make the running in the technological
the run running away: *There are two prisoners on the*
across (someone or something) to meet or find (someone or
something) by chance: *I ran across an old friend*
[a mile](#) see

[a tight ship](#) see

[high](#) see

[in the family](#) see

[its course](#) to continue to its natural end, to develop naturally: *Your*
child will get better. We just have to let the infection run its
the person, animal or thing that comes second in a competition,
race, etc: *The runner-up got a silver*
see

[oneself into the ground](#) see

[out of steam](#) see

out on (someone or something) to abandon (someone or
something): *She ran out on her husband and*

[riot](#) see

[the gauntlet](#) see

[\(someone or something\) to earth](#) see

[\(something\) up the flagpole](#) see

[wild](#) see

with it to make the best possible use of an opportunity, idea, etc:
If they've offered you a job, run with them *They're one of the best*
companies in the

a running jump go away: *He asked her out but she told him to*
take a running

rush

rushed off one's feet to be very busy: *We were rushed off our feet in*
the shop

a rush of blood to the head to to do something daring or rash which one would not usually do: *Anna is usually very cautious, but she had a rush of blood to the head and bet a lot of money on a horse when she was taken to the*

one's fences see

rush hour a period when there is a lot of traffic on the roads, usually when people are going to, or leaving, work: *I avoid the rush hour by going to work*

rune

the runes to examine and interpret a situation according to one's skill and experience: *Their accountants read the runes correctly and the company was prepared for the recession when it* are the letters of an ancient alphabet with secret or magic meaning. >

rut

a rut in a routine, monotonous way of life: *He's leaving his job because he feels he's in a* to the rut made by a cartwheel, etc, which is difficult to get out of.>

S

sabre

one's sabre to put on a show of anger or fierceness without resorting to physical force in order to frighten someone: *It is unlikely the dictator will invade the neighbouring He's only rattling his*

sack

the sack to be dismissed from one's job: *If he's late for work once more he'll get the the sack* in which workmen carried their tools and belongings.>

[and ashes](#) sorrow or apology for what one has done or failed to do: *He apologized profusely to her for being so It was a case of sackcloth and* in mourning used to wear sackcloth and throw ashes over their heads. The phrase has several biblical references, including Matthew 11:21.>

sacred

[sacred cow](#) see

sacrifice

sacrificed on the altar of

safe

on the safe side not to take any risks: *I don't think it will rain but I'll take my umbrella to be on the same*

and sound totally unharmed: *The missing children were found safe and sound at a friend's*

[as houses](#) see

[safety in numbers](#) it is safer to undertake a risky venture if there are several people involved: *He wouldn't go on strike on his own but his colleagues are joining him and he feels there's safety in*

sail

sailing_see

close to the wind to to come close to breaking the law or a rule: *The second-hand car dealer is not a convicted criminal but he sails very close to the*

under false colours to pretend to be different in character, beliefs, status, work, etc, than is really the case: *He said that he is a qualified teacher, but he is sailing under false* to a ship flying a flag other than its own, as pirate ships sometimes did.>

the wind out of (someone's) sails see

salad

salad days (someone's) carefree and inexperienced youth: *In our salad days we didn't mind the discomfort of Shakespeare's Antony and Act 1, scene v.*>

salt

the salt in a humble, lowly or despised position: *Now that she is in an executive position she regards all her former colleagues as being below the* the salt container marked the division at a dinner table between the rich and important people and the more lowly people, the important people being near the top and so above the salt.>

a dose of salts see

salt in the wound to to make someone feel worse: *He left her and rubbed salt in the wound by laughing about it with his* used to be used as an antiseptic but it was painful on raw wounds.>

(something) with a grain to or *pinch of salt* to treat (something) with some disbelief: *He says that he is an experienced sailor but I'd take that with a pinch of*

salt of the earth someone very worthy or good: *Her mother would help anyone in* *She's the salt of the* biblical reference to Matthew 5:13.>

one's salt worth the money one is paid, of any worth: *If she can't take telephone messages properly she's not worth her* was once a valuable commodity and the reference is to that given to servants or workers.>

Samaritan

good Samaritan someone who helps people when they are in need: *A good Samaritan gave me a lift to the garage when I ran out of* biblical reference to the parable in Luke 10.>

same

all the same to (someone) to be a matter of no importance to (someone): *It's all the same to me if he goes or*

in the same mould as (someone) see

on the same page see

be in the same league as (someone) see

from the same hymn or song sheet see

same old story see

sand

(something) on sand to establish (something) without having enough support, money, likelihood of survival, etc, to make it secure or practicable: *The new business is built on The market for its products is too* biblical reference to Matthew 7:26.>

as a sandboy see

shifting sands of (something) used to describe a situation which keeps changing and so is difficult to deal with: *Given the shifting sands of the current political situation, it is impossible to predict which party will win the next*

sardine

like sardines crowded very close together: *So many people turned up to the protest meeting that we were packed like* are sold tightly packed in tins.>

savage

savage see

save

or put away or save (something) for a rainy day see

by the bell see

one's skin see

the day see

grace see

sauce

sauce for the goose is sauce for the gander see

say

one's piece see

the word see

no saying it is impossible to know or guess, there is no way of knowing or guessing: *There's no saying how long the meeting will*
They have so many issues to

can say that again! you're absolutely right!: *"I think that shop is very expensive."* *"You can say that again!"*

scales

the scales to be the factor that decides some issue, or causes events to happen in a certain way: *We couldn't decide between a holiday in Greece or one in Italy but the cheaper flight to Rome tipped the scales in favour of*

scarlet

woman an immoral or promiscuous woman: *His mother treats her like a scarlet woman because she is* biblical reference to the woman in scarlet in Revelation 17.>

scene

the scenes out of sight of the public, etc: *Our hostess took all the credit for the successful dinner party but she had a team of caterers working behind the* literally to people in a theatrical production who work behind the scenery, offstage.>

on the scene to arrive or appear: *They were happily married until that young woman came on the*

(someone's) scene not the kind of thing that (someone) likes:

Opera is not his scene; he prefers

the scene for (something) to prepare the way for (something), to

be the forerunner of (something): *His disagreement with his*

assistant on his first day in the job set the scene for their working

relationship all the time he was with the originally to the

preparation of the stage for theatrical action.>

scent

(someone) off the scent to distract (someone) from a search for someone or something, for example by giving him or her wrong

information: *The police were thrown off the scent of the real killer by*

someone making a false to dogs.>

scheme

best-laid schemes of mice and men (gang aft agley) the most

carefully arranged plans (often go wrong): *We had checked our*

holiday itinerary to the last detail but you know what they say about

the best laid plans of mice and to a quotation from Robert Burns's

poem, "To a Mouse".>

school

the old school believing in or practising customs, codes of

behaviour, ideas, etc, no longer popular: *She's of the old She*

always wears a hat and gloves when going to visit

[school of hard knocks](#) see

science

[\(someone\) with science](#) to talk about something in such a

complicated technical way that it is difficult for a layperson to

understand: *Sam was supposed to be explaining the new computer*

system to the office staff, but he just blinded them with

[rocket science](#) see

score

the score to know exactly what is involved, to know all the facts of a situation: *They knew the score and were aware that their new employee had a police record before they employed to know from the score in a game who is likely to win or lose.>*

an own goal see

old scores to get revenge for wrongs committed in the past: *I know he went off with your wife years ago but there's no point in settling old*

scot

without being punished or hurt: *The police knew he was guilty but he got off scot-free because she gave him a false referred to Scots not having to pay a form of tax.>*

scrape

the (bottom of the) barrel see

scratch

see

the surface (of something) see

from scratch to start from the very beginning, without any advantages: *There were no furniture and fittings at all in the new We had to start from scratch and buy to the starting line (formerly scratched on the ground), from which runners start unless their handicap allows them to start further down the track.>*

to scratch up to the required standard: The pupil will have to repeat the year if his work is not up to originally to a scratch in the centre of a boxing ring to which boxers had to make their way unaided after being knocked down to prove that they were fit to continue.>

scream

blue murder see

screw

a screw loose to be deranged, to be very foolish: *She must have a screw loose to marry such a violent* literally to malfunctioning machinery.>

the screws on (someone) to exert pressure or force to get (someone) to do something: *He didn't want to give them a room but they really put the screws on* to thumbscrews, an instrument of torture.>

up one's courage see

Scrooge

an extremely mean person: *He didn't give them a wedding* He's an old to a character in Charles Dickens's *A Christmas*

Scylla

Scylla and Charybdis faced with having to choose between two equally undesirable choices: *Barry was between the Scylla of accepting punishment for a crime which he had not committed and the Charybdis of being beaten up or killed by the friends of the real criminal, if he told the police* the to Homer's in which Odysseus had to sail down a narrow strait between Scylla, a monster on a rock, and Charybdis, an extremely dangerous whirlpool.>

sea

sea change a complete change in a situation, someone's opinion, attitude, etc: *There has been a sea change in the kind of food we eat since we became more health*

at sea puzzled, bewildered: *She was all at sea trying to cope with the rows of*

seal

lips are sealed see

(someone's) fate see

one's or the seal (of approval) on (something) to give one's agreement or approval to (something): *The council have set their*

seal on our proposal for a new nursery to sign (something) by attaching a wax seal to it.>

seam

bursting at the seams to be extremely full: *All the classrooms are bursting at the seams and so the school cannot possibly accept any more*

or *fall apart at the seams* to be in a state of collapse or ruin: *The educational system there is in danger of falling apart at the clothes coming to pieces.>*

seamy side (of life) the rough, nasty, low aspect (of life): *She saw the seamy side of life when she was to the seamed or wrong side of a garment in Shakespeare's Act 4, scene ii.>*

search

high and low for (someone or something) same as *hunt high and low* see

season

season on (someone or something) used to describe a time when someone or something is being subjected to a great deal of criticism or attack: *It seems to be open season on politicians' private*
season refers to the period when certain animals, birds or fish may be killed.>

silly season see

seat

on the edge of your seat see

bums on seats see

a ringside seat see

the hot seat see

second

second hand not directly, from someone else: *I didn't hear about his injury from I heard it at second*

one's second wind see

second fiddle to (someone) see

childhood see

nature a firmly established habit: *It is second nature to her to work night*

not of the highest quality, inferior: *Their team last year was very good but this year's team is*

sight the supposed power of seeing into the future: *She said that she had second sight and knew that she would die*

thoughts a change of opinion, decision, etc: *They've had second thoughts about*

secret

open secret see

see

daylight see

double see

eye to eye with (someone) see

further than the end of one's nose see

how the land lies see

life see

red see

stars see

the light see

things see

through (someone or something) not to be deceived by (someone or something): *We saw through his trick to get us out of the*

which way the wind blows see

seed

to seed to become shabby and uncared-for: *This area of town has gone to to plants seeding after flowering and being no longer attractive or useful.>*

seize

[the day](#) see

sell

[past one's sell-by date](#) see

[\(someone\) a pup](#) see

[\(someone\) down the river](#) see

send

[\(someone\) packing](#) see

[\(someone\) to Coventry](#) see

(something) up to ridicule or make fun of (something), especially through parody or satire: *In the playwright's latest comedy he sends up the medical*

sense

[sixth sense](#) see

[to one's senses](#) to begin to behave or think sensibly: *He was going to leave his job but he came to his senses when he looked around for*

[sense](#) see

[of proportion](#) see

[leave of one's senses](#) to become deranged or very foolish: *I think she's taken leave of her* *She's going to marry that womanizer from the*

separate

[the sheep from the goats](#) see

sepulchre

[sepulchre](#) see

serve

[a or the purpose](#) see

[\(someone\) right](#) see

service

(someone's) service ready to be of assistance to (someone): *His chauffeur is at our service for the seen good service to have been well used and reliable.*

[\(someone or something\) into service](#) see

set

[set in stone](#) see

about (someone or something) (1) to begin (something or doing something): *How will you set about finding someone for the job?* (2)

to attack (someone): *The thug set about the old man with an iron*

[one's cap at \(someone\)](#) see

[one's face against \(someone or something\)](#) see

[one's heart on \(something\)](#) see

[one's or the seal \(of approval\) on \(something\)](#) see

[one's sights on \(something\)](#) see

[one's teeth on edge](#) see

[out one's stall](#) see

[the cat among the pigeons](#) see

[the pace for](#) see

[the wheels in motion](#) see

[\(something\) to rights](#) see

settle

[old scores](#) see

up (with someone) to pay what one owes (someone): *If you pay the bill now we'll settle up with you*

seven

[sixes and sevens](#) see

[seventh heaven](#) see

sewn

sewn up completely settled or arranged: *Our expansion plans are all sewn*

shade

(someone or something) *in the shade* to be much better, etc, than (someone or something): *Her dancing puts that of her fellow pupils totally in the shade* to making someone seem dark by being so much brighter oneself.>

of (someone or something) that reminds me of (someone or something): *Shades of school!* The food served at this conference is exactly like the school dinners we used to have to is as though the shade or ghost of someone or something were present.>

shadow

to a shadow made exhausted and thin by over-working: *She's worn to a shadow because of all the overtime she has had to*

shaggy

[shaggy dog story](#) see

shaker

[movers and shakers](#) see

shakes

two shakes of a lamb's tail [to](#) in a very short time: *I'll get it for you in two shakes of a lamb's*

great shakes not very good or important: *She's no great shakes as a tennis*

shame

[crying shame](#) see

shank

[shanks's pony](#) on foot: *There's no proper You'll have to go on shanks's* to "shank" meaning leg.>

shape

[\(someone or something\) into shape](#) to get (something) into the desired or good condition: *The office system is chaotic but we'll soon knock it into*

[\(someone or something\) into shape](#) see

up to be developing into the desired state or form: *The new player wasn't very good to start with but he's shaping*

up or ship out used to tell someone that he/she should start acting in a more responsible or appropriate way or get out: *The trainee has been given several warnings about his unpunctuality and carelessness and he's now been told to shape up or ship*

sharp

sharp be quick: *Look The bus is coming.*

as a razor see

practice dishonest dealing: *Their accounts department has been found guilty of sharp*

sheep

wolf in sheep's clothing see

sheep see

might as well be hanged for a sheep as a lamb to if (someone) is going to do something slightly wrong and have to pay the same penalty as for bigger crimes, they might as well do the latter and get more benefit: *By now your wife is already angry at you for being late home so you might as well have another drink and be hanged for a sheep as a* to the fact that at one time in our past it didn't matter whether you stole a small lamb or a large sheep, both actions were punishable by death.>

the sheep from the goats to to distinguish in some way the good, useful, talented, etc, people from the bad, useless or stupid, etc, ones: *The teacher said that the exam would separate the sheep from* the biblical reference to Matthew 25:32..>

sheet

as a sheet extremely pale: *She went white as a sheet when she heard the*

shelf

the shelf unmarried and unlikely to get married because of being unattractive, old, etc: *She thinks she's on the shelf at 23!* to goods that are not sold.>

shell

out of one's shell to become less shy: *The child has come out of her shell since she went to to a tortoise or crab, etc.*>

shift

[shifting sands of \(something\)](#) see

shine

a shine to (someone) to become fond of (someone): *He's taken a real shine to the girl in the*

ship

[a tight ship](#) see

[up or ship out](#) see

and Bristol fashion neat, in good order: *She likes everything shipshape and Bristol* applied to ships. Bristol was formerly the largest port in Britain.>

[that pass in the night](#) people who meet by chance and only on one occasion: *I met her at a conference but she was just a ship that passed in the* to a quotation from the poem "Tales of a Wayside Inn" by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow.>

the ship for a ha'porth of tar [to](#) to spoil something of value by not buying or doing something which would improve it but not cost very much: *She spent a fortune on an evening dress but refused to buy an evening bag—she carried her old* *Trust her to spoil a ship for a ha'porth of* <"Ship" is dialect here for "sheep"—tar used to be used to prevent infections in sheep or to treat wounds.>

(someone's) ship comes in when (someone) becomes rich or successful: *We'll buy a new car when my ship comes* to merchants waiting for their ships to return with goods to sell.>

shirt

stuffed shirt see

one's shirt on not to become angry: *Keep your shirt She didn't mean to bump your*

one's shirt on (someone or something) to bet everything on (someone or something): I would have put my shirt on her winning the

shoe

(someone's) shoes in (someone else's) place: I wouldn't want to be in your shoes when he sees the

a shoestring using very little money: We organized our holiday on a into dead men's shoes see

shoo

a shoo-in to be certain to win or be successful: Martin is a shoo-in for the post of manager; the other applicants don't have his administrative

shoot

a line see

(something) down in flames to destroy: *Recent research will shoot his theory down in to destroying aircraft by shooting at them.>*

one's mouth off see

whole (bang) shoot or the whole shooting match to absolutely the whole lot: He wants to sell the whole bang shoot before he goes

shop

over the shop all over the place: In her office there are books all over the

up shop to stop working: It's 5 o'clock—time to shut up

shop to talk about one's work: *I try to avoid my colleagues They keep talking*

short

a short head by a very small amount: She got there before me by a short to horse-racing.>

or *taken short* having a sudden, urgent need to go to the toilet:
He was caught short and looked for a public
[a long story short](#) see

[the short straw](#) see

[\(someone or something\) short shrift](#) to spend very little time or thought on (someone or something): *He gave her short shrift when she asked for her job* shrift was the short time given to a criminal for confession before execution.>

short not to have or take enough of something that one needs:
She goes short of food herself to feed the

short work of (something) to deal with or get rid of (something) very quickly: *We'll make short work of washing these*

short of (something) to begin not to have enough of (something):
We're running short of

(someone or something) short not to do justice to, to belittle (someone or something): *He always sells his wife short but she's actually very pleasant and* give a customer less than the correct amount of something.>

and sweet short and to the point: His goodbye was short and
[short of \(something\)](#) see

shot

[long shot](#) a guess or attempt unlikely to be accurate or successful, but worth trying: *It's a long shot, but you might get his address from the local*

shot across the bows something given as a warning: *The lawyer's letter was just a shot across the* naval warfare.>

[shot in the arm](#) something that helps to revive (something): *He should look for more* *The business needs a shot in the* an injection in the arm.>

[shot in the dark](#) see

shot an important person: *The big shots on the board are having a the shots to be in charge of events or a situation: The old man's retired and it's his son who's calling the shots in the firm*

a shot very quickly or willingly: *If my aunt were to invite me to visit her, I'd go like a*

wedding a forced wedding, usually because the bride is pregnant: *He was forced into a shotgun wedding by her the idea that the groom was forced into the wedding by shotgun.>*

shoulder

shoulder to cry on a sympathetic listener: *She doesn't need someone to scold She needs a shoulder to cry*

(someone) the cold shoulder see

a chip on one's shoulder see

a (good) head on one's shoulders see

broad shoulders see

one's shoulder to the wheel to begin to work hard: *If this project is going to be finished on time, we'll have to put our shoulders to the to putting one's shoulder to the wheel of a cart, etc, to push it out of muddy ground, etc.>*

shoulders with (someone) to associate closely with (someone): *She rubbed shoulders with all kinds of people in her*

to shoulder side by side: *The two men fought shoulder to shoulder in the last*

shout

shouting match see

(something) from the rooftops see

shove

push comes to shove see

show

show of hands a vote expressed by people raising their hands: *The decision to strike was taken by a show of*

show for appearance, in order to impress people: *The country's annual military procession is just for*
the show on the road to get something started or put into operation: *Get everybody out of bed! It's time we got this show on*
the originally of a theatre company going on tour.>
the show to be in charge of an organisation, etc: *I don't know what will happen to our*
There's a new man running the show to the world of theatre.>

one's face see

one's hand see

oneself in one's true colours see

off to behave in such a way as to impress others with one's possessions, ability, etc: *The child has just learnt to dance and is*
showing

one's paces see

one's teeth see

the flag see

the white feather see

the show to attract the most attention at an event: *The little flower girl stole the show at the*
to someone getting most of the applause at a theatrical performance.>

shrift

(someone or something) short shrift see

shy

shy of (something) see

sick

and tired of something weary of or bored of something: *I'm sick of the sight of this old*
I wish I had a new

as a parrot very disappointed: *He's sick as a parrot he didn't get the*

at heart very sad: *She is sick at heart because her husband is seriously*

side

[bit on the side](#) see

[or keep on the right side of \(someone\)](#) see

[on the wrong side of \(someone\)](#) see

[the side down](#) to hinder one's colleagues by not performing, etc, as well as they have: *His team-mates all won their matches but he let the side down by being beaten very*

the side in a way other than by means of one's ordinary occupation: *He has a full-time job as a teacher but he earns a lot on the side as a*

[the side of the angels](#) see

[by on the other side](#) see

by side beside one another: *They climbed the hill side by*

[sides](#) to support a particular person, group, etc, against another: *Two of the women in the office quarrelled and everyone else took*

sieve

a memory like a sieve to be extremely forgetful: *Don't expect him to remember the date of the He's got a memory like a*

sign

on the dotted line [to](#) to make a firm commitment to do something, often one that is legally binding: *Donald and Jim decided to go into business together and they signed on the dotted line to the signing of a formal agreement or contract.>*

signal

[signals](#) see

sight

[sight for sore eyes](#) see

[or set one's sights on \(something\)](#) to try to obtain (something): *She set her sights on the big house at the edge of the to the sights of*

a gun.>

(someone) by sight to be able to recognise (someone) without ever having spoken to them: *I know some of the other parents by sight*
be able to stand the sight of (someone) to dislike (someone) very much: *The two women are friendly but their husbands can't stand the sight of each other*
out of sight, out of mind to one ceases to think about someone who has gone away or about something which is no longer in front of one: *He rarely mentions his girlfriend, who is out of sight*
out of sight, out of mind

sight see

silence

is golden it is better to say nothing in a particular situation: *In order to keep the children quiet the teacher told them that silence is golden*

silent

silent majority the people who make up most of the population but who rarely make their views known, although these are thought to be moderate and reasonable: *The politician said it was time the silent majority had an influence on the government*

silk

can't make a silk purse out of a sow's ear to one cannot make something good or special out of poor materials: *She is not really a poor person*
The pupils aren't very bright and you can't make a silk purse out of a sow's ear

silly

silly season a period of the year, usually late summer, when the newspapers have a lot of unimportant stories in the absence of important news: *There's a story in this about a funny-shaped object It must be the silly season*

silver

with a silver spoon in one's mouth to be born into an aristocratic or wealthy family: *She's never worked in her She was born with a silver spoon in her* from the custom of giving a christening present of a silver teaspoon.>

cloud has a silver lining_see

(something) handed to one on a silver platter_see

sin

a multitude of sins_see

in sin to live together without being married: *Her parents regard their living together as living in*

as sin extremely ugly: *He said the girl we invited as his partner was ugly as*

sink

but the kitchen sink_see

sing

all-dancing_see

isn't over till the fat lady sings_see

from the same hymn or song sheet to to be in agreement about something, often to show this agreement publicly: *The prime minister will hope that all the members of the government will sing from the same hymn sheet when they are asked by the press about the*

(someone's or something's) praises_see

sit

sitting duck_see

on a goldmine_see

at (someone's) feet_see

in judgement_see

on the fence_see

(something) out to do nothing and simply wait for the end of *(something) unpleasant: Small firms should try to sit out the*

tight see

pretty see

six

sixth sense intuition, an ability to feel or realize something not perceived by the five senses: *A sixth sense told him that he was not*

sixes and sevens in a state of confusion and chaos: *With so many visitors staying the house was at sixes and*

(someone) for six to take (someone) completely by surprise: *The news of his promotion knocked him for to cricket—literally to score six runs off a bowl.>*

of one and half a dozen of another so similar as to make no difference: *We can either go by train or It is six of one and half a dozen of a dozen is six.>*

sixty

sixty-four-thousand-dollar question the most important and/or difficult question: *Only one of us will be The sixty-four-thousand-dollar question is who it will* an American quiz game in which the contestant won one dollar for the first question, two for the second, four for the third, up to the last when he or she won sixty-four dollars or lost it all.>

size

(someone) down to size to humble (someone), to reduce (someone's) sense of his or her own importance: *He threatened to cut his young assistant down to size for being impertinent to up (someone or something) to consider carefully and form an opinion of the worth, nature, etc, of (someone or something): You should size up the employment situation before leaving your*

skate

one's skates on to hurry up: *Get your skates We'll miss the*

on thin ice see

skeleton

a skeleton in the cupboard to have a closely kept secret about some cause of shame: *We didn't know that they had a skeleton in the cupboard until a family friend told us that their grandfather had murdered their*

skid

on the skids to be doing very badly or unsuccessfully and be very likely to fail: *Pam and Bob have finally got divorced; their marriage has been on the skids for*

skin

the skin of one's teeth only just, very narrowly: *He passed the exam by the skin of his*

out of one's skin to get a very great fright or shock: *I jumped out of my skin when the door*

skin off my, etc, nose no difference to me, etc, of no concern to me, etc: *It's no skin off my nose whether he comes to the party or*

one's skin to save one's life or one's career: *He didn't bother about his wounded He just wanted to save his own*

sky

and bone extremely thin: *That pony is just skin and*

sky-high to go very high: *The price of petrol has gone*

in the sky see (someone or something) to the skies to praise (someone) extremely highly: *He praises his new assistant to the*

sky's the limit there is no upper limit: *He doesn't think about money when he buys her a The sky's the*

slap

slap in the face a rebuff: *Her refusal to come to dinner was a slap in the face to her*

slap on the wrist a reprimand: *She'll get a slap on the wrist for forgetting to give the boss that*
and tickle playful lovemaking: *They were having a bit of slap and tickle on the park*

sleep

sleep (over something) to worry or be anxious about (something): *She's left him but he won't lose any sleep over*

sleep a wink see

(something) to sleep to kill (an animal) painlessly because it is incurably ill, etc: *The vet put the dog to sleep when it lost the use of its*

around to be promiscuous: *She seems very respectable now but she slept around in her*

like a log see

like a top see

with (someone) to have sexual intercourse with (someone): *His wife doesn't know that he is sleeping with another*

sleeve

or keep (something) up one's sleeve to keep (a plan, etc) in reserve or secret for possible use at a later time: *We're not beaten I have a scheme up my to cheating at cards by having a card up one's sleeve.>*

up one's sleeve at (someone or something) see

slice

slice of the cake see

slip

Freudian slip see

slip of the tongue a word or phrase said in mistake for another: *He called her Mary but it was just a slip of the*
(someone) the slip to succeed in escaping from or evading (someone): *The escaped prisoner gave the police the*

(something) slip to say or reveal (something) accidentally: *I'm sorry I let slip that you are*

one's mind see

through the net see

many a slip 'twixt cup and lip to something can easily go wrong with a project, etc, before it is completed: *We hope we'll get the house but the contract isn't signed yet and there's many a slip 'twixt cup and*

slow

slow deliberately to work less quickly than usual as a form of protest: *The voters voted not to strike but to go*

on the uptake see

small

a small world an expression used when one meets someone one knows somewhere unexpected: *We went to Australia on holiday and met our next-door neighbours. It's a small world!*

(someone) look small to make (someone) seem foolish or insignificant: *He made her look small by criticizing her work in front of all of*

talk light conversation about trivial matters: *He always talks about his work. He has no small*

wonder it is not at all surprising: *Small wonder she's got no spends it all on*

small print the parts of a document where important information is given without being easily noticed: *Read all those legal clauses very* *Don't ignore the small*

(wee) small hours see

smart

smart Alec someone who thinks he or she is very clever: *He's such a smart Alec that he tries to teach us our*

smart to be quick: *If you look smart you'll catch the last*

smart money is on (something) see

smash

smash-and-grab a robbery in which a shop window is smashed and goods grabbed from behind it: *Lots of gold jewellery was stolen in a smash-and-grab robbery on the high*

smash hit a great success: *The magician was a smash hit at the children's* referred to a very successful popular song.>

smear

campaign an attempt to blacken or damage someone's reputation by making accusations or spreading rumours about him or her: *He started a smear campaign against the opposing*

smell

up smelling of roses see

a rat see

of the lamp see

smoke

smoke in (someone's) face to to try to confuse or deceive (someone): *Steve drew up a complicated expansion plan to try to attract investors to his company, but he was blowing smoke in their faces; the firm was practically*

up in smoke to end in nothing: *He had a great many plans but they all went up in*

that in your pipe and smoke it! see

signals indications which show intentions, views, feelings, etc, when these are not actually stated: *Sue always says that she is happily married, but her expression sends out smoke signals that suggest*

no smoke without fire there is always some kind of basis to a rumour, however untrue it appears to be: *He denies that he ever fathered a son, but there's no smoke without*

snail

a snail's pace extremely slowly: *The children wandered along at a snail's*

snake

snake in the grass a treacherous person: *Be careful of He appears to be very friendly and helpful but he's a real snake in the* Virgil's

sneeze

to be sneezed at not to be ignored or disregarded: *It's not a large salary but on the other hand it's not to be sneezed*

snook

a snook at (someone) see

snow

as the driven snow see

under overwhelmed: *We're snowed under with work just*

snow job used to describe something that is based on lies, tricks or exaggeration: *We almost gave him the job, but when we checked his references, we discovered that his CV was a snow*

soap

opera a radio or television serial broadcast regularly and dealing with the daily lives, problems, etc, of the characters: *Life in their house is like a soap They've had to cope with all kinds of to the fact that such series were often sponsored by soap manufacturers in America, where they were first made.>*

sober

as a judge see

sock

one's socks up to make an effort to improve: *You had better pull your socks up or you won't pass your*

a sock in it to be quiet: I wish you'd put a sock in I want to listen to the

it to (someone) to put as much effort and energy as possible into (something): The singer really socked it to the

a soft spot for (someone) to have a weakness, affection or exceptional liking for (someone): *The old man has a soft spot for his youngest*

in the head see

soft touch or mark someone who is easily taken advantage of, deceived etc: *He would lend money to He's a soft*

option a choice or alternative which is easier or more pleasant than the others: *At school camp there was a choice of climbing the mountain or walking along the river bank and most of the children chose the soft*

sold

sold on (something) to be keen on (something): They're sold on the idea of going to

song

a song for very little money: They bought that house for a song and dance about (something) to cause an unnecessary fuss about (something): She really made a song and dance about losing her

[from the same hymn or song sheet](#) see

[swan song](#) see

soon

sooner said than done a request will be fulfilled as soon as it is made: You asked for a pizza? No sooner said than

[too soon](#) to say something that takes for granted something not yet accomplished: *We started to congratulate him on his horse winning but we spoke too It was*

sore

[sight for sore eyes](#) see

[sore point](#) a subject which annoys or offends someone: *Don't mention cars—they're a sore point with He's just had his*

out like a sore thumb [to](#) to be very noticeable: The fact that they had been quarrelling stuck out like a sore

sorrow

[one's sorrows](#) see

[in sorrow than in anger](#) more disappointed than angry at someone's behaviour: *The headmaster said that it was more in sorrow than in anger that he was expelling the*

sort

[takes all sorts \(to make a world\)](#) one should be tolerant of everyone whatever they are like: *Don't be so critical of your fellow It takes all*

a bad sort quite a nice person: He's not a bad sort when you get to know

of sorts not feeling quite well, rather bad-tempered: *He's been out of sorts ever since he had*

soul

to be able to call one's soul one's own to be under the constant control of someone else: Since he married he's not been able to call his soul his His wife orders him around all the

soul of (something) a perfect example of (something): She's the soul of She won't say anything

soup

the soup in serious trouble: We'll be in the soup if we're caught in the school after

sour

grapes see

one's wild oats see

can't make a silk purse out of a sow's ear see

space

a waste of space see

spade

a spade a spade to speak bluntly and forthrightly: *Stop trying to break the news to me I'd rather you called a spade a*

the spadework to do the hard preparatory work at the beginning of a project: There's a lot of spadework to be done before we open for is the first stage of building houses, etc.>

spades used to emphasize the large amount of something: The committee has received criticism in

spanner

a spanner in the works to hinder or spoil (a project, plan, etc): *We were going on holiday but my boss threw a spanner in the works by asking me to do some urgent*

spar

partner someone with whom one often enjoys a lively argument: *I missed my brother when he left He was a good sparring to someone with whom a boxer practises.>*

spare

spare to become very angry or distressed: *You're so late that your wife will be going*

tyre a roll of fat round the middle of the body: *She's trying to get rid of her spare tyre before the start of her its supposed resemblance to a spare car tyre.>*

speak

on speaking terms to be friendly towards someone and communicate with him or her: *He is not on speaking terms with her since she crashed his*

a manner of speaking see

for itself to need no explanation: *The evidence speaks for They're obviously*

the same language see

too soon see

volumes see

with a forked tongue see

speak of worth mentioning: *He has no money to speak*

spectacles

at (someone or something) through rose-coloured or rose-tinted spectacles or glasses see

spell

(something) out to explain (something) plainly and in detail: *Let me spell out what will happen if you get into trouble with the police*

spend

a penny see

money like water see

spice

[is the spice of life](#) see

spick

and span clean and tidy: *The old lady's house was spick and*

spike

[\(someone's\) guns](#) see

spill

[over spilt milk](#) see

[one's guts](#) see

[the beans](#) see

spin

[a flat spin](#) see

[a yarn](#) see

spirit

[spirit](#) see

(someone or something) away to carry away (someone or something) secretly and suddenly: *They spirited the celebrity away before the press could interview*

[spirit is willing \(but the flesh is weak\)](#) one is not always physically able to do the things that one wishes to do: *They've asked him to join their climbing expedition but he says he won't—the spirit is willing but the flesh is* biblical reference to Matthew 26:40–41.>

spit

[the spitting image or the spit and image or the dead spit of](#)

[\(someone or something\)](#) to be extremely like (someone or something): *The child's the spitting image of his*

and polish cleaning: *The house could be doing with a bit of spit and* to the habit of using spit as well as polish to shine boots.>

[in the wind](#) see

splash

out on (something) to spend a great deal of money on (something): *Let's splash out on some*

spleen

one's spleen to express one's anger and frustration: *He had a row with his wife and vented his spleen by shouting at the* spleen was thought to be the source of spite and melancholy.>

splice

the mainbrace to serve alcoholic drinks: *It's six o'clock. It's time to splice the mainbrace with a nice gin and* slang.>

splinter

group a group that is formed by breaking away from a larger one: *We formed a splinter group because we didn't agree with all the views of the parent*

split

split second a fraction of a second: *For a split second she thought she was going to be*

hairs see

spoil

spoiling for (something) to be eager for (a fight, etc): *He was drunk and spoiling for a*

the ship for a ha'porth of tar see

many cooks spoil the broth see

spoke

a spoke in (someone's) wheel to hinder (someone's) activity: *They had a monopoly of the market in electrical goods and charged a lot in the area but a local firm has put a spoke in their* <"Spoke" is from the Dutch a bar formerly jammed under a cartwheel to act as a brake when going downhill.>

sponge

up the sponge to give up a contest, struggle, argument, etc: *He was getting badly beaten at chess and decided to throw up the sponge* originally to a method of conceding defeat in boxing.>

spoon

with a silver spoon in one's mouth see

sport

a sporting chance see

spot

a soft spot for (someone) see

the spot used to indicate that something is just what is required or is completely satisfactory: *That glass of cold water really hit the spot* I was so hot and

a spot in trouble, in difficulties: *He's in a spot* His car is beyond repair, and he lives in a remote

spots off (someone) to beat or surpass (someone) thoroughly: *The youngest Scrabble® player knocked spots off the rest of the*

(someone) on the spot to place (someone) in a difficult or awkward situation: *Having boasted about his ability at chess for a long time, he was put on the spot when he was challenged to a*

to the spot unable to move from fear, horror, etc: *She stood rooted to the spot as the bull*

on absolutely accurate: *The young contestant's answer was spot*

sprat

sprat to catch a mackerel something minor or trivial given or conceded in order to obtain some major gain or advantage: *Our chairman asked the owner of that small local firm to a supposedly informal friendly lunch but it was a sprat to catch a mackerel* He wants to buy his

spread

like wildfire see

one's wings see

oneself thin see

spur

the spur of the moment suddenly, without previous planning: *They decided to go on holiday on the spur of the*

square

square deal see

to square one back at the beginning: *I thought I'd found a job but it's back to square* to an instruction in board games.>

and square see

meal a nourishing and filling meal: *He's been living on He hasn't had a square meal in*

the circle see

up with (someone) to settle a bill with (someone): *You paid my train I had better square up with*

up to (someone or something) to face and tackle (someone or something) boldly: *She is going to have to square up to her financial*

squeak

narrow squeak a narrow escape: *That was a narrow That car nearly ran me*

squib

damp squib see

stab

a stab at (something) to have a try at (something): *I've never papered a room but I'll have a stab at*

(someone) in the back to behave treacherously towards (someone), to betray (someone): *He stabbed his best friend in the back by going off with his wife when he was in*

stable

the stable door after the horse has bolted to to take precautions against something happening after it has already happened: *Now that they have been burgled they have installed a burglar* It is a case of locking the stable door after the horse has

stack

one's stack to lose one's temper: *Mary's mum will blow her stack if she's late home*

the cards against (someone) see

stage

stage whisper a loud whisper that is intended to be heard by people other than the person to whom it is directed: *She said to me in a stage whisper that she would like to meet the man by the* the fact that whispers on stage have to be audible to the audience.>

fright the nervousness, sometimes leading to him or her forgetting words, felt by an actor when in front of an audience; often extended to that felt by anyone making a public appearance: *She suddenly got stage fright when she saw the size of the gathering that she was to*

(something) to be in overall charge of (something): *She stage-managed the whole of the musical* to be in charge of the scenery and equipment for a play.>

stake

to the stake to suffer severe punishment or retribution: *The women won't mind going to the stake if they can stop the nuclear waste dump being sited* people being burned while tied to a stake, often because of their religious beliefs.>

a stake in (something) to have an interest or investment in (something): *We all have a stake in the family*

a claim in (something) to assert or establish one's right to or ownership of (something): *The youngest sister got a lawyer to stake*

her claim to a share in the family originally to gold-mining.>

stall

[out one's stall](#) to make all the plans or preparations necessary to achieve something: *Mark is already setting out his stall to be promoted to*

stamp

[stamping ground](#) a place where (someone) goes regularly: *The pub in the village is his stamping to animals.>*

stand

[stands to reason that](#) see

[where one stands](#) to know the exact nature of one's position or situation: *With so much talk of redundancy the workers must know where they*

[a stand against \(something\)](#) to oppose or resist (something one believes to be wrong, etc): *We should all make a stand against*

[to stand an earthly same as not to have an earthly](#) see

by (1) to provide help and support for (someone): Her parents stood by her when she had the (2) to be ready to take action: The emergency services are standing There has been an accident at the corrected to accept that one has been wrong: I thought they lived in Leeds but he tells me it's I stand

[one's ground](#) see

in for (someone) to act as a substitute for (someone): She is just standing in for his usual nurse who is on

[\(someone\) in good stead](#) see

on ceremony to be very formal: Take your jacket off if you There is no need to stand on

out for (something) to go on protesting or resisting until one gets (something): The unions are standing out for more

[the test of time](#) see

(someone) *up* not to keep a promise to meet (someone): *We were supposed to be going to the cinema together but he stood me up and be counted to declare one's opinions publicly: She says she's in favour of equal rights for women but she won't stand up and be counted when it comes to us asking the boss for fairer up for (someone) to support or defend (someone): His brother stood up for him when he was being*

up to (someone) to face (someone) boldly, to show resistance to (someone): She should be encouraged to stand up to her husband and refuse to be

star

stars to see flashes of light as a result of a bang on the head: *I saw stars when the branch fell on my*

stare

staring one in the face see

start

false start an unsuccessful beginning, resulting in one having to start again: *He's had one false start with his first restaurant and he's now bought a start in a race which has to be repeated, e.g. because a runner has left the starting line before the signal has been given.>*

under starter's orders to be ready to start doing something: *It took the council a long time to get enough money to build a new community hall, but the project is under starter's orders*

starters to begin with: *For starters, we need more* <"Starter" refers to the first course of a meal.>

from scratch see

statistics

statistics see

status

quo the situation as it is, or was, before a change: *The experiment has obviously failed and we should return to the status* “the state in which”.>

symbol a possession which supposedly demonstrates someone’s high social position: *He bought his Rolls Royce as a status*

stay

[the course](#) to continue to the end or completion of (something):

She’s gone on a diet but she’ll never stay the

[the pace](#) see

stead

[\(someone\) in good stead](#) to be useful or advantageous in the future: *The job may not be interesting but the experience of it will stand you in good stead when you look for*

steady

[as a rock](#) see

[steady](#) to go out together regularly, to have a romantic attachment to each other: *My cousin and his girlfriend are not engaged but they are going*

steal

[a march on \(someone\)](#) see

[the show](#) see

[\(someone’s\) thunder](#) see

steam

all steamed up to get angry or agitated: *There’s no point in getting all steamed up about the ugly new* *There’s nothing you can do about* *up steam* to gather energy and impetus to do (something): *I should finish this work today but I can’t seem to get up of* increasing the pressure of steam in an engine before it goes into operation.>

[off steam](#) to give free expression to one’s feelings or energies: *He wrote the letter to the council to let off steam about his objections*

to the new The children need to let off steam after they've been sitting in school all release steam from a steam engine in order to reduce pressure.>

out of steam to become exhausted, to lose enthusiasm: I think our political campaign is running out of steam. Hardly anyone turns up for our public to the steam engine.>

one's own steam entirely through one's own efforts: He got the job under his own steam even although his father's in the same

step

by step gradually: You won't get better right You must take it step by

in to intervene: The two children are quarrelling but the parents shouldn't step

on it to hurry: Step on We're going to be to putting one's foot down hard on the accelerator pedal of a car.>

out of line see

(something) up to increase (something): The police are going to step up their

steps to take action of some kind: The government must take steps to improve the

stick

stick to beat (someone) with something which can be used to criticize or damage (someone): Tom was very wild as a youth and this is still used by some of his critics as a stick to beat him with, even though he is now a successful

on a sticky wicket to be in a difficult or awkward situation that is difficult to defend: He's on a sticky wicket if he sold goods that he knew were to cricket when the state of the ground or the weather make it difficult for the batsman to hit the ball.>

to a sticky end to meet some misfortune or an unpleasant death:

He was murdered by a People weren't surprised that he came to a sticky end after the life of violence he had

hold of the wrong end of the stick to to misunderstand a situation or something said or done: I didn't tell her she could She must have got hold of the wrong end of the

(someone) stick to scold or criticize (someone): The boy's father will give him stick when he finds out that he has failed all his literally to beating someone with a stick.>

a cleft stick see

sticks see

by (someone) to support and defend (someone), especially when he or she is in trouble: His wife stuck by him when he was in someone who is unwilling to try anything new or exciting: She certainly won't go trekking in the She's a real

one's neck out see

one's oar in see

out a mile see

out like a sore thumb see

to one's guns see

to one's last see

up for When all the other children were blaming him she stuck up for

stiff

(someone) *stiff to bore* (someone) a great deal: *The audience were bored stiff by the*

[a stiff upper lip](#) see

still

waters run deep to quiet people often think very deeply or have strong emotions: *He hardly said a word during the discussion, but that doesn't mean he doesn't feel strongly about* *Still waters run*

stitch

stitch in time saves nine to prompt action at the first sign of trouble saves a lot of time and effort later: *You should repair that broken roof tile or your ceiling may get* *A stitch in time saves* (someone) *in stitches* to make (someone) laugh a great deal: *The comedian had the audience in*

a stitch on completely naked: *He stood at the window without a stitch*

stock

the stocks in preparation, in the process of being made or arranged: *We have a new product on the stocks but it won't be on the market until next* to the fact that a ship is supported on stocks, a wooden frame, while being built.>

stock (of something) to assess (a situation): *I took stock of my life and decided I need a*

stomach

no stomach for (something) not to have the inclination, toughness, etc, for (something): *They are a peace-loving* *They have no stomach for a* to a medieval belief that the stomach was the seat of physical courage.>

(someone's) *stomach* to make (someone) feel sick, to disgust (someone): *The sight of blood turns his*

stone

stone's throw a very short distance: *Their house is a stone's throw away from*

[set in stone](#) to be something that cannot be changed: *The older members of the committee want to go on organizing the fête in the same way year after year and you will have difficulty in persuading them that this is not set in*

[on stony ground](#) see

no stone unturned to try every means possible: *The police left no stone unturned in their search for*

stool

[between two stools](#) to try to gain two aims and fail with regard to both of them, usually because of indecision: *The student's essay falls between two In one part of it he is trying to be funny and in the other he is trying to be very serious and the two styles don't*

stop

[out all the stops](#) to put as much effort and energy into something as possible: *If you're going to win that race you'll have to pull out all the* to pulling out the stops of an organ so that it plays at full volume.>

[at nothing](#) to be willing to do absolutely anything, however wrong, etc: *He will stop at nothing to get those* dead to stop suddenly and abruptly: *He stopped dead when he saw his*

over to stay overnight somewhere while on a journey: *He stopped over at*

[short of \(something_ or doing something\)](#) not to go as far as (something or doing something): *I hope he would stop short of*

store

cold storage in reserve: *Our plans for expansion are in cold storage until the recession is*

store in the future, coming to one: *There's trouble in store for you if you go home late*

great store by (something) to consider (something) to be of great importance or value: *My neighbour sets great store by a tidy*

storm

[port in a storm](#) see

[storm in a teacup](#) a great fuss made over a trivial matter: *She kept going on about her ruined dress but it was a storm in a teacup* You could hardly see the title of a farce written by William Bernard in 1854.>

[petrel](#) someone whose presence indicates that there is likely to be some kind of trouble in the near future: *She's a stormy petrel in a* Men always end up fighting over a small bird that lives in areas where storms are common.>

(someone or something) by storm to make a very great and immediate impression (on someone or something): *The young opera singer took London by storm* to capture a fort, etc, by a sudden violent military attack.>

[the storm](#) to survive a difficult or troublesome situation or period of time: *The company found it difficult to weather the storm during the recession* originally to ships.>

story

[tall story](#) see

[a long story short](#) see

[same old story](#) a situation, etc, that occurs frequently: *It was the same old story* As soon as he got out of prison he committed another story goes (that) people say that, rumours suggest (that): *The story goes that they are not*

straight

[straight arrow](#) see

straight to start leading an honest life: *He has been in prison twice but he's going straight*

(something) *straight* to get all the facts and details of a situation so as to understand it fully: *Let's get this Are you saying that you have never met the man who claims to be your*

[a straight face](#) see

[a straight bat](#) see

[the record straight](#) see

as a die completely honest and fair. *You can trust that estate agent. He's straight as a*

[from the horse's mouth](#) see

[talking](#) frank and honest statement or conversation: *You've tried to tell her tactfully to Now it's time for some straight*

[home straight or stretch](#) see

[straight and narrow \(path\)](#) a good, virtuous way of life: *He left the straight and narrow when he went to variation* on a biblical reference, "Straight is the gate and narrow is the way which leadeth unto life", Matthew 7:4.>

stranger

a stranger to (something) to have no experience of (something): *He is a stranger to*

straw

[straw in the wind](#) a small or minor incident, etc, that shows a general trend: *The by-election result might be interpreted as a straw in the wind for the general*

[at straws](#) to hope that something may happen to get one out of a difficulty or danger when this is extremely unlikely: *He is hoping that his wife will recover but he's clutching at She's terminally ill with the saying "A drowning man will clutch at a straw".>*

the short straw [to](#) to be the one in a group who has to perform an unpleasant or undesirable task: *James drew the short straw and*

has to work on New Year's out a straw from a collection of straws of different lengths is a kind of lottery to decide who is to do something.>

[of straw](#) see

poll an unofficial poll to get some idea of general opinion: *The union took a straw poll on the possibility of a* to drawing straws.>

[last straw or the straw that breaks the camel's back](#) an event, etc, which, added to everything that has already happened, makes a situation impossible: *Her boss's criticism was the last straw and she walked* the saying that it is the last straw added to its burden that breaks the camel's back.>

[to make bricks without straw](#) see

streak

a blue streak [to](#) to talk a great deal and at a very fast speed: *The person sitting next to me in the bus talked a blue streak all the way, despite the fact that I was trying to read my*

stream

on stream [to](#) to begin to be used or to operate: *The proposed new training courses are scheduled to come on stream next*

street

on the streets to be homeless: *They'll be on the streets soon if they can't pay the*

[right up \(someone's\) street](#) to be exactly what one likes or what is suitable for one: *That job abroad is right up her*

on the streets to become a prostitute: *She went on the streets to support herself and the*

[Queer Street](#) see

[ahead of \(someone or something\)](#) see

[man in the street](#) see

strength

[tower of strength](#) see

strength to strength to progress successfully from one achievement to another: *The firm's going from strength to strength since it*
the strength of (something) relying on (something): *We're going on a cruise on the strength of our pools*

stretch

full stretch using all one's energy, abilities, powers, etc, as much as possible: *We're working at full stretch these*

[home stretch or straight](#) see

[a point](#) to go further than the rules or regulations allow in giving permission, etc, for something: *I shouldn't really let you take this book out but I suppose I could stretch a*

[one's legs](#) see

stride

into one's stride to become accustomed to doing something and so do it well and effectively: *He was slow at the job at first but he soon got into his* reference to running.>

great strides to make very good progress: *Her son is making great strides with his studies in senior*

(something) in one's stride to cope with (something) without worrying about it: *She failed the exam but she took it in her to a horse jumping an obstacle without altering its stride.>*

strike

[a balance](#) see

[a bargain](#) see

[a chord](#) see

[gold](#) see

[it lucky](#) see

[it rich](#) see

(someone) off (something) to remove (something, especially a doctor's name) from a professional register, etc, for misconduct: *I won't go to that* From the rumours I hear he'll soon be struck

the right note see

while the iron is hot see

string

another or more than one string to one's bow see

(someone) *on a string* to have (someone) in one's control: *He has her on a string—she owes him to someone manipulating a puppet.*>

the purse strings see

long is a piece of string? to used to emphasize how difficult or impossible it is to give a definite answer to a question: *You're asking how long it will take to get planning permission for the new How long is a piece of string? It depends on things like how many other planning proposals there are before the committee, how many protests there are, and so*

strings to use influence to gain an advantage or benefit of some kind: *He may have to pull a few strings to get a visa for above.*>

to (someone's) apron-strings see

no strings attached without any conditions or provisos: *Father will lend us the money with no strings*

strip

a strip off (someone) see

stripe

one's stripes to do something which justifies your job, position, rank, etc: *In last night's performance the young actor really earned his stripes as most promising newcomer to the British*

stroke

a stroke with a single effort or attempt: *That loan would solve all our financial problems at a*

(someone) off his or her stroke to hinder or prevent (someone) from proceeding smoothly with an activity: *By laughing at him*

while he was playing bowls they put him off his to upsetting the rhythm of someone's rowing.>

strong

(someone's) strong suit be something at which (someone) is very good: *Organization is not his strong to card-playing.>*

strut

one's stuff see

stubborn

as a mule see

stuck

for (something) in need of (something), unable to go on without (something): I can't finish decorating my I'm stuck for

on (someone or something) very fond of (someone or something): He's stuck on her younger

with (someone or something) burdened with (something): She's got stuck with the club

stuff

stuffed shirt a pompous, over-formal person: *He never seems to enjoy He's a real stuffed to a shop dummy.>*

one's stuff to do something that is necessary and that one either specializes in or does skilfully: *Here's the Go and do your*

stuffed an angry expression used informally in refusing someone's request, opinion, etc: *You want me to go and get your slippers? Get stuffed!*

the stuffing out of (someone) (1) to beat (someone) severely: *The older boy knocked the stuffing out of the* (2) to discourage (someone) completely, to deprive (someone) of vitality: *It knocked the stuffing out of him when he was declared to stuffed animals.>*
one's stuff to be knowledgeable about one's subject, job, etc: *Our neighbour works in computers and he really knows his*

one's stuff to do something which you know you do well, usually in a proud and confident way: *The young dancers were delighted to be given the opportunity to strut their stuff in front of a large*

stumbling

stumbling block something that hinders or prevents progress: *The cost of the venture is the main stumbling* biblical reference to Romans 14:13.>

stump

one's stumps to hurry up: *You'd better stir your* *Our guests will soon be* <"Stumps" here means legs.>

style

(someone's) style to hinder (someone) from acting in the way that he or she would like or is accustomed to: *His style has been cramped by the fact that he has a wife and two*

style elegantly, luxuriously: *She arrived in style in a chauffeur-driven*

such

as it is used to suggest that something you have referred to is of low quality or not enough: : *You are welcome to borrow our wheelbarrow, such as it*

suffer

to suffer fools gladly see

sugar

daddy an elderly man who has a young girlfriend or mistress to whom he gives expensive presents: *She looks like a Christmas tree wearing all the jewellery her sugar daddy has given*

the pill to make something unpleasant more pleasant: *She was told she was losing her job but the boss sugared the pill by offering her some part-time*

suit

(someone's) strong suit see

in (grey) suits to used to describe the powerful men who are in control of an organization, government, etc: *The men in grey suits are having a meeting this afternoon which will decide the fate of many of the bank's*

birthday suit nakedness: *The little boy ran along the corridor to the bathroom in his birthday*

suit see

(someone) down to the ground see

oneself to do as one wishes: We're all going, but you can suit

summer

Indian summer see

swallow does not make a summer see

sun

the sun see

place in the sun see

the sun in the whole world: He would like to visit every country under the

Sunday

month of Sundays see

Sunday best (someone's) smartest, formal clothes, of the kind worn to church on Sundays: *He's wearing his Sunday best because he's going for a job*

sundry

and sundry see

sure

or *feel sure of oneself* to be confident, to have self-confidence: *He's not very good at his job but he's very sure of*

as eggs is eggs used to emphasize the certainty of something: *Matt will be late, sure as eggs is*

enough as was expected: I said the parcel would arrive today, and sure enough it came before

be sure certainly: *To be sure, he seems to be very pleasant but I do not trust*

surface

the surface of_(something) to deal with only a very small part of (something): *In one term you will only scratch the surface of the history of the*

suspicion

suspicion see

swallow does not make a summer a single success, etc, does not mean that a generally successful, etc, time is about to come: *He sold a car on his first morning in the garage and thinks he's going to be a top-class We couldn't resist telling him that one swallow does not make a* to the fact that swallows begin to come to Britain at the start of summer.>

one's pride see

swan

around to wander about in a leisurely way: *We were all working hard and she was swanning about giving*

swan song the last work or performance by a musician, poet, playwright, actor, etc, before his or her death or retirement; by extension also applied to anyone who does anything for the last time: *The theatre was full because everyone wanted to be present at the great actress's swan He was not to know that his conference speech was his swan song. He died the next* to an ancient legend that the swan sings as it is dying although it is otherwise silent.>

swear

blind see

by (someone or something) to have complete trust and faith in (someone or something), to recommend (someone or something) very highly: *He swears by that make of*

like a trooper see

sweat

[a cold sweat](#) see

sweat! used informally to mean no trouble, no problem: *No sweat! I'll get your package there on*

[blood](#) see

sweat of one's brow one's hard work: *She spends all the money that he earns by the sweat of his*

sweep

[a clean sweep](#) see

[\(someone\) off his or her feet](#) see

[\(something\) under the carpet](#) see

sweet

all sweetness and light to seem to be pleasant and good-tempered: *She's all sweetness and light when she gets what she*

[a sweet tooth](#) to like sweets, cakes and desserts: *She has a real sweet She always has a bar of chocolate in her*

[nothings](#) affectionate things said to someone with whom one is in love, endearments: *We were embarrassed when he sat and whispered sweet nothings in her ear in our*

swim

in the swim be actively involved in social or business activities: *She was in mourning for a long time but she's back in the social swim*

[against the tide](#) see

swing

into the swing of things to become accustomed to (something) and begin to understand and enjoy it: *I hated the job at first but now I'm into the swing of things I'm quite to the swing of a pendulum.>*

[with a swing](#) to be very successful: *The opening of the exhibition went with a*

full swing at the most lively or busy part of something: *He came into the hall when the meeting was in full*
to be enough room to swing a cat see
the lead see

you lose on the swings you gain on the roundabouts disadvantages in one area of life are usually cancelled out by advantages in another: *I got a parking ticket today but I won a prize in a* *What you lose on the swings you gain on the*

Swiss

more full of holes than Swiss cheese to used to emphasize the number of flaws or faults which there are in an argument, theory or plan: *The owner's explanation as to how the jewels could have gone missing is as full of holes as Swiss*

swoop

or in one fell swoop in one single action or attempt, at the same time: *I threw out all my old clothes in one fell* to a quotation from Shakespeare's Act 4, scene iii, the reference being to a hawk swooping on poultry.>

sword

double-edged or *two-edged sword* to used to indicate that something has a bad and a good side: *Being given so much freedom so suddenly can be a double-edged sword for young*

swords with (someone) to enter into a dispute with (someone):

Those two always cross swords at committee They never

sword of Damocles a threat of something bad that is likely to happen at any time: *Possible redundancy is hanging over her like the sword of* to a legend in which Damocles was forced by Dionysius of Syria to sit through a banquet with a sword hanging by a single hair over his head.>

system

systems go everything is functioning and active: *It's all systems go here We have so much work to get* phrase is used by the controllers of a space flight to indicate that everything is ready for the spaceship to be launched.>

(something) out of your system to to stop feeling angry, resentful, obsessive, etc, about something, often by saying or doing something: *We're hoping that going out with Emma will get Sara out of Tim's system for He hasn't been able to forget about her since they broke up last*

T

T

a T exactly, very well: *That portrait of my aunt is her to a*

tab

tabs on (someone or something) to keep a check on (someone or something): *He keeps tabs on his wife's spending as she's*

up the tab for (something) to pay for (something): *He picked up the tab for the whole party of* is an American term for bill.>

table

the tables on (someone) to change a situation so that one gains the advantage (over someone) after having been at a disadvantage: *At first they were winning but we soon turned the tables on* the medieval game of tables, of which backgammon is a form, in which turning the board around would exactly reverse the position of the players.>

tail

on (someone's) tail to be following someone closely: *The escaping robbers did not realize that the police were on their*

one's tail to spend a great deal of time and effort trying to do something but achieving very little: *Amy needs to get herself organized if she is going to keep that job; she has no system and is chasing her tail all the*

one's tail up to be confident of success: *Now that the favourite for the race has withdrawn because of injury, John really has his tail*

tail is wagging the dog to used to indicate that a small or unimportant part of something is being allowed to control the whole thing: *The opening hours of the whole firm have been changed*

because the publicity department wanted to start work Talk about the tail wagging the dog!

tail to turn round and leave a difficult or dangerous situation:

When the burglars saw the large guard dogs they immediately turned one's tail between one's legs in an ashamed, miserable or defeated state: The children went home with their tails between their legs after the farmer scolded them for stealing his the behaviour of an unhappy dog.>

take

taken with (someone or something) to find (someone or something)

attractive: She was quite taken with the little

after (someone) to resemble: She takes after her

(something) as gospel see

a rain check on (something) see

a sledgehammer to crack a nut see

(something) as read see

(someone) at his/her word see

one's cue from (someone) see

(someone) for a ride see

heart see

(someone) in to deceive (someone): She really took the old lady in by pretending to be a social

it easy see

it from me (that) you can believe me when I say (that): You can take it from me that he won't come

it or leave it either to accept (something) or refuse (something) as one wishes, but it will not be altered: That is my final Take it or leave

it out on (someone) to treat (someone) in an angry or nasty way because one is disappointed, angry, etc, about something: She turned down his proposal and he took it out on the

the plunge see

off suddenly to become successful: *His business has really taken to the launching of a rocket.>*

(someone) off to mimic (someone): *She was taking off her friend's father when he entered the*

sides see

steps see

the floor see

the words out of (someone's) mouth see

the wraps off (something) see

no prisoners see prisoner

one's time see

up arms see

(someone) up on (something) to accept (someone's offer, etc): *I'll take you up on your invitation to*

up the cudgels see

up the gauntlet see

(something) up with (someone) to raise (a matter) with (someone): *You should take your complaint up with the*

(someone's) word for it see

tale

to tell the tale to to survive a dangerous or threatening situation, often used humorously: *You mean you asked the boss for more money and lived to tell the tale!*

its, etc, own tale to indicate clearly what took place: *The charred remains told their own*

tales to report someone's wrong-doing: *Don't let her see you She'll tell tales to the*

hangs a tale there is a story associated with that: *He recognized the woman who came into the room and thereby hangs a pun on "tail", used by Shakespeare.>*

talk

talks see

talking see

a blue streak see

about (something)! that is a good example of (something): Talk about conceit! He looks at himself in every shop

down to (someone) to speak to (someone) in a condescending way as if he or she were inferior: *Adults often talk down to*

one's head off see

nineteen to the dozen to to talk a great deal and usually very rapidly: *She and her friend talk nineteen to the dozen when they get*

shop see

through one's hat see

through the back of one's head see

turkey see

talk of the town someone or something that is the subject of general conversation or gossip: *Their sordid affair is the talk of the*

tall

tall order a difficult task: *It's a tall order to get the book for you by*

tall story a story which is extremely unlikely: *His latest tall story is that he has seen a*

tan

(someone's) hide see

tank

like a tank big and strongly built: *The bouncers at the door of the nightclub are both built like*

tangent

or *fly off at a tangent* suddenly to leave the subject being discussed or the task being undertaken and move to a completely different subject or task: *It is difficult to follow the speaker's line of*
She keeps going off at

tangle

[tangled web](#) see

tango

[takes two to tango](#) used to indicate a particular situation has to involve two people and that, therefore, both bear some responsibility: *Bob is blaming Ros for the fact that they quarrel a lot, but it takes two to*

tap

tap available, ready for use: *There was coffee on tap all*

tape

or *get* (someone or something) *taped* to have a full knowledge or understanding of (someone or something): *She thought she could deceive me but I have her if measured with a tape.>*

[tape](#) see

tar

tarred with the same brush to have the same faults: *He and his father are tarred with the same They're both*

[the ship for a ha'porth of tar](#) see

task

(someone) *to task* to reprimand or criticize (someone): *The teacher took the pupil to task for being*

taste

a nasty taste in the mouth [to](#) to leave someone with unpleasant memories or associations: *Lily apologized afterwards and said that she had been under stress, but her violent outburst left a nasty taste in all our*

taste of one's own medicine same as *a dose of one's own*

tea

[storm in a teacup](#) see

[be one's cup of tea](#) see

for all the tea in China not for anything at all, certainly not: *I wouldn't work there for all the tea in a long time, China was the source of the world's tea.>*

teach

[one's grandmother to suck eggs](#) see

[a strip off \(someone\)](#) to scold (someone) severely: *The boss tore a strip off them for their*

[one's hair out](#) see

[tears](#) see

teeth

[to the teeth](#) see

[the skin of one's teeth](#) see

[one's teeth on \(something\)](#) to practise on or get early experience from (something): *The Everest climber had cut his teeth on the hill behind his* to children being given something to chew on to help their teeth come through.>

[the teeth of \(someone or something\)](#) to make (someone or something) no longer dangerous: *He drew the blackmailer's teeth by threatening to go* to pulling out an animal's teeth.>

one's teeth into (something) to tackle (something) vigorously: *He has always liked a problem that he can get his teeth*

one's eye or back teeth [to](#) to be willing to do anything in order to obtain something: *They'd give their eye teeth to go to*

one's teeth to be angry or disappointed: *We gnashed our teeth as the bus drove away before we could reach* biblical reference to Matthew 8:12.>

[one's teeth](#) see

teeth of an organization, legislation, etc, to have power or authority so that people have to obey it: *The new committee has no teeth; it's a waste of time and*

the teeth of (something) against (something): They married in the teeth of much

[pulling teeth](#) used to indicate how difficult something is to do: *He was terrified of the police so getting any information out of him was like pulling*

[in or through one's teeth](#) see

[\(someone\) in the teeth](#) to refuse to help or support (someone) when he or she is in need of help: *She had helped him in the past, but when she was in trouble and needed his help, he kicked her in the*

one's teeth on edge [to](#) to irritate one: *His constant whistling sets my teeth on*

[one's teeth](#) to demonstrate one's fierceness, to show that one can be aggressive: *They withdrew their opposition to our scheme when we showed our* to a dog, etc, showing its teeth in anger.>

troubles problems occurring at the very beginning of a new project, etc: *Our new factory has recovered from its teething the pain experienced by babies when teeth are just coming through.>*

tell

told you so I warned you and I was right to do so: "I've discovered he's a real "I told you so but you wouldn't listen."

[to tell the tale](#) see

[its own tale](#) see

[tales](#) see

[\(someone\) where to get off](#) see

no telling it is impossible to know: *There's no telling how many people will*

never can tell it is possible: *We might get a heat You never can telling me!* used informally to mean that is definitely the case: *bad-tempered and rude." telling me!"*

tender

(someone or something) to (someone's) tender mercies to leave (someone or something) in the care of (someone nasty, inefficient, etc): *My mother-in-law is so vague that I didn't want to leave the children to her tender*

tenterhooks

on tenterhooks be very anxious or agitated waiting for something to happen: *We were on tenterhooks waiting for the exam results to be were hooks for stretching newly woven cloth.>*

territory

[goes with the territory](#) used to indicate that something, often a problem or difficulty, usually occurs in connection with a particular job, activity or situation and should be expected: *Billy's wife complains about the fact that he works uncertain hours, but he's a policeman and that goes with the*

term

[on speaking terms](#) see

to terms with (something) to accept (something) as unavoidable and try to deal with it as best one can: *She will have to come to terms with her*

test

[litmus test](#) see

the test of time [to](#) to survive or still be in use or popular after a considerable period of time: *Shakespeare's plays have certainly stood the test of*

[the water](#) see

tether

[the end of one's tether](#) see

thank

[thankful for small mercies](#) see

only oneself to thank for (something) to be the cause of (one's own misfortune): You've only yourself to thank for the children being spoiled

that

like that immediately, without further consideration, discussion, etc:

When she asked for more money he sacked her—just like

that there is no more to be said or done: *He's gone and that's*

thick

bit thick more than can be tolerated: *It was a bit thick for her to invite herself*

(someone) *a thick ear* to slap (someone) across the ear, to box

(someone's) ears: *My big brother will give you a thick ear if you hit*

[it on thick](#) see

[plot thickens](#) see

and fast in great quantities and at a fast rate: *The replies are coming in thick and*

[as thieves](#) extremely friendly: *The little girls quarrelled but they're thick as thieves*

as two short planks extremely stupid: *Don't ask him to be in your quiz He's as thick as two short*

thick and thin whatever difficulties arise: *He will support his leader through thick and*

thief

a thief to catch a thief the best way to catch or outwit a dishonest or deceitful person is to use the help of another who is dishonest, as he or she knows the technique: *The exconvict has become a police informer and they have made many arrests thanks to It's true what they say about setting a thief to catch a*

[as thieves](#) see

thin

thin on top to be balding: *He wears a hat to hide the fact he's thin on*

a thin time of it to have an unpleasant or difficult time, especially because of money difficulties: *They're having a thin time of it since she stopped work to have the*

thin air see

on thin ice see

oneself too thin to try to do several different things at once, often with the result that none of them are done very well or properly: *Joe is an excellent tennis coach, but he is spreading himself too thin by taking on so many*

thin end of the wedge see

as a rake extremely thin: *She insists on dieting although she's thin as a*

on the ground see

thing

near thing see

all things to all men see

one's (own) thing to to do what one likes to do or what one is good at doing: *At the recreation club we all do our own*

thing see

a thing about (someone or something) (1) to be very fond of or particularly attracted to (someone or something): *He has a thing about small blonde* (2) to be scared of, to have a phobia about (someone or something): *She has a thing about*

one of those things something that must be accepted: *Our flight has been delayed, but that's just one of those*

a thing or two to be astute and sensible: *He wouldn't drink and He knows a thing or*

(quite) a thing of (something) to treat (something) as very important, to make a fuss about (something): *She's making quite a*

thing of her

such thing (1) definitely not: *He says he's a qualified teacher but he's no such* (2) not existing: *There are no such things as fairies and*
to know the first thing about (something) see

things to see someone or something that is not there: *She must be seeing* *She said she thought she saw a large snake in the*
thing is the most important point or question is: *The thing is, how will we get the money?*

very thing see

think

another think coming to be quite mistaken: *If you think I'll still be here tomorrow, you have another think*

to think much of (someone or something) to have a low opinion of (someone or something): *I didn't think much of the*
one's thinking cap on see

better of (something) see

nothing of (something) see

nothing of it see

(something) up to invent (something): *He's thought up a good plot for a*

the world of (someone) see

twice see

third

(someone) the third degree see

Thomas

doubting Thomas see

thorn

thorn in (someone's) flesh see

thought

for thought see

thoughts see

thread

by a thread to be in a very precarious or uncertain state: *Our chances of victory are hanging by a thread* We are waiting to hear if two players will be fit in a reference to the sword of Damocles (see the thread to cease to follow the course or development of an argument, conversation, etc: *The lecturer rambled on and I lost the thread*

three

three-ring circus see

three R's see

throat

each other's throats quarrelling fiercely: *They're at each other's throats over custody of their*

one's own throat to cause damage or harm to oneself by one's own action: *The firm says that if the workers insist on having a pay rise they will be cutting their own throats because some of them will have to be declared*

a frog in one's throat see

down (someone's) throat to attack (someone) verbally or in an angry or violent manner: *She jumped down my throat when I tried to explain my*

(something) down (someone's) throat to try forcefully to make (someone) accept ideas, opinions, etc: *He's always ramming his political views down our*

in one's throat or *gullet* to be difficult for one to accept or tolerate: *It sticks in my throat the way he treats*

throne

power behind the throne see

throw

(someone) a curve (ball) see

caution to the (four) winds see

good money after bad see

in one's hand see

in the towel see

or knock (someone) for a loop see

money at (something) see

(something) out of gear see

one's weight behind (someone or something) see

(someone) over to leave or abandon (a girlfriend or boyfriend): *She threw him over to go out with someone*

(someone) to the lions see

up to vomit: *The child threw up in the*

up the sponge see

one's weight about see

thumb

all fingers and thumbs see

of thumb see

out like a sore thumb see

a lift to ask for a lift in someone's vehicle by signalling with one's thumb: *Two young hikers were standing at the roadside thumbing a*

one's nose at (someone or something) to express defiance or

contempt at (someone or something), originally by making the

rude gesture of putting one's thumb to one's nose: *The new pupil thought it was clever to thumb her nose at the*

down rejection or disapproval: *The proposal got the thumbs down*

from the from the method employed by the crowds in ancient

Rome to indicate whether they thought the defeated gladiator

should live or die after a fight between two gladiators.>

up acceptance or approval: *Our dress designs have been given the thumbs up from the above.>*

one's thumbs to do nothing, to be idle: *Friday was so quiet in the office everyone was sitting twiddling their to rotate one's thumbs around each other, indicating a state of boredom.>*

(someone's) thumb under one's control or domination: *The whole family is under the father's*
thunder

(someone's) thunder to spoil (someone's) attempt at impressing people by doing what he or she intended to do before him or her: *She knew her sister was going to announce her engagement on Christmas Day and she deliberately announced hers on Christmas Eve to steal her* Dennis, a 17th/18th century playwright, invented a machine for simulating thunder in plays. When someone else used a similar device in a rival play Dennis said that he had stolen his thunder.>

tick

(someone) a *ticking-off* to scold (someone) sharply: *The teacher gave the boy a ticking-off for*
over to run quietly and smoothly: Sales aren't brilliant but they're *ticking* literally of a car engine.>

ticket

dream ticket see

the ticket exactly what is required: *A plate of hot soup is just the ticket on a cold winter's*

ticket someone who can be relied upon to support one, providing food and so on: *She regards her husband purely as a meal*

tickle

tickled pink to be delighted: *She was tickled pink with her birthday*
one's fancy see

tide

against the tide to do, say or believe things which are the opposite of what the majority of people are doing, saying or believing: *Beth liked to swim against the tide and wore ankle-length skirts when all the other girls were wearing*

[tide is turning](#) used to indicate that a change is occurring in people's attitudes, tastes, beliefs, etc: *For many years most people in this city preferred to live in rented accommodation, but now the tide is turning and people are rushing to buy*

[back the tide](#) to stop or reverse a change in attitude, taste, behaviour, etc: *Most people now are better informed about medical conditions and cures, but some doctors would like to turn back the tide of this*

tie

tied up to be busy or engaged: *I'm afraid you can't see the He's tied up in a*

(someone) down to limit (someone's) freedom: *She feels that children would tie her*

[\(oneself or someone\) in knots](#) see

[the knot](#) see

tight

a tight corner or *spot* in a difficult or dangerous situation: *We were in a tight corner practically surrounded by the*

[a tight rein on \(something\)](#) see

a tight ship [to](#) to run an efficient, well-organized firm etc: *During a recession it is exceptionally important to run a tight*

[tight](#) to be unwilling to move or take action: *Now is not the time to change Sit tight for a*

[one's belt](#) see

tightrope

a tightrope to be in a very difficult situation, often one which involves opposing groups, which requires one to act with great caution and delicacy: *The two sides cannot reach an amicable agreement and have asked Tom to intervene, but he's going to have to walk a tightrope to avoid upsetting at least one*

tile

night on the tiles a celebratory evening spent in a wild and unrestrained manner: *They had a night on the tiles after the to roof tiles and to cats sitting on them at night.>*

tilt

full tilt at maximum speed: *The boy ran down the street at full tilt to catch the to knights tilting or jousting.>*

at windmills see

time

of one's time with ideas in advance of one's contemporaries, often not understood: *The philosopher was not highly rated as he was ahead of his*

in good time soon, when it is the right time: *The guests will arrive all in good*

stitch in time saves nine see

one time at a time in the past: *At one time he was quite*

high time see

the times not up-to-date, old-fashioned: *His ideas are behind the*
one's time see

time to be in prison: *He's doing time for*

time immemorial see

time see

the time for a good part of the time, frequently: *Half the time she doesn't know where her husband*

a thin time of it see

a time of it to have a difficult time: *The family have had a time of it since the father lost his*

no time for (someone or something) to have a very low opinion of (someone or something) and to wish not to associate with him or her or it: *I have no time for people who are rude to old*

the time of one's life to have a very enjoyable time: *The children had the time of their lives at the*

time on one's hands to have more free time than one can usefully fill with work, etc: *I could help you in the I have some time on my hands just*

the big time see

good time early enough, with time to spare: *You should get to your interview in good*

(someone's) own good time when it is convenient for (someone), at whatever time or speed he or she chooses: *There's no point in rushing He'll get there in his own good*

the fullness of time see

the nick of time see

time early enough: *If we hurry we'll still get there in*

time (1) of a clock to show the time accurately: *The grandfather clock keeps excellent* (2) to perform an action in the same rhythm as someone else: *She kept time with the musicians by clapping her*

time to find something to do to pass some idle time, especially time spent waiting for someone or something: *I'm waiting to see the I'm just killing time by reading this*

good time to have as rapid, or more rapid, a journey as one expected: *We made good time on the motorway, but the country roads slowed us*

time to remain in one's present position without progressing or taking any action: *He's not applying for other He's marking time*

until something just right comes to soldiers moving their feet as if marching but not actually moving forwards.>

before time not too soon, rather late: You've finally arrived? Not before

time at all a very short time: *It will be no time at all before your mother comes*

time at the right time: You'll be sent away if you don't get there on the time of day with (someone) to greet (someone) and have a brief conversation, e.g. about the weather: Whenever I meet the postman in the street, I pass the time of day with

for time to act so as to delay an action, event, etc, until the time that conditions are better for oneself: *He played for time by saying that he would have to discuss the situation with his wife before reaching a games such as cricket it means to play in such a way as to avoid defeat by playing defensively until the close of the game.>*

the test of time see

one's time not to hurry, to take as much time as one wishes to do something: *Take your The bus isn't due for ten*

time by the forelock to act quickly and without delay: If you want to travel the world take time by the forelock and go to the fact that time was often represented by an old man with no hair except for a forelock, a length of hair over his forehead.>

time off to take a break from work: He has taken time off to look after his sick

no time like the present if one has decided on a course of action one should get started on it right away: *If you're going to take up running there's no time like the*

and tide wait for no man time moves on without regard for human beings and therefore opportunities should be grasped as

they arise, as they may not be there for very long: *If you want to marry her you should ask her Time and tide wait for no and time again* repeatedly: *I've told the child time and time again not to go out of the garden*

flies time passes very quickly: *Is it that time already? Doesn't time fly?*

is getting on time is passing, it is growing late: *We had better get Time is getting*

out of mind same as *time*

was there was a time when: Time was when he could have climbed that hill and more like it but he's old and stiff

tin

[little tin god](#) see

[the tin lid on \(something\)](#) see

tip

[on the tip of one's tongue](#) to be about to be said: *It was on the tip of my tongue to tell him to leave*

[tip of the iceberg](#) see

(someone) off to give (someone) some private or secret information: *She was going to leave without saying goodbye but he tipped me*

[the scales](#) see

[\(someone\) the wink](#) see

tit

for tat repayment of injury or harm with more injury or harm: *Your child hit mine and he hit That was simply tit* for a variation on "blow for blow".>

to

and froing repeatedly going backwards and forwards: *There's been a lot of toing and froing between the two board We think a merger is*

toast

as toast very warm and cosy: *The child was warm as toast under her*

tod

one's tod alone: *He prefers to go on holiday on his Cockney rhyming slang "on one's Tod Sloan", meaning "on one's own", Tod Sloan having been a famous American jockey.>*

toe

on one's toes to be alert and prepared for action: *You had better all be on your toes The school inspector is*
the line see

one's toes curl to make one feel very uncomfortable or embarrassed: *It made Rick's toes curl when his father insisted on singing old-fashioned songs at his eighteenth birthday*

a toe in the water to start doing something very slowly or gradually to see if one likes it, whether it will be successful, whether people will approve, etc: *We're not sure how popular this product will be and so we've put a toe in the water by putting it in a small selection of our shops across the*

on (someone's) toes to offend (someone) by doing or saying (something) that is against his or her beliefs or opinions: *I obviously trod on his toes by criticizing the*

toffee

for toffee not at all: *She can't sing for*

token

the same token in addition and for the same reason: *If the firm expands we'll need more staff and by the same token more facilities for*

told see

Tom

peeping Tom a man who gets sexual enjoyment from secretly watching women undress or women who are naked, especially by

looking through the windows of their houses: *The police have arrested the peeping Tom who has been creeping around our the story of Lady Godiva who is said to have ridden naked through the streets of Coventry as part of a bargain made with her husband, Leofric, Earl of Mercia, to persuade him to lift a tax he had placed on his tenants. Everyone was to stay indoors so as not to see her but a character, later called Peeping Tom, looked out to see her and was struck blind.>*

or *any Tom, Dick and Harry* absolutely everyone or anyone, every ordinary person: *The club does not admit every Tom, Dick and the fact that all three are common English Christian names.>*

ton

[a ton of bricks](#) see *brick*

tongs

[at it hammer and tongs](#) see

tongue

[slip of the tongue](#) see

[on the tip of one's tongue](#) see

[\(someone\) the rough edge of one's tongue](#) see

one's tongue in one's cheek to say something that one does not mean seriously or literally, sometimes to say the opposite of what one means for a joke: *He said that he worked for a very generous company but I could tell that he had his tongue in his*

[one's tongue](#) to remain silent or to stop talking: *I wanted to tell him what I thought of his actions but I decided to hold my*

[tongues wagging](#) to start people gossiping: *Mark and Susan are just friends, but they've started tongues wagging by deciding to share a*

tool

[tools](#) to stop working, especially as a form of protest: *When Sam was sacked the rest of the workers immediately downed tools, demanding that he be*

tooth

or get long in the tooth to be or become old: *That actor's getting a bit long in the tooth for that*

tooth and nail to fight, struggle or argue fiercely and determinedly: *She fought tooth and nail to get her children*

a sweet tooth see

thin on top see

one's top to lose one's temper: *She blew her top when he came home*

on top of one used to indicate that someone is not coping with all the things that require to be done: *Lisa's workload has been increased and it's really getting on top of*

the top of one's head to without much thought, without research or preparation: *I don't know exactly how far it is, but off the top of my head I'd say 500*

top of the world see

of the top drawer see

the top too much, to too great an extent: *He went completely over the top with his criticism of the*

the bill see

top brass see

top of the ladder or *tree* the highest point in a profession, etc: *The young doctor got to the top of the surgical*

like a top to sleep very soundly: *We slept like tops after our long walk over the* pun on the fact that "sleep" used of a spinning top means "to spin steadily without wobbling".>

torch

a torch for (someone) see

toss

the toss to dispute a decision: There's no point in arguing the toss. The judge's decision is to arguing about the result of tossing a coin.>

touch

[soft touch](#) see

touch with (someone) in communication with (someone): I tried to get in touch with an old

[touch and go](#) it's very uncertain or precarious: *It's touch and go with the invalid's* refers to a ship that touches rocks or the ground but goes on past the danger without being damaged.>

(something) into touch to reject (something) or avoid dealing with it: We thought that the planning committee would give their approval to our proposal for a new leisure complex, but they kicked it into to football in which a ball can be kicked over the touchline, one of the lines which mark the side boundaries of the playing area, and so is not in play.>

[one's touch](#) to lose one's usual skill or knack: *He used to be good at getting the children to sleep but he's lost his* refers to someone's touch on piano keys.>

of touch with (someone) (1) no longer in contact or communication with (someone): The two friends have been out of touch for (2) not understanding or sympathetic towards: She's out of touch with the people in her old

common touch the ability to understand and get on with ordinary people: *The prince has the common*

finishing touches the final details which complete something: *I'm just putting the finishing touches to my*

[Midas touch](#) see

[a chord](#) see

[a nerve](#) see

(something) off to cause (something), to give rise to (something):

His remarks sparked off a

[wood](#) see

tow

(someone) in tow to have someone following closely behind one:

She had her three children in

towel

[in the towel](#) to give up, to admit defeat: *The student can't cope with his studies and he is throwing in the a method of conceding defeat in boxing.>*

tower

[tower of strength](#) someone who is very helpful and supportive: *He was a real tower of strength when her husband*

[in an ivory tower](#) see

town

out on the town to go out for a night's entertainment: *We're going out on the town to celebrate their*

[to town](#) to act or behave without restraint, with great enthusiasm or with great expense: *They've fairly gone to town on decorating the new*

[the town red](#) see

[talk of the town](#) see

track

one's tracks to hide one's activities or movements: *The bank raiders tried to cover their tracks by changing*

[the wrong side of the tracks](#) used of someone who comes from a poor or less desirable area of town: *Mark's parents live in a huge house by the park; they're very snobbish and don't want him to go out with Judy because she comes from the wrong side of the in origin and refers to the fact that, when railways were built, they often split an area into two sharply divided districts.>*

[a one-track mind](#) see

or lose track of (someone or to to keep or fail to keep oneself informed about the whereabouts or progress of (someone or something): *He must find it difficult to keep track of all his business*
I lost track of my university friends years

[tracks \(for\)](#) to leave or set out (for): *It's We must be making tracks*
(for

[the beaten track](#) see

the right or wrong track to on the right or wrong course to get the correct answer or desired result: *The police think they're on the right track to find the*

[track record](#) the extent of a person's success or failure in his or her profession or trade: *The salesman has an excellent track*

trail

a trail to show or lead the way in some new activity or area of knowledge: *His research blazed a trail in cancer* to explorers going along a path and marking the way for those coming after them by stripping sections of bark from trees (blazing).>

tread

[on \(someone's\) corns](#) see

[on \(someone's\) toes](#) see

[water](#) see

tree

[up the wrong tree](#) see

[to be able to see the wood for the trees](#) see

[top of the tree](#) see

[a gum tree](#) see

tremble

be or go in fear and trembling of (someone or something) to be extremely afraid: *The children go in fear and trembling of the school*
biblical reference to Philippians 2:12.>

trial

and error the trying out of various approaches or methods of doing something until one finds the right one: *They found a cure for the skin rash by trial and*

and tribulations difficulties and hardships: *She was complaining about the trials and tribulations of being a*

triangle

eternal triangle see

trick

of tricks see

trick see

the trick to have the desired effect, to achieve the desired result: *It's proved difficult to cure her cough but the doctor said that this would do the*

to miss a trick never to fail to take advantage of a favourable situation or opportunity to bring advantage to oneself: *He was selling insurance to people in his holiday He never misses a*

to one's (old) tricks acting in one's usual (wrong, dishonest or deceitful) way: *The police suspect that the local villain is up to his old*

trooper

like a trooper to swear very frequently or very strongly: *He was shocked to hear the young woman swearing like a trooper* was an ordinary cavalry soldier.>

trot

the trot (1) one after the other: *He won the prize for Best in Show for three years on the* (2) very active and busy: *With three children she's on the trot from morning till*

trouble

in troubled waters see

oil on troubled waters see

trousers

all mouth and trousers see

(someone) with his or her trousers down see

the trousers to make all the important decisions in a household:
There's no point in asking him if they need any gardening work His wife wears the

trowel

it on with a trowel see

truck

no truck with (someone or something) to have no contact or dealings with (someone or something): *I wouldn't have any truck with They're always in trouble with the*

true

true see

to form see

trump

one's trump card to use something very advantageous to oneself that one has had in reserve for use when really necessary: *The shop manager refused to exchange the faulty stereo system until he played his trump card and said he wrote about consumers' card games a trump is a card of whichever suit has been declared to be higher-ranking than the others.>*

up trumps to do the right or required thing in a difficult situation, especially unexpectedly: *I didn't think our team member would beat the champion but he turned up above—refers to drawing a card from the trump suit.>*

truth

truth see

will out the true facts of a situation will not remain hidden or secret forever: *He thought that no one would find out that he had committed bigamy, but his neighbour Truth will*

try

it on to act in a bold way in order to find out to what extent it will be tolerated: *He didn't expect to be allowed to go to the all-night He was just trying it*

[one's wings](#) see

tug

of love a struggle involving the custody of a child: *No-one has asked the child's opinion in the tug of*

tune

the tune to be the person in control who gives the orders: *It's his deputy who's calling the tune since he's been to the saying "He who pays the piper calls the tune".>*

[one's tune](#) see

tune with (something) in agreement with (something), compatible with (something): *Our ideas on the environment are very much in the tune of (something)* to the stated sum of money, usually high or higher than is expected or reasonable: *Instead of hundreds he had to pay to the tune of thousands for that*

tunnel

[at the end of the tunnel](#) see

turkey

turkey a form of treatment for drug or alcohol abuse involving sudden and complete withdrawal as opposed to gradual withdrawal: *He's having a hard time trying to get off drugs cold turkeys voting for Christmas* [to](#) used to indicate that people are very unlikely to act in a certain way because it would be against their own interests: *It may seem like turkeys voting for Christmas but some doctors are in favour of some forms of alternative to the fact that turkey is one of the foods traditionally eaten at Christmas.>*

[turkey](#) to talk plainly and honestly: *If you're interested in this business deal let's talk*

turn

turn-up for the books something favourable which happens unexpectedly: *He discovered there was a later bus after That was a turn-up for the* originally to a horse that unexpectedly won a race, “the book” meaning the total number of bets on a race.>

(someone) a good turn to help (someone) in some way: *The boy did the old man a good turn and cut his lawn for*

a U-turn see

to a turn cooked exactly right, cooked to perfection: *The roast beef was done to a*

the worm turns see

(someone) *quite a turn* to give (someone) a sudden shock or surprise: *You gave me quite a turn coming up behind me so*

the wheels turning see

to know which way to turn see

to turn a hair see

of turn (1) out of the correct order, not at the correct time: *You played out of It was my* (2) at the wrong time, without consideration for the circumstances of the situation, someone’s feelings, etc: *I hope I’m not talking out of turn but I think you’re doing the wrong*

turned gamekeeper see

tide is turning see

turn of the year or *century* the end of one year or century and the beginning of the next: *He’s changing jobs at the turn of the*

a blind eye to (something) see

back the tide see

(someone’s) head see

of phrase a way of expressing something: *The novelist has a fine turn of*

(someone) *off* to arouse feelings of dislike, disgust, etc in
(someone): *The sight of the greasy food turned me right*
[one's coat](#) see

[one's hand to \(something\)](#) see

(someone) *on* to arouse feelings of excitement, interest or lust (in
someone): *Jazz really turns him*

[on one's heel](#) see

[over a new leaf](#) see

[tail](#) see

[the corner](#) see

[the other cheek](#) see

[the tables on \(someone\)](#) see

[to jelly](#) see

[turtle](#) to turn upside down, to capsize: *We were afraid that the
boat would turn turtle in the rough* turtle is helpless and easy to
kill if it is turned over on its back.>

[up one's nose at \(something\)](#) see

[up trumps](#) see

turtle

[turtle](#) see

twice

[twice](#) to give careful consideration: *She wouldn't think twice about
leaving him if someone richer came*

twiddle

[one's thumbs](#) see

twinkle

[the twinkling of an eye](#) see

(someone) *was just a twinkle in his or her daddy's eye* before
(someone) was born, a long time ago: *You were just a twinkle in
your daddy's eye when I first met*

twist

one's knickers in a twist see

the twist insane, extremely foolish: *She's round the twist to buy that It's falling to bits and she will need a small fortune to fix it*

(someone's) arm see

(someone) round one's little finger see

the knife to make a bad situation worse for someone: *Anna's fiancé had just broken their engagement when Julie twisted the knife by telling Anna that he had gone off with her*

two

bird in the hand is worth two in the bush see

double-edged or two-edged sword see

two pins see

two minds see

two shakes of a lamb's tail see

two ticks in a very short time: *I'll attend to it in two to the ticking of a clock.*>

takes two to tango see

as two peas in a pod see

two and two together to come to a (correct) conclusion from what one sees and hears: *Eventually I put two and two together and realized he had been in*

lesser of two evils see

are no two ways about it see

a penny see

of a kind two people of a very similar type or character: *Don't worry about her treating him They're two of a*

company, (three's a crowd) a third person who is with a couple is often unwanted as they want to be alone: *When she went on holiday with her boyfriend, her mother insisted that her sister went*

too, so throughout the holiday it was very much a case of two's company, three's a

wrongs do not make a right a second wrong action does not lead to good and does not improve a situation: *Don't take revenge by damaging his car because he damaged two wrongs don't make a*
tyre

tyre see

U

ugly

[as sin](#) see

[duckling](#) see

umbrage

umbrage to show that one is offended: *She took umbrage at not being asked to join our trip to the* meant to feel overshadowed, from Latin “shade”.>

uncle

your uncle everything is or will be all right: *Just apologize to him and Bob's your*

[to \(someone\) like a Dutch uncle](#) see

Sam the United States of America: *Uncle Sam* is supplying some of the from the initials “US” which were stamped on government supplies, or possibly because someone called Uncle Sam was employed in hand- ling such supplies.>

under

[under the hammer](#) see

[in under the wire](#) see

[\(someone\) under one's wing](#) see

[\(someone's\) \(very\) nose](#) see

[one's own steam](#) see

the influence under the influence of alcohol, drunk: *He was caught driving under the*

[the weather](#) see

[\(someone's\) thumb](#) see

[way](#) see

unholy

[unholy alliance](#) see

university

[university of hard knocks](#) see

unknown

[unknown quantity](#) see

unsound

unsound mind insane, deranged: *He murdered his wife while of unsound*

unstuck

[unstuck](#) see

up

[in \(something\) up to one's neck](#) see

[one up on \(someone\)](#) see

on the up-and-up to be making successful progress: *The firm was doing badly but it's on the up-and-up*

[right up \(someone's\) street](#) see

[up against it](#) see

(well) up in or *on (something)* to have an extensive knowledge of (something): *He's well up in modern medical*

[up and running](#) to have started and be operating well: *The new production system is now up and*

[up in arms](#) see

up to (someone) it is (someone's) responsibility or duty: *It's up to him whether he joins or*

up to (something) (1) to be occupied with or in (something, often something dishonest, etc): *What's that crook up to now?* (2) to be good enough, strong enough, etc, to do (something): *She's obviously not up to the*

[up to no good](#) see

[up to the mark](#) see

up with (someone) to be wrong with (someone): What's up with him?

[up in the world](#) see

[one's tail up](#) see

[is all up with \(someone\)](#) see

[upstairs](#) see kick

[up to much](#) see

[number is up](#) see

and about out of bed, after an illness: He was ill for a long time but he's up and about

likely to be successful, rising in popularity or prominence: Her little sister is an up-and-coming young

and doing active and busy: I don't like doing nothing. I like to be up and

[for grabs](#) see

and downs good fortune and bad fortune, successful periods and unsuccessful periods: Their relationship has had its ups and

(someone or something) to take attention or interest away from

(someone or something): She tried to upstage the other girls at the ball with a very revealing ball

[the wall](#) see

[to a point](#) see

[to one's ears in \(something\)](#) see

[to the minute](#) see

upshot

upshot the result or outcome: They quarrelled and the upshot was that she the last shot in an archery competition.>

upper

[or get the upper hand \(of or over\) \(someone\)](#) have or get an advantage or control (over someone): *She has the upper hand in the custody dispute because the child lives with*

a stiff upper lip see

one's uppers very poor: *We can't pay the We're on our with no soles on one's shoes.*>

of the upper class or aristocracy: *She has an upper-crust* literally to the part of the pastry of a pie that covers the the filling.>

upside

or *get upsides with (someone)* to be or become on a level with or equal with (someone): *She's upsides with you She has a new car (something) upside down* to put (something) into a state of disorder and confusion: *We turned the house upside down looking for the lost*

uptake

or *slow on the uptake* to quick or slow to understand: *She's so slow on the uptake that everything has to be explained several*

Uriah Heep

Heep a sycophant, someone who always fawns over and toadies to others: *He's volunteered to go and get the boss's He's a real Uriah* to a character in Charles Dickens's novel *David*

use

in useful to be useful in the future: *Don't throw out that It might come in*

no use for (someone or something) to wish not to be associated with (someone or something), to think little of (someone or something): *He has no use for people who lie and*

use of (someone) to use (someone) for one's own gain or benefit, to take advantage of (someone): *Mary makes use of her mother for all sorts of jobs when she comes to*

one's loaf see

U-turn

a U-turn to change one's opinion, policy, etc, completely: *The government have done a U-turn on their health* originally to vehicle

drivers making a turn in the shape of the letter U to reverse direction.>

v

vain

(someone's) name in vain to use (someone's) name disrespectfully, especially to swear using God's name: *They were punished for taking the Lord's name in* biblical reference to Exodus 20:7.>

value

(someone or something) at face value see

vanish

vanishing act see

variety

is the spice of life the opportunity to do different things, experience different situations, etc, is what makes life interesting: *As variety is the spice of life, I will go to the pop concert although I'm really a jazz* quotation from a poem by William Cowper.>

veil

a veil over (something) not to discuss (something), to keep (something) hidden or secret: *If I were him I would draw a veil over his part in the*

velvet

iron hand in the velvet glove see

vengeance

a vengeance very strongly, much, etc: *It's snowing with a vengeance*

vent

one's spleen see

venture

ventured, nothing gained see

very

very thing exactly what is required: *That scarf is the very thing for her birthday*

vessel

vessels make most noise see

vested

vested interest in (something) see

vex

vexed question a difficult issue or problem that is much discussed without being resolved: *Then there is the vexed question of who is responsible for paying for the*

vicious

circle see

victory

victory a victory in an election by a very large number of votes: *We expected a victory but not a landslide*

victory see

view

bird's-eye view of (something) (1) a view of (something) seen from high above: *We got a marvellous bird's-eye view of the town from the top of the* (2) a brief description, etc, of (something): *The book gives a bird's-eye view of alternative medicine, but you will require something more*

view of (something) considering (something), because of (something): *In view of his behaviour he will have to be*

a dim view of (something) see

villain

villain of the piece the person responsible for an act of evil or wrongdoing: *We wondered who had broken the window—the boy next door turned out to be the villain of the* originally to the villain in a play.>

vine

clinging vine a possessive person, someone who likes always to be with someone else: *His wife's a real clinging on the vine* to die, to come to an end without being used, finished, etc: *The research department has some good ideas but they wither on the vine because the company does not have the money to put them into* of grapes withering on the vine instead of being picked and eaten or made into wine.>

violet

shrinking violet a very timid, shy person: *She won't speak in She's very much a shrinking*

viper

a viper in one's bosom to be helpful to, or supportive of, someone who does one harm: *The boy whom they were fostering attacked their son with a They were nursing a viper in their viper* is a poisonous snake.>

vital

[statistics](#) one's chest, waist and hip measurements: *The announcer at the beauty contest gave everyone's vital* originally to statistics dealing with population.>

voice

[voice crying in the wilderness](#) (someone) expressing an opinion or warning that no one takes any notice of: *She told them that the proposed product would not sell but she was a voice crying in the* biblical reference to John the Baptist in Matthew 3:3.>

still, small voice (of reason) the expression of a calm, sensible point of view: *The still, small voice of reason told her not to accept a lift from the stranger, but she* biblical reference to I Kings 19:12..>

volume

[volumes](#) to express a great deal of meaning without putting it into words: *She made no reply to his insult but her look spoke*

vote

[vote of confidence](#) a vote taken to establish whether or not the government, a group of people, a person, etc, is still trusted and supported: *The chairman survived the board's vote of*

[turkeys voting for Christmas](#) see

with one's feet to leave: The workers had no confidence in the new management and so they voted with their feet and found other

W

wag

tongues wagging_see tongue

tail is wagging the dog_see

wagon

the wagons of a group of people, to work together to protect themselves against possible harm or danger: *Members of the board of directors began circling the wagons when news of a hostile take-over bid reached the American West* travelling pioneers used to form their wagons into a circle if they were under attack.>

off the wagon to start drinking again after having stopped: *Jock gave up drinking alcohol because of his health several years ago, but he fell off the wagon recently when his wife left*

one's wagon to a star to have noble or high ambitions or aims: *He was born into a very poor family but he had hitched his wagon to a star and was determined to go to to a quotation from "Society at Solitude" by Ralph Waldo Emerson.>*

the wagon not drinking alcohol: *He's on the wagon for health to a water wagon.>*

wait

in wait to be on the watch (for someone), to ambush (someone): *The rock star tried to leave by the back exit, but his fans were lying in wait for*

in the wings_see

wake

wake-up call something that rouses or shocks people into taking action: *The recent floods caused a great deal of damage in the Let's*

hope that this acts as a wake-up call to the council and that they do something to prevent such damage happening

the wake of (something) immediately following, and often caused by (something): *Disease came in the wake of the* <“Wake” refers literally to the strip of water left by the passing of a ship.>

[up and smell the coffee](#) see *coffee*

walk

[of the walk](#) see

[a tightrope](#) see

it to win or succeed easily: He was nervous about the match but he walked

of life occupation or profession, way of earning a living: *People from all walks of life joined the*

[on air](#) see

wall

[climbing the wall\(s\)](#) to feel frustrated, bored or impatient: *It poured with rain all the time we were at the holiday cottage; there was nothing to do inside and we were all climbing the walls by the end of the*

[to the wall](#) to suffer ruin: *Many small firms went to the wall during the uncertain.*>

[one's back to the wall](#) see

[the wall](#) to reach a point where you can go no further or achieve no more: *I've hit the wall in my career and will have to get more educational qualifications before I get promoted*

[\(someone\) to the wall](#) to punish someone severely or make him/her suffer because one is very angry: *Bert is furious with his son and says that he is going to nail him to the wall for driving his car without*

[the wall](#) unconventional, strange: *A few people find Terry's jokes funny, but they're a bit off the wall for most of*

writing on the wall see

the wall very annoyed, irritated, harassed, etc: *These children are driving me up the wall with their*

have ears someone may be listening (to a secret conversation): *Be careful what you say in the It's not busy but walls have*

like to be a fly on the wall see

Walter

Walter Mitty someone who invents stories about himself to make his life seem more exciting: *I was amazed at some of his adventures until I discovered that he was a Walter* to a character in a James Thurber short story.>

want

to want to know see

war

been in the wars to have a slight injury: "You've been in the wars," said the nurse to the little boy who had broken his leg falling off a the warpath very angry: *Look Father's discovered the broken window and he's on the American Indian expression.*>

of nerves see

war of words a fierce argument or disagreement: *Management and unions are engaged in a war of words which will be of no benefit to the*

warm

as toast see

the cockles of the heart see

wart

and all including all the faults and disadvantages: *Her husband is a bit irresponsible, but she loves him warts and* to the fact that Oliver Cromwell instructed his portrait painter, Sir Peter Lely, to paint him as he really was, including his warts, rather than try to make him look more handsome.>

wash

out in the wash to come to a satisfactory end: *Don't worry about making a mistake on your first It'll all come out in the* literally of a stain on clothes, etc, that comes out when the article is washed.>

[one's dirty linen in public same as air one's dirty linen in public](#) see exhausted: *She felt completely washed-out after her long* literally of garments which have lost colour as a result of lots of washing.>

ruined, finished: *Their relationship is all washed to a shipwreck.*>

[one's hands of \(something\)](#) see

won't wash to be regarded as unacceptable or incredible: *Barry wants to go to the football match but his story about having to visit his sick granny won't wash with the*

waste

[a waste of space](#) to be completely useless: *My new assistant is a total waste of* She can't even take a telephone message properly.

[waste \(something\)](#) to destroy or ruin (something) by force: *The invading army laid waste the*

not, want not if one is careful not to waste anything, it is likely that one will never be lacking or in need: *Don't throw out that Waste not, want*

watch

[watching paint dry](#) see

[or a watched pot never boils](#) see

[one's back](#) see

[\(someone\) like a hawk](#) see

water

[water off a duck's back](#) see

[\(someone or something\) out of the water](#) to destroy or defeat (someone or something) utterly: *Our team looked much the stronger but they were blown out of the water by the*

[in the water](#) see

in muddy or troubled waters see

water to be accurate, to be able to be proved true: *Your theory won't hold to a vessel or container that is not broken.*>

deep water see

hot water see

a fish out of water see

one's mouth water see

and water see

the waters to confuse a situation: *It was perfectly clear what everyone was doing in the organization of the fête until Jan came along trying to change things and generally muddying the*

the first water see

oil on troubled waters see

or throw cold water on (something) see

a toe in the water see *toe*

money like water see

waters run deep see

to (something) like a duck to water see

the water/waters to try to find out what the reaction is likely to be to a plan before one puts it into effect: *It is thought that the leak about proposed major changes to the health service which was in all the newspapers yesterday was the government's way of testing the*

water to take very little action: *This is not a time to expand the We should tread water for a* to keep oneself afloat in water by moving the legs (and arms) rather than by swimming.>

(something) down to make (something) less serious, exciting, etc, than it really was: *We had better water down the account of the accident for my mother or she'll* to dilute with water.>

under the bridge something that is past and cannot be changed and should be forgotten: *Stop worrying about our It's water under the*
the

waterfront

[the waterfront](#) an American phrase meaning to cover a wide range of things or a wide range of aspects of something: *The new magazine claims to cover the waterfront of business*

Waterloo

[one's Waterloo](#) see

wave

[on the crest of a wave](#) see

waves to cause trouble: *Alison's father doesn't want her to marry Robert and he keeps trying to make waves for the young couple in the hope that they will split*

the same wavelength as (someone) having the same opinions, attitudes, tastes, etc, as (someone): *We'll never be We're just not on the same*

wax

[whole ball of wax](#) see

way

set in one's ways to have a set routine in your life and to dislike having this disrupted: *I'm a bit worried about having to ask my parents to look after the children for a few days; they've become very set in their ways since they*

[fight or find or organize, etc, one's way out of a paper bag](#) see

[both ways](#) see

into the way of (something or doing something) to become accustomed to (something or doing something): *She can't get into the way of using the*

or have one's own way to do or get what one wants: *We all wanted to go to the beach but as usual she got her own way and we went to the*

back a long way to used to indicate that people have known each other for a long time: Jim and Ted go back a long way; apparently, they were at primary school

out of one's way to do more than is really necessary, to make a special effort: She went out of her way to be kind to the new the way of all flesh to die or come to an end: He must have gone the way of all flesh by Otherwise he would be over 100 years

a way with (someone or something) to have a special knack with (someone or something), to be good at handling (someone or something): He has a way with

come a long way to to have changed or improved a great deal since starting out: Jack has come a long way since he used to clean windows in our street; he now owns several local

everything one's own way to get everything done according to one's wishes: The boss won't listen to any He likes to have everything his own

it both ways to have the advantages of two sets of situations, each of which usually excludes the possibility of the other: She wants a full-time job but she wants to look after her children She's not going to be able to have it both

a bad way very ill, injured, distressed, etc: The accident victim is in a bad

the way to go first, to be in front: Which country leads the way in electronics?

the other way see

one's way to cease to know where one is or which direction one is going in: We lost our way in the

one's way to go, to progress: Make your way to the first

way for (someone or something) to stand aside to leave room for (someone or something): Older people must retire and make way

for the

one's ways to improve one's behaviour: *You'll have to mend your ways if you want to stay with the*

way see

to know which way to turn to to be in trouble and to be too confused to be able to decide what to do for the best: *Jane's a single parent with two children and has just been told that the landlord is not renewing the lease on her She simply does not know which way to*

way and another in various ways: *He was made to feel very unwelcome in one way and*

the way about to happen or arrive: The food's on its

one's way to pay one's expenses or one's share of expenses:

David's family have invited Pam to join them on holiday as their guest, but she is insisting on paying her

the way for (something) see

(someone) up the wrong way see rub

one's way to (doing something) to be able and willing to (do something): *Could you see your way to giving me a lift to work?*

parting of the ways see

are no two ways about it no other opinion, attitude, etc, is possible: *He's guilty as There are no two ways about*

way in progress: *His plans are well under*

and means methods, especially unofficial ones: *We don't have the money yet, but there are ways and means of getting*

there's a will there's a way a saying used to indicate that if one is determined to do something, then one will find a way to succeed in doing it: *If Janet really wants to start her own business she'll find the money Where there's a will there's a*

wayside

by the wayside to fail to continue to the end of something; to give up in the course of doing something: *Not all students fall by the wayside* Some fall by the biblical reference to the parable of the sower in Luke 8:5.>

weak

a weak moment at a time when one is feeling unusually kind, generous, sympathetic, etc: *In a weak moment I agreed to let her stay at my*

weak link in the chain see

wear

the worse for wear (1) to be in a bad state, looking tired, ill, untidy, etc: *Jenny had been up all night finishing her essay and looked decidedly the worse for wear when she arrived for her first* (2) to be drunk: *We were all the worse for wear after the office*

one's heart on one's sleeve see

the trousers see

weather

a weather eye open see

heavy weather of (something) see

the weather unwell: *She left work early feeling under the*

the storm see

web

tangled web used to describe a very complicated, confused situation: *Sue wanted to work abroad for a while but she had difficulty in making her way through the tangled web of information about work*

wedding

wedding see

wedge

a wedge between to cause disagreement or ill will between two people or two groups, especially when they were formerly friendly:

The two sisters were very close to each other as young women, but a disagreement over their mother's will drove a wedge between them and they haven't spoken to each other

thin end of the wedge to a minor event or action which could be the first stage of something major and serious or harmful: Letting her stay for a week is the thin end of the Soon she'll want to stay weep

buckets see

weight

weight off one's mind used to indicate that one no longer has to worry about something which has been worrying one for some time: *Mel's father was waiting for a heart operation for months and it was a weight off her mind when he finally got*

weight to have influence, to be considered important: *Their opinion won't carry any*

one's weight to do one's fair share of work, etc: *We'll finish this in time if we all pull our*

above one's weight to to try to do something which is thought to be beyond one's abilities: Rob is really going to have to punch above his weight to stay in the team, because all of the rest of the players in it have much more

the weight off one's feet to sit down: *Do you mind if I take the weight off my feet for a while? I've been shopping all day and I'm*
one's weight about or around to use one's power and influence in a bullying way: *The deputy manager is throwing his weight around when the manager is*

one's weight behind (someone or something) to support (someone or something): *Jill is almost certainly going to be club president because most of the women students have thrown their weight behind (something) up to assess (something): It's difficult to weigh up our chances of*

its or one's weight in gold see

well

well out of (something) to be fortunate in having got out of (something): *You're well out of that She's not to be*

welly

it some welly used informally to put effort and energy into doing something: *You'll never finish painting the sitting room today if you go so Give it some welly!*

off (1) having plenty of money, rich: *They're very well off although they live very (2) in a fortunate situation: He's looking for a new He doesn't know when he's well*

west

west to be ruined, to be finished: *Our hopes of victory have gone slang from World War I.>*

wet

behind the ears to be young, inexperienced and naive: *You can't expect him to deal with that difficult He's still wet behind the blanket* see

the baby's head see

one's whistle see

whale

a whale of a time to have an extremely enjoyable time: *The children had a whale of a time at the*

what

(someone) *what for* to scold or punish (someone): *You'll get what for borrowing his bike without*

what's what to know the details of a situation, to know what is going on: *He's the only one who knows what's what in the have you* and similar things: *Put your suitcase and what have you over*

of it? what does it matter?: So I've annoyed What of it?

wheel

fifth wheel a person or thing that is not needed or is not wanted: *Jo said that she needed people to help get the hall ready for the party, but, when I arrived, there were so many helpers there already that I felt like a fifth to the fact that a vehicle needs only four wheels to keep running.>*

the wheels turning to keep (something) operating smoothly: *We need a competent office manager who will keep the wheels of the business*

the wheels see

a spoke in (someone's) wheel see

one's shoulder to the wheel see

the wheel to do something which one considers new or innovative, but which is, in fact, very similar to something which has been done by someone else; to start a project from scratch without taking advantage of available information, research, etc: *The new head teacher has spent ages working out a new timetable for the school, but it is practically identical to the old He has wasted valuable time reinventing the*

the wheels in motion to to start a process off: *If you want to get planning permission you'll have to set the wheels in motion right*

and dealing acting in an astute but sometimes dishonest or immoral way, especially in business: *He made a lot of money from wheeling and dealing in the antiques*

within wheels used to indicate a very complicated situation with many different things involved, all influencing each other: *The political situation there is extremely complicated, definitely a case of wheels within wheels, and I have not begun to understand*

while

(someone's) while worth (someone's) time and effort: *If you do the work he'll make it worth your*

whip

[the whip](#) see

[fair crack of the whip](#) see

[the whip hand](#) to have control or an advantage: *He has the whip hand in that He makes all the to coach-driving.>*

whipping boy someone who is blamed and punished for someone else's mistakes: *The young clerk is the whipping boy for the whole* literally to a boy who was punished for any misdeeds a royal prince made, since the tutor was not allowed to strike a member of the royal family.>

whirl

[\(something\) a whirl](#) to give something a try to see if one likes it, finds it suitable, etc: *I haven't heard any reports about the new restaurant, but we're going to give it a whirl on our wedding*

whisker

by a whisker to win by a very short amount: *Labour won the election by a*

[cat's whiskers same as the cat's pyjamas](#) see

whisper

[a stage whisper](#) see

whistle

[whistling in the dark](#) see

[the whistle on \(someone\)](#) see

[as a whistle](#) see

[one's whistle](#) to have a drink: *It's Let's stop and wet our*
[in the wind](#) see

for (something) to ask for (something) with no hope of getting it: You may need extra money but you can whistle for from an old sailors' superstition that when a ship is becalmed, whistling can summon up a wind.>

white

[whited sepulchre](#) someone who pretends to be moral and virtuous but is in fact bad: *He seems very pious but he beats his wife and* biblical reference to Matthew 23:27.>

[white elephant](#) see

[the white feather](#) see

[as a sheet](#) see

[lie](#) a not very serious lie: *I'd rather tell her a white lie than tell her I don't like her*

than white extremely honest and moral: *Mark's father always seemed to be whiter than white until it was revealed, when he died, that he had had a mistress for more than twenty*

whole

[the whole hog](#) see

[whole new ball game](#) see

[whole ball of wax](#) see

[whole \(bang\) shoot or the whole shooting match](#) see

whoop

it up to celebrate in a noisy, extravagant way: *He really whooped it up before his*

wick

on (someone's) wick to annoy or irritate (someone) greatly.

wicket

[on a sticky wicket](#) see

wide

wide open used of a competition of some kind to indicate that it is very difficult to predict the winner as the competitors seem equally good: *Jim is hoping to win, but the race is wide*

[one's net wide](#) see

widow

[widow](#) see

wild

[wild goose chase](#) a search or hunt that cannot end in success: *I knew it was a wild goose chase to look for an open restaurant at that time in the*

[wild](#) to behave in an uncontrolled, undisciplined way: *The children run wild while their parents are at*

one's wild oats [to](#) to enjoy oneself in a wild and sometimes promiscuous way when one is young: *He's sown his wild oats as a young man and now he wants to get married and settle*

[like wildfire](#) to spread extremely rapidly: *The disease spread like wildfire through the small* was probably a kind of fire started by lightning.>

[horses would not drag_\(someone\)_to_something_or_somewhere](#) see

wilderness

[voice crying in the wilderness](#) see

will

there's a will there's a way

[horse](#) see

a will enthusiastically and energetically: *The children worked with a will weeding the*

[the best will in the world](#) see

win

[the day same as carry the day](#) see

[the battle but lose the war](#) see

wind

straw in the wind see

one's second wind to find renewed energy to go on doing something after a period of feeling tired and weak: *I got very tired halfway up the mountain, but, after a bit of a rest, I got my second wind of (something) to receive information about (something) indirectly or secretly: We got wind of the enemy's to the scent of an animal carried by the wind.>*

the wind about to happen, being placed or prepared: *I think major changes are in the wind at*

an ill wind see

the wind up to become frightened or nervous: *He got the wind up when he heard the police were after*

the wind to get enough money to do (something): *They're trying to raise the wind to buy a*

close to the wind see

which way the wind blows see

in the wind to try to do something impossible and so waste time and effort: *James says that he has sent in several applications and that he is sure that he will get a job in journalism soon. He's just spitting in the wind, because he's got no qualifications and no*

the wind out of (someone's) sails to reduce (someone's) pride in his or her cleverness, abilities, etc: *She was boasting about how many exams she had passed when we took the wind out of her sails by telling her that everyone else had passed to the fact that a ship takes the wind out of another ship's sails if it passes close to it on the windward side.>*

caution to the (four) winds to to begin to behave recklessly: *She had very little money but she threw caution to the winds and bought a new*

in the wind to make a statement or promise which is pointless since it is very unlikely to have any effect or produce any results: *The owner of the firm has promised staff that he will find a buyer for it who will keep on all the work force, but he is whistling in the wind. Any buyer would reduce the number of staff*

windmill

at windmills to struggle against imaginary opposition: *She thinks everyone in the office is trying to get rid of her but she is tilting at windmills. Most people think she is good at her to an episode in Cervantes' novel Don Quixote in which the hero mistakes a row of windmills for giants and attacks them.>*

window

out the window to disappear completely; to be ignored or forgotten about: *We had great plans for travelling around the world after we were married, but they soon went out the window when our twins were*

the presentation of something to show the most favourable parts and hide the rest: *There's a lot of window-dressing in this. It mentions all the benefits of the scheme but it glosses over the details. Literally to the arranging of goods in a shop window to attract customers.>*

wing

(someone's) wings see

a wing and a prayer used to indicate that you hope to do something successfully even though you do not have the resources to do so: *George is running his business on a wing and a prayer at the moment and he is desperately hoping that his financial situation will improve*

one's wings (1) to leave home: *I like living at home but I think it's time to spread my wings and find a (2) to try to put into practice one's own ideas, to make use of one's abilities: So far she has*

been carrying out the head of department's suggestions but it is time for her to spread her to young birds ready to try to fly and leave the nest for the first time.>

(someone) under one's wing to take (someone) under one's protection and guidance: Someone should take the new girl under their She feels lost in this large to the practice of some birds of covering their young with their wings.>

one's wings to try to do something which one has never done before in order to see if one will be successful at it: Lucy had never been left in charge of the shop for any length of time, but she was willing to try her wings while the manager took a week's

in the wings in a state of readiness to do something, especially to take over someone else's job: She's afraid to be away from the office for very long because her assistant is just waiting in the waiting in the wings of a theatre stage ready to go on stage.>

it to do something without planning or preparation, to improvise: I have to give an after-dinner speech tonight and I've no time to prepare anything; I'll just have to wing

wink

nod is as good as a wink to a blind horse see

winks see

sleep a wink not to be able to sleep at all: I didn't sleep a wink because I was worrying about the next day's

(someone) the wink to give (someone) information secretly or privately: He tipped me the wink that it was her

wipe

the floor with (someone) see

the grin off (someone's) face see

wire

to the to the last possible minute: Negotiations had to end at midnight and both sides talked right down to the

or have one's wires crossed to be involved in a misunderstanding: *I thought it was tomorrow we were meeting. I must have got my wires to telephone wires.>*

in under the wire to do something or get somewhere at the last possible minute: *Applications for the competition closed yesterday afternoon and I just got in under the wire with*

wisdom

of wisdom see

wise

wise guy someone who thinks that he is smart, knowledgeable, etc, and acts as if he is: *He's such a wise guy that everybody dislikes*

wise after the event see

the wiser knowing no more than one did before: *I was none the wiser after his*

(someone) wise to (something) to give (someone) information about (something), make (someone) aware of (something): *Her friend put her wise to his police*

wish

thinking believing that, or hoping that, something unlikely is true or will happen just because one wishes that it would: *I hoped that we would win but it was just wishful*

(someone)_joy_of_(something) to wish that (something) will be a pleasure or benefit to someone (although one doesn't think it will): *I wish you joy of that car, but I found it*

wit

one's wits' end worried and desperate: *She's at her wits' end about her missing*

one's wits about one to be alert and watchful: *Keep your wits about you when doing business with People say he is a*

by one's wits to live by cunning schemes rather than by working:

He hasn't done a day's work in his life. He lives by his

one's wits against (someone) to use one's intelligence to try to defeat (someone): *The police know that they are pitting their wits against a master*

(someone) out of his or her wits to frighten (someone) very much: They were scared out of their wits when they saw the man with a
witch

a search for and persecution of people who are thought to have done something wrong, hold opinions which are thought to be dangerous etc: *The company are conducting a witch-hunt of certain union* historically to organized hunts for people thought to be witches.>

without

rhyme or reason see

so much as a see

wolf

lone wolf see

wolf in sheep's clothing someone evil and dangerous who seems to be gentle and harmless: *She trusted him but when he turned nasty she realized that he was a wolf in sheep's* biblical reference to Matthew 7:15.>

wolf to give a false warning of danger, to call unnecessarily for help: *She said there was an intruder in the garden but she was only crying* to one of Aesop's fables in which a shepherd boy used to amuse himself by calling out that a wolf was coming to attack his sheep and did this so many times when it was not true that no one believed when it was true, and all his sheep were killed.>

the wolf from the door to to prevent poverty and hunger: *He earns very little, but enough to keep the wolf from the*

wonder

nine days' wonder see

wonder it is not surprising: *No wonder you're It's very*
wonder see

wood

wood see

to be able to see the wood for the trees not to be able to consider the general nature of a situation, etc, because one is concentrating too much on details: *She's so busy worrying about putting the commas in the right place that she doesn't appreciate the quality of the She can't see the wood for the*
of the woods out of danger or difficulties: The patient is improving but he's not out of the woods

or that, etc, neck of the woods see

wood to touch something made of wood, supposedly to keep away bad luck: *None of us is Touch wood!* to a well-known superstition.>

woodwork

out of the woodwork suddenly to appear in large numbers: *When the police announced that there was to be a reward for information leading to the arrest of the old lady's attacker, witnesses started coming out of the woodwork all over the*

wool

the wool over (someone's) eyes to deceive (someone): *He pulled the wool over her eyes by pretending to be in love with her but he was really after her*

day-dreaming: *The boss complains about her She has no to someone wandering around hedges gathering wool left by sheep.>*

word

man of his word see

as good as one's word see

one's words to admit that one was wrong in what one said: *I said he would be last but I was forced to eat my words when he*
the word go see

a word in edgeways or *edgewise* to have difficulty in breaking into a conversation: *The old friends were so busy chatting that their husbands couldn't get a word in*

on (someone's) words to listen carefully and eagerly to everything that someone says: *The student hangs on the lecturer's*

a word in (someone's) ear to tell (someone) something in private: *She doesn't know he's I think you should have a word in her*

a word with (someone) to have a short conversation with (someone): *I'd like a word with you before the*

the last word see

words to argue or quarrel: *You can tell from their expressions that they've had*

a word briefly: *In a word, I dislike*

one's word to do as one promised to do: *He said he would be there and he kept his*

the word see

in a good word for (someone) to say something favourable about (someone), to recommend (someone): *You might get the job if he puts a good word in for*

words into (someone's) mouth to say that someone has said something when he/she did not; to suggest that someone is going to say something when he/she has no intention of doing so: *The child's mother had a right to be present when the police were questioning him, but she kept putting words into his*

the word say what you want and your wishes will be carried out: *If you want some food just say the*

(someone) at his or her word to believe (someone) without question and act accordingly: *He said I could buy goods at a discount, and I took him at his*

(someone's) word for it to believe what someone says without question and without proof: *You don't have to take my word for it that I was not the last to Ask Jenny, who was still in the hall when I*

the words out of (someone's) mouth to say what (someone) was just about to say: *You took the words right out of my I was going to suggest a trip to the cinema*

last word see

fail me I cannot put my feelings into words: *Words fail me when I think of their*

work

in a day's work see

work and no play makes Jack a dull boy to jack, people should take some leisure time and not work all the time: *Take some time off and come swimming. You have been working really hard and all work and no play makes Jack a dull*

nasty piece of work see

(someone) *the works* to give (someone) the complete treatment: *She went to the beauty salon and had the slang for to kill someone.>*

up the works see

one's work cut out to face a very difficult task: *You'll have your work cut out to get there on to have a lot of work ready for one.>*

piece of work see

a spanner in the works see

up agitated, annoyed: *She's all worked up because they're*

like a dream see

out to come to a successful conclusion: *I'm glad things worked out for*

[the oracle](#) see

[your fingers to the bone](#) see

world

man of the world a sophisticated and worldly man: *He won't be shocked by her He's a man of the*

[down in the world](#) to be less well off, less successful, etc, than formerly: *The family have come down in the Their grandfather owned several businesses and lived in a huge house, but his grandsons both live in rented flats and are*

[up in the world](#) to be better off, more successful, etc, than formerly: *Joan's family have come up in the They live in a large detached house and have a chain of restaurants, but their grandfather was an immigrant who arrived in this country with*

[to the world](#) see

[\(someone\) the world of good](#) to have a very good effect on (someone); to be of great benefit or advantage to (someone): *Jane has been ill and a holiday will do her the world of*

all the world like (someone or something) exactly like (someone or something): She looked for all the world like a

[or get the best of both worlds](#) see

[the best of both worlds](#) see

[a small world](#) see

[takes all sorts \(to make a world\)](#) see

[the end of the world](#) used to make someone realize that things are not as bad as they think they are: *It's a pity that you failed your driving test but it's not the end of the You can take it*

[to be long for this world](#) to be about to die: *The old man's family have been sent It is thought that he will not be long for this*

top of the world very cheerful and happy: *She's on top of the world with her new*

of this world remarkably good: *The food was out of this*

the world on fire see

the world of (someone) to be extremely fond of (someone): *He thinks the world of his*

the best will in the world see

world is (someone's) oyster (someone) has a great many possible opportunities or chances: *With those qualifications the world is your* to a quotation from Shakespeare's *The Merry Wives of Act 2, scene ii.*>

worm

can of worms an extremely complicated and difficult situation: *It has been suggested that several politicians may be involved in the financial scandal; it could be a real can of worms for the* to the fact that worms wriggle around a lot.>

the worm turns even the most humble or meek person will protest if treated badly enough: *He had bullied her for years, so it was no surprise when she eventually left him—even the worm*

worse

none the worse for (something) not to have been harmed or badly affected by (something): *The group of students had to stay on the mountain all night because of bad weather, but they were none the worse for their*

the worse for wear see

worship

the ground (someone) walks on see

worth

all one is worth using maximum effort: *We ran for all we were worth to catch the last*

its or one's weight in gold see

one's salt see

(someone's) while see

wound

one's wounds to try to recover from a situation in which one has been badly defeated or humiliated: *Our national rugby team is licking its wounds after its shocking defeat last*

old wounds to remind people of past unpleasant experiences which they would prefer to forget about: *It would be better not to tell Helen that her ex-fiancé is in town with his wife; it would only reopen old*

salt in the wound see

wrap

(something) under wraps to keep (something) secret or hidden:

We're keeping our new product under wraps until the

the wraps off (something) to reveal, or give details about,

something that has been secret up till now: *Everyone wants to know what is going to happen but the company has still not taken the wraps off its plan for*

oneself in the flag see

(someone) in cotton wool see

up in (someone or something) absorbed in, giving all one's attention to (someone or something): *She's completely wrapped up in her*

(something) up to finish (something) completely: At last the contract is all wrapped

wringer

put through the wringer to have experienced a very difficult or painful period or situation: *Val has really been put through the wringer this Her mother died, her father's been very ill and she lost her*

wrist

slap on the wrist see

writ

large used to indicate that something is in its most extreme form:
All three new trainees are related to directors of the firm; that is nepotism writ

write

to write home about see

writing on the wall something which indicates that something unpleasant, such as failure, unhappiness, disaster, etc, will happen:
She should have seen the writing on the wall when her boss kept complaining about her biblical reference to Daniel 5:5–31, in which the coming destruction of the Babylonian empire is made known to Belshazzar at a feast through mysterious writing on a wall.>

wrong

in the wrong to be blameworthy, to be guilty of error: *You must admit that you were in the*

the wrong side of the tracks see

hold of the wrong end of the stick see

off on the wrong foot see

out of bed on the wrong side see

on the wrong side of (someone) to cause (someone) to dislike or be hostile to one: *It's unwise to get on the wrong side of the*

to put a foot wrong not to make a mistake of any kind: *The player didn't put a foot wrong in the whole*

the wrong track see

(someone) up the wrong way see

wrongs do not make a right see

x/y/z

yarn

a yarn to tell a long story, especially an untrue one that is given as an excuse: *When he was late he spun some yarn about being delayed by a herd of a story is compared to spinning a long thread.>*

year

year dot a long time ago, the beginning of time: *I've known him since the year*

yesterday

born yesterday experienced and not easily fooled: *You don't expect me to believe that! I wasn't born yesterday!*

young

only young once one should take advantage of the opportunities that arise when one is young and has the energy, freedom, etc, to enjoy or exploit them: *You should take the job After all, you're only young*

zero

hour the time at which something is due to begin: *The party begins tonight at eight and it's only two hours until zero* a military term.>

WEBSTER'S WORD POWER

Betty Kirkpatrick, a graduate of Edinburgh University, has a long career in reference publishing. She has edited *Chambers Twentieth Century Dictionary*, *Roget's Thesaurus*, the concise edition of *Brewer's Phrase and Fable*, and was language consultant to the *Encarta World English Dictionary*. She has compiled various other reference books, including the *Oxford Paperback Thesaurus* and the *Bloomsbury Dictionary of Cliches*. She acts as a consultant to the *Bloomsbury Good Word Guide*. Betty is author of an extensive list of publications on various aspects of the English language for learners of English.



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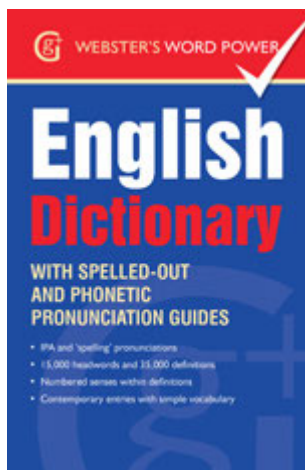


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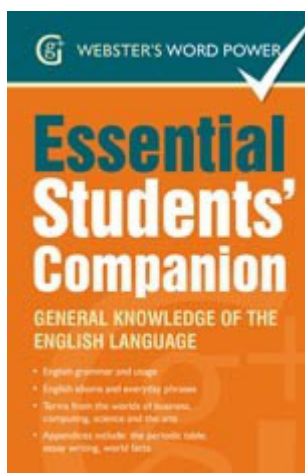
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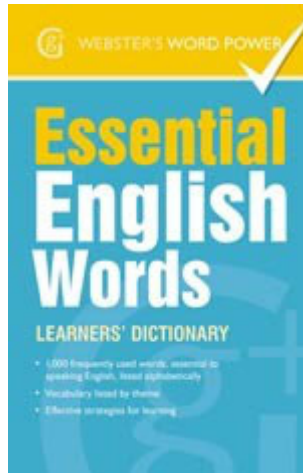
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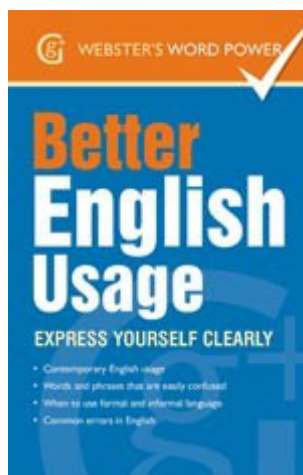
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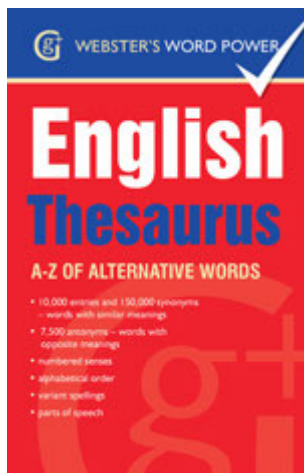
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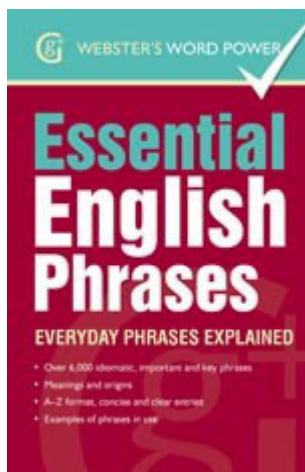
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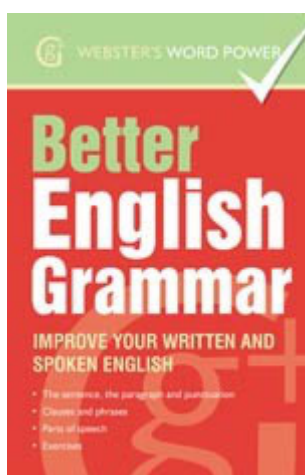
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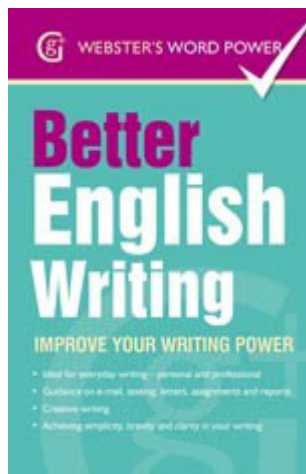
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best

—do one's level best to try as hard as one can: *We'll do our level best to get there on time.*

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