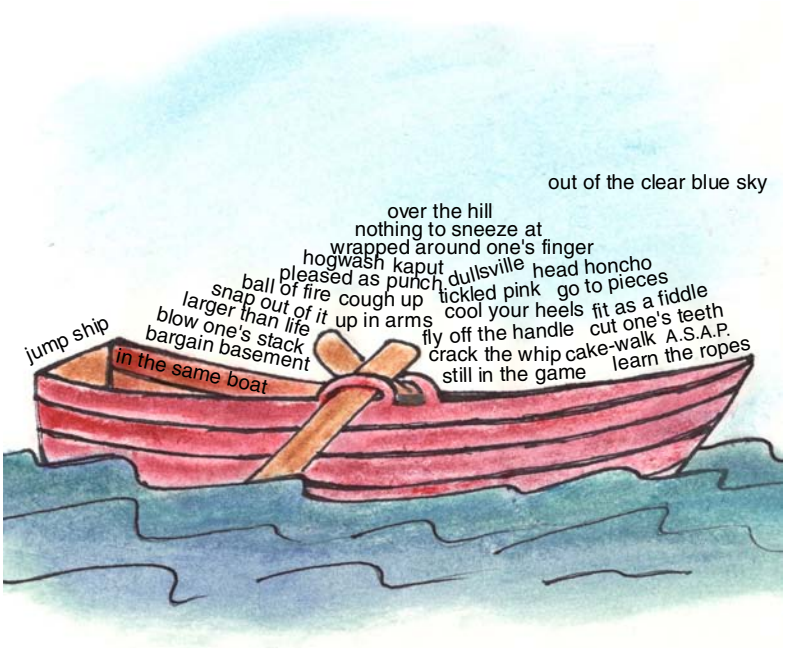
# A Boatload of Idioms

## Over a thousand English expressions




compiled by Lucia Sera

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# A Boatload of Idioms

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# Introduction

Idioms are informal expressions used in everyday speech. Often referred to as catch phrases, colloquialisms or clichés, they are groups of words that, together, have a special meaning that is different than each of the words alone. They serve as a colorful way to sum up an idea (for example, "mad as a hornet" illustrates a recognized degree of anger in a simple expression). However, idioms can be one of the most difficult areas to learn in another language, especially English. ESL/EFL students often attempt to translate literally from their native tongues, which can lead to confusion (sometimes humorous). As vital as grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation are to basic language acquisition, even the best student's speech will remain a bit stilted without a working knowledge of idioms; they are indeed the last measure of fluency in any language.

A Boatload of Idioms can help students become familiar with the most common idiomatic expressions found in modern American English. There are over a thousand idioms offered here, along with definitions and example sentences. In this straightforward presentation, the idioms (highlighted in bold) are listed alphabetically. Brackets appear at the beginning of some of the entries to show the full saying, ordered by topic word. Each idiom is followed by a short definition; several contain explanations of their origins. Also, example sentences (shown italicized) are given for further clarity. At the end, exercises are provided to check readers' comprehension of the various idioms chosen from the body of this product.

Best wishes are extended to readers for fully grasping the meaning of the material presented here. Once idioms can be understood with ease, speaking English will be a "cake-walk".

# A

**A.S.A.P.** – as soon as possible; immediately.

*The report is urgent; the president needs it A.S.A.P.*

**A.W.O.L.** – Absent Without Official Leave. This is a military term to mean one who deserts his post; it is also used to deem anyone who leaves a situation without notifying anyone.

*The soldier was so sick of war that he went A.W.O.L. in January.*

**[Do an] about-face** – to suddenly change course and go in the opposite direction.

*Mom thought it was a bad idea for me to marry Rick, but when he demonstrated how kind he was, she did an about-face on the subject.*

**Accident waiting to happen** – a disaster in the making; the warning that trouble is ahead.

*The pitcher of water was teetering on the window-sill, which was an accident waiting to happen.*

**Accidentally-on-purpose** – something done on purpose, under the guise of an accident; a seemingly harmless mistake.

*Since she was jealous of her competitors in the race, it looked like she tripped the girl next to her "accidentally-on-purpose".*

**Achilles heel (or tendon)** – a weakness or vulnerability. The Greek god, Achilles, was dipped in the River Styx by his mother to make him stronger; however, the only part of his body not submerged was his heel, which was his weak spot. For thousands of years, this has been a metaphor for weakness.

*He played piano well, but his Achilles heel was rhythm.*

**Ace in the hole** – a useful thing to fall back on, in case the course one is pursuing does not work out. This comes from poker; an ace, hidden in one's hand, is often useful to have at the end of the game.

*The man tried to persuade the firm to give him a job, and his ace in the hole was a great recommendation from its founder.*

**Acid test** – the test by which something is determined to be genuine. This comes from the jewel world: jewelers, knowing that nitric acid will melt most metals, like brass, but not gold, put a drop of acid on a metal to see if it is gold or not.

*The acid test given to the woman claiming to be from Argentina was if she spoke Spanish.*

**Adam's apple** – the lump in the throat, most prominent in men. This term refers to the Garden of Eden, when a piece of apple (the forbidden fruit) presumably got stuck in the throat of Adam.

*Jimmy was very thin, with his Adam's apple sticking out of his neck like an extra nose.*

**Add fuel to the fire/flame** – to make things worse.

*He added fuel to the fire when he came in late for work after having taken four days off without permission.*

**Add insult to injury** – to make a bad situation worse; to further hurt one who is already injured. This expression is known to have first appeared in the fifth book of fables, by Phaedrus, in the first century, A.D.

*Minnie told her boyfriend that besides having an ugly car, he also was a bad driver, adding insult to injury.*

**Against the grain** – that which goes against the expected way. On a piece of wood, one side is smooth and the other ("against the grain") is rough.

*To have to call a much younger boss,"sir", really went against the grain.*

**Ahead of time** – in advance

*I knew I would be busy in the morning, so I laid my clothes out the night before.*

**All bollixed up** – confused. This is from the British slang, "ballocks", referring to testicles.

*He got all bollixed up with the new photo-copy machine.*

**All ears** – to be listening intently.

*When Agent Peters said he learned some new information which may solve the case, we were all ears.*

**All the rage** – very fashionable and popular.

*Carrie bought one of the new little phone cases which are all the rage now.*

**All that glitters is not gold** – a proverb to describe something shiny with no value.

*He saw the beautiful but shallow woman as an example of "all that glitters is not gold".*

**All thumbs** – very clumsy.

*Henry was all thumbs with the new baby, not knowing how to hold her.*

**All wet** – mistaken; full of nonsense.

*You're all wet if you think it's a good idea to let a 15-year old stay home alone for the weekend.*

**Ambulance chaser** – a lawyer who pursues accident victims.

*Jim got a call from an ambulance chaser after his car accident asking if he was considering a lawsuit.*

**And how**! – an expression to exclaim agreement. Really! Indeed! Definitely!

*When we asked my mother if we were cute when we were little, she said, "And how!"*

**[The] apple doesn't fall far from the tree** – children tend to take after their parents.

*The apple didn't fall far from the tree with Senator Smith, whose father and grandfather were both in politics.*

**Apple of someone's eye** – a favorite person. Someone who is beloved and treasured.

*Jeannie, my youngest sister, was the apple of my father's eye.*

**Apples and oranges** – two different matters entirely (often used to refute comparison).

*Saying that men are better at math than women because they are physically stronger is like comparing apples and oranges.*

**[Tied to her] apron strings** – to be under the domination of one's mother or wife.

*No woman was good enough for Kevin because he was tied to his own mother's apron strings.*

**Armed to the teeth** – well-equipped with ammunition, also could be verbal weapons.

*The lawyer went into the hearing armed to the teeth with ammunition against the accused.*

**Around the clock** – continually; nonstop.

*The new baby cried around the clock that first week home.*

**Around the corner** – coming right up soon.

*His eighteenth birthday is tomorrow and then college is right around the corner.*

**Artsy-fartsy** – pretentious; phony artist.

*Jill changed her name to Butterfly after joining that artsy-fartsy commune.*

**As big as a house** – very big, usually referring to weight; obese.

*Carol must have gained a good 50 pounds – she's as big as a house now!*

**As sick as a dog** – very ill.

*After getting 4 teeth removed at once, I was as sick as dog for about a week.*

**Asleep at the switch/wheel** – inattentive; careless.

*Who was asleep at the switch and left the gates to the prison wide open?*

**At the eleventh hour** – at the last moment. This expression comes from the Bible (Matthew xx, 1-16).

*Mr. Judson was spared a long prison sentence because the governor called with a pardon at the eleventh hour.*

**At the mercy of** – to be dependent on; to rely on.

*The convicted man was at the mercy of the judge regarding the length of his sentence.*

**Atta boy!** - Good job! Derived from "That's the boy!"

*"Atta boy!" said the baseball coach when Troy hit two home runs in a row.*

**Avoid something like the plague** – stay away from something completely.

*Jeff was in trouble everywhere he went, so most people avoided him like the plague.*

**[An] ax to grind** – a problem to discuss.

*If you have a legitimate complaint, not just an ax to grind, call the customer service desk.*

# B

**[A] babe in the woods** - a very naïve, innocent person.

*Jenna didn't realize that it was a dangerous neighborhood, as she was a real babe in the woods.*

**Back down** – yield; concede; give in to someone else's wishes.

*The man believed he was right, and he wasn't going to back down from pursuing his claim.*

**[To] back someone up** – to support him/her.

*My father always backed me up, no matter how silly my plans were.*

**Back-pedal** – to reverse a stance or position on a certain topic, then try to claim that you never really supported the former position.

*At first, Governor Kelly said he would hate to raise taxes, but then he back-pedaled by saying that he never said he wouldn't do it if necessary.*

**Back-seat driver** – a person who gives unwanted advice when they're not "in the driver's seat" or in control.

*His mother was such a back-seat driver that she made him crazy with all her warnings.*

**Back talk** – disrespectful, rude talk (usually a child to a teacher or parent or a subordinate to his/her boss).

*The kindergarten teacher said the back talk from the pupils was getting worse every year.*

**Back in circulation** – to be available and in public again (after an absence or having been tied up).

*Tom is back in circulation again since he and Gail divorced.*

**Back to square one** – starting the process all over again, usually after a failed attempt.

*When the tide ruined our sandcastle, we went back to square one and started building again.*

**Back to the drawing board** – to start over again; have a fresh beginning, usually after a failed try.

*After the flood, we went back to the drawing board with plans for the basement.*

**Bad blood** – bad and hostile feelings between two or more people or groups.

*There was such bad blood between the Northerners and Southerners that there was bound to be a civil war.*

**[In the] bag** – 2 meanings: 1. to have something won, to have it all figured out, and 2.drunk. Also, "half in the bag."

*1. Don't worry about buying a new car; I have this new job in the bag.*

*2. Delroy started drinking at noon and was already half in the bag by 2 p.m.*

**Bad trip** – an unpleasant experience.

*I'm glad I got fired from that job because it was such a bad trip all around.*

**Bag of bones** – a very skinny person.

*When he came out of jail, he was nothing but a bag of bones.*

**Bag of tricks** – useful tools to help a situation.

*Maybe Joel has a plausible excuse in his bag of tricks.*

**Bags under one's eyes** – to have dark circles/lines under one's eyes.

*Mark has been working so hard lately that he is beginning to have bags under his eyes.*

**Bail out** – to leave, usually abruptly.

*I bet Tim will bail out of helping us when he finds out that there's a free concert at the arena tonight.*

**Bail someone out** – to help someone out of a difficult situation.

*I called my father to come bail me out when I got thrown in jail for disturbing the peace.*

**Bait and switch** – deceptive advertising which lures in customers with one promise, but then changes the offer.

*Herrick's Boutique sent me a postcard with great sale prices, but they are famous for the bait and switch tactics.*

**Baker's dozen** – 13.

*The Bouliers had a bakers dozen of a family – 13 children!*

**Balance the books** – to account for all spending and earning; to make sure the accounts are in balance.

*The first thing the new manager needs to do is balance the books.*

**The] ball is in your court** – it is your turn to do something.

*I gave you my offer, so now the ball is in your court.*

**[On the] ball** – to have many attributes is to have a lot "on the ball".

*Gary has a lot on the ball – he's nice, handsome and has a great job with that big accounting firm.*

**Ball and chain** – a special burden; sometimes a husband or wife is jokingly referred to as a "ball and chain."

*The old ball and chain won' let me go out bowling tonight.*

**Ball of fire** – used to describe an energetic, capable person.

*She was a ball of fire and got the garage cleaned out in one afternoon.*

**Ball-park figure** – a rough estimation based on guesses.

*I asked the plumber to give me a ball park figure for fixing the sink.*

**[Oh] baloney!** – nonsense.

*"Oh, baloney!" said my father when I told him I needed $500 to get flames painted on the sides of my car.*

**[On the] bandwagon** – to join a group of people, especially in an argument. This expression came about because politicians used to ride on a moving stage in a parade. As they passed by people, their supporters would join their "bandwagon" by hopping aboard.

*Everyone is jumping on the bandwagon and telling me to get my tattoo removed with laser.*

**Bane of one's existence** – if someone is the bane of your existence then they are like poison to you. This comes from "wolf-bane" (a toxic aconite).

*That snotty librarian is the bane of my existence, so I've been avoiding the library when I know she's on duty.*

**[To] bank on something** – to count on something.

*I was banking on getting a new raise in order to afford the car payments.*

**Banker's hours** – to work just a few hours each day or get out of work early.

*Glenda has banker's hours with her new modeling job.*

**Barfly** – a person who spends much (all) of their time in a drinking establishment.

*Ken was turning out to be a barfly with nightly drinking.*

**Bargain-basement** – low-priced, very inexpensive or of inferior quality.

*On her strict budget, the only new clothes Jenny could afford were at bargain-basement prices.*

**[His/her] bark is worse than his/her bite** – describes a person with a gruff demeanor but who isn't that tough.

*That tough Mr. Devino gave us $100 for our charity, proving that his bark was worse than his bite.*

**Barking up the wrong tree** – to focus on the wrong target or in the wrong direction. What happens when hunters let their hound dogs loose to go after possums that escape up trees is that often the hounds lose the scent and end up "barking up the wrong tree."

*Christa was barking up the wrong tree if she thought I would help her paint the house – I'm allergic to the fumes.*

**Barn burner** – an exciting time; a fun, wild event.

*There's going to be a barn burner at the field-house tonight when the farmers play their fiddles and everyone dances.*

**Basket-case** – a very troubled person; one with lots of problems; a very emotional person.

*She was a basket-case after her husband died and left her with so many bills.*

**Bat a thousand** – be completely free of failure; do a job perfectly.

*Mr. Patterson was batting a thousand in his new position as company accountant: he had caught several errors on his first day of work, saving the company thousands of dollars.*

**[Like a] bat out of hell** – to go very fast; to tear out of somewhere is said to be going "like a bat out of hell."

*After the guy threatened him, he drove like a bat out of hell to get away.*

**Batten down the hatches** – to lock oneself securely in for a while (like during a storm).

*This winter's going to be so cold that we'll all have to batten down the hatches and get comfortable inside.*

**Battle-ax** – A very dominating, belligerent woman.

*She acts just like the stereotypical mother-in-law, a battle-ax.*

**Be that as it may** – an expression to say, "even if something is true . . ."

*When I told the coach I was too sick for practice, he said, "Be that as it may, you still need to memorize the plays."*

**Bear a grudge** – to harbor feelings of resentment or ill will.

*Do you bear a grudge against Harry for tattling on you?*

**Bear fruit** – yield results; be successful.

*I applied for five different jobs, so we'll see if any of the applications bear fruit or not.*

**Bear with me** – have patience with me.

*Bear with me if I'm a little slow today – I only got 4 hours of sleep last night.*

**Beat a dead horse** – to keep fighting even after the argument is over; to continue to harangue and harp on a subject.

*It was fruitless to collect money from the bankrupt business, but still Jana kept beating a dead horse with her collection calls.*

**Beat around (about) the bush** – hesitate in getting to the point; speak indirectly. This comes from hunting, when one beats the bushes in order to scare prey out into the open (this process usually takes longer than catching the animals directly).

*You should come right out and ask for a raise instead of beating around the bush.*

**Beat the rap** – avoid a penalty. This comes courtroom procedures: when a judge raps his gavel, it means that court has begun or ended its session. Beating a rap means that one has prevailed in court and is done with a case.

*The accused shoplifter beat the rap when the store video was found to be defective.*

**Beaten path** – the traditional route. The conventional way.

*Sometimes it's riskier but mire rewarding to avoid the beaten path.*

**Beauty is in the eye of the beholder** – what is beautiful to one person may be awful to another.

*No one could understand what she saw in that old house, but then again, beauty is in the eye of the beholder.*

**Beauty is only skin-deep** – a proverb which means that outside looks are not important, implying that one's inner beauty is more important.

*She was a beautiful girl, but beauty is only skin-deep, and what's more important is how good a person she is.*

**[No] Bed of roses** – not a place of comfort, beauty or ease.

*Working in that beehive is no bed of roses, believe me.*

**Beef up** – to strengthen.

*After Roy joined the football team, he beefed up to 220 lbs.*

**Beefcake** – a physically-attractive, usually muscular man.

*The calendar was filled with beefcake photos of all the movie stars of the 1970's.*

**Beg to differ** – to disagree; to politely state an opposing opinion.

*Mr. Odle says that Math is the most important subject, but I beg to differ; I think English is more useful.*

**Beggars can't be choosers** – a proverb which means that one shouldn't complain if he/she is given something for free and can't afford anything ales.

*He ate the cold soup without complaining, realizing that beggars can't be choosers.*

**Behind closed doors** – secretly; beyond the view of others.

*There were lots of deals made behind closed doors during the budget crisis.*

**Behind one's back** – secretly and deceptively.

*Mary Lou was talking behind my back, saying that my clothes were too tight and that I had gained weight.*

**Behind schedule** – late.

*The printers were running behind schedule and asked us to wait another month for our order.*

**Behind the eight-ball** - is to be at a disadvantage; to be in a difficult position. This comes from a pool (Billiards) game, where it is risky to wind up behind the eight-ball.

*Since she missed so much school due to illness, she was going into the final exam behind the eight-ball.*

**Behind the scenes** – on the inside, where the inner workings are.

*Jack liked to work behind the scenes where the real fun was.*

**Behind the times** – old-fashioned and out-of-date.

*Bessie's shoulder-padded suits were really behind the times.*

**Belabor the point** – to go on and on about something, especially after the message was already received.

*My sister was belaboring the point that I was always messy growing up – we've heard it a hundred times already!*

**Bells and whistles** – many extra "shiny" features, such as a sunroof, extra CD-player and heated seats in a new car.

*The new computer is very expensive, but it does have all the latest bells and whistles that will make things easier.*

**Below the belt** – unfair; unsportsmanlike.

*We started to argue, and he hit below the belt by saying that I have bad breath.*

**Benchwarmer** – a player who sits on the bench more than he/she plays.

*I wasn't very good at basketball and spent the season as a benchwarmer.*

**Bend over backwards** – to try and concede as much as possible; to go above and beyond the call of duty.

*Mario bent over backwards to accommodate his new maid's inconvenient hours.*

**[On a] bender** – on a drinking binge. This expression is a metaphor: a drinker "bends" his elbow when he takes a drink.

*Keith went on a bender that weekend and doesn't remember how he ended up in Cleveland Monday morning.*

**[To give the] benefit of the doubt** – to assume the innocence, rather than guilt, of a person.

*Though I suspect that Melissa wasn't really ill, I'm have to give her the benefit of the doubt and pay her for sick leave.*

**[To get] bent out of shape** – to be upset and annoyed.

*Don't get so bent out of shape when the clerks are rude – they have a hard job dealing with the public all day long.*

**[Go] berserk** – to go crazy; be in a frenzy.

*When I told her that Marcus was in detention again, she went berserk and said he would have to get his own ride home.*

**Bet one's bottom dollar** – to be very sure of something; positive; willing to bet on it.

*I bet my bottom dollar that Shari will be late as usual and miss the opening act.*

**Better late than never** – it's preferable to do something late than not at all.

*Henry was going to skip the assignment because it was overdue, but then he figured "better late than never".*

**Better safe than sorry** – it is better to choose the secure route in life than have regrets.

*Take an umbrella on a cloudy day – better safe than sorry.*

**Between a rock and a hard place (also, between the devil and the deep blue sea)** – a difficult situation where there seems to be no options.

*How can she decide if she should go to college or take care of her ailing mother; she's between a rock and a hard place.*

**Beyond a reasonable doubt** – absolutely sure; positive.

*The DNA and fingerprint matches prove beyond a reasonable doubt that he is the murderer.*

**Beyond reproach** – flawless; very good.

*She acted in good faith, and her behavior was found to be beyond reproach.*

**Bide one's time** – wait patiently.

*I'm just biding my time until retirement.*

**Big cheese** – an important or influential person.

*On Thursday, the big cheese is coming in for an important meeting.*

**Big for one's britches** – an arrogant person with a puffed-up ego.

*Since he won the National Book Award and got so much praise, Yuri was getting too big for his britches.*

**Big gun** – an important person; a heavyweight.

*He got the endorsement of a big gun like Senator Sherman from the great state of California.*

**Big deal** – a big fuss; an important matter.

*They made a big deal out of Paco's 50th birthday.*

**Big shot** – a well-known, important person.

*He drove an expensive car and was considered a big shot in town.*

**Big-ticket item** – an expensive, high-priced piece of merchandise.

*She decided to buy him a big-ticket item for his 50th birthday.*

**[The] bigger they are, the harder they fall** – the higher up in life a person is, the greater the consequences are when they fail.

*It was a shock when Mary Stuart was convicted, because the bigger they are, the harder they fall.*

**Bigwig** – an important person; someone of high rank .This refers to British judges and lawyers, who wear wigs; the judge wears a big wig, whereas the lawyers wear shorter ones.

*The chamber was full of bigwigs making important decisions.*

**[In a] bind** – to be in a difficult situation; to be caught in the middle of a problem and not know what to do.

*I was in a real bind: my sister asked me to baby-sit that weekend, but it was my only chance to shop for a prom dress.*

**Bingo!** – that's exactly right.

*He said, "Bingo! You answered that question perfectly!"*

**[A] bird in the hand is worth two in the bush** – it is better to have something definite than a couple of prospects.

*I wasn't going to wait around for Brad or Mike to ask me to the dance when Darren asked right away.*

**[It's for the] birds** – not interesting; undesirable.

*She thought that watching TV inside on a beautiful day was for the birds!*

**[The] birds and the bees** – making babies; human reproduction.

*I found out about the birds and the bees at age 10.*

**Birds of a feather flock together** – a proverb which means that similar types of people like to hang around each other.

*I knew he was no good because his friends were known criminals, and birds of a feather flock together.*

**Birthday suit** – naked; nude.

*The toddler came into the living room in his birthday suit.*

**Bit-player** – a stage actor with a small part in a play; someone who plays a small role.

*He was found to only be a bit-player in the scams, as he only was only involved in one of the twelve heists.*

**Bite off more than one can chew** – to take on more than one can handle.

*I think I bit off more than I can chew when I volunteered with the scouts.*

**Bite the bullet** – just do it; jump right in.

*We decided to bite the bullet and join the Pease Corps.*

**Bite the hand that feeds one** – to turn against someone who is helping one.

*When they got mad at us for not donating more time and money, I said they were biting the hand that feeds them.*

**Bit the dust** – to die, finally.

*After hitting that pothole, my car finally bit the dust.*

**[To the] bitter end** – to the very end. This term comes from the nautical world: the anchor rope is fastened to wood called "the bitt"; when the anchor is let out as far as it can go, it is strung out "to the bitter end."

*His wife stuck by him, even though he had cheated on her, until the bitter end.*

**Black sheep of the family** – the oddest or worst member of a family, sometimes estranged from the others.

*No one wanted to talk about Ben, the black sheep of the family.*

**Blackball** – to reject from an exclusive group.

*Dan was blackballed from the club after he was arrested.*

**Bleeding heart** – an overly-sensitive person, especially as regards to the poor and downtrodden.

*Her bleeding heart wouldn't let her to walk by a beggar without giving him a dollar.*

**Blessing in disguise** – something that turns out to be good when, at first, it seemed like an unfortunate thing.

*Maybe that college rejection was a blessing in disguise, as it led me to go to cooking school, which I love.*

**Blind as a bat** – said of someone who can't see or who has bad eyesight.

*You have to help Mara find her glasses, because she's blind as a bat without them.*

**Blood is thicker than wa**ter – family ties are stronger than friendships.

*Even though Ralph had been rude to his family, in the end they were there for him because blood is thicker than water.*

**Blood, sweat and tears** – great and difficult personal effort.

*My parents went through blood, sweat and tears raising us.*

**Blow a fuse/gasket** – to get very mad.

*My dad is going to blow a fuse when he sees the big dent I put in his car.*

**Blow one's mind** – to shock, stun, astonish.

*It blows my mind that Delia turned out to be a spy working for the enemy.*

**[To] blow one's own horn** – to brag or boast.

*I don't mean to blow my own horn, but I got all A's on my report card this semester.*

**Blow one's cover** – to accidentally reveal someone's true identity.

*Sheila almost blew his cover by calling him by his real name.*

**Blow one's stack** – to get very mad, as in a boiler explosion.

*Joyce is going to blow her stack when she sees this mess, especially after she had worked so hard to make it clean.*

**Blow someone off** – to be rude to someone; to not show up at an arranged meeting.

*I waited all day for his phone call, but I guess he blew me off.*

**Blow the whistle on** – to reveal or expose wrongdoing to the authorities.

*John is going to blow the whistle on that corrupt agency.*

**Blow-by-blow account** – a detailed description of an event.

*Give me a blow-by-blow account of everything that happened that night.*

**Blue blooded** – aristocratic. This term arose when the rich got to stay indoors (and thus their skin was pale and even, bluish), while the poor had to work outside and got tan.

*Polo used to be the sport of the blue-blooded.*

**[Once in a] blue moon** – very rarely. Moons of a blue color happen only occasionally, like after a volcanic explosion.

*I only get to go out dancing once in a blue moon.*

**Blue-sky thinking** – dreaming, hoping, aspiring.

*All entrepreneurs spend some time blue-sky thinking.*

**Blues** – two meanings: 1. low spirits; depression, 2. type of jazz music.

*1. She had the blues when her husband left her.*

*2. Ginny liked to listen to the blues on the radio.*

**[A] boatload of** – many; a ton of something.

*In January, the thrift shop got a boatload of donations from people who received unwanted Christmas gifts..*

**Boob tube** – television. This name comes from a time when TVs functioned by way of cathode ray tubes.

*I like to relax by watching the boob tube.*

**Bombshell** – a secret revealed; shocking news.

*He dropped a bombshell when he revealed that he had been married three times before.*

**Boondocks** – a very remote, rural place; out in the countryside.

*They loved the woods because they grew up way out in the boondocks.*

**Boozehound** – a heavy drinker.

*Oona was turning into a boozehound since she started going to the casino every night.*

**[A] bone of contention -** a sore subject, a point of argument with some people.

*Bob's radical politics was a bone of contention with his family.*

**[A] bone to pick** – a topic of argument, like two dogs growling over a bone.

*I was mad over the cost and have a bone to pick with the caterer.*

**[Make no] bones about something** – don't try to sugarcoat it or put a good face on it. To speak honestly about a matter.

*She made no bones about favoring the girls because she felt they had been slighted in the past.*

**[Throw him/her a] bone** – give someone a break.

*Since Carlos went through a hard time last year, the professor threw him a bone and allowed him to make up the classes on the weekends.*

**Bonkers** – crazy.

*I'll go bonkers if I have to spend 18 hours in the car with that loud radio playing.*

**Born and bred** – said of a place where one is born and raised.

*Benjamin was born and bred in Chicago, Illinois.*

**Born with a silver spoon in one's mouth** – from a rich, indulgent family.

*Our manager was born with a silver spoon in his mouth and doesn't know anything about hard work.*

**Bottle [it] up inside** – to keep problems to oneself, to the point of bursting.

*Kieran kept his troubles bottled up inside.*

**Bottleneck** – a tight, narrow entry-point preventing easy passage. Traffic is usually congested at a bottleneck.

*There was a bottle neck at the photo-copy machine because we all had reports due at once.*

**Bottom line** – to summarize; the synopsis.

*He wasn't interested in all the details and told me to give him the bottom line.*

**[Get down to] brass tacks** – go directly to the actual facts in a matter and look at them honestly.

*After exchanging some niceties, we got down to brass tacks and discussed the actual costs of building a house.*

**Bow out** – to quit and leave a situation.

*I need to bow out of this project because I am so busy now.*

**Brain drain** – a situation whereby many of the smartest people leave (a job or a country).

*There was a brain drain from India until recently.*

**Bravo!** – a cheer of praise for a job well done.

*The crowd yelled, "Bravo!" after the excellent opera aria.*

**[My] bread and butter** – the main way one supports himself.

*Julia designs dresses once in a while, but her bread and butter comes from drawing industrial uniforms.*

**Break a leg!** – good luck wished upon someone, usually in performance.

*He whispered, "Break a leg!" to me before I entered the stage.*

**Break even** – to come out even (win or lose nothing) in a money transaction.

*After devoting six years to that business, I just about broke even.*

**Break one's heart** – to hurt another's feelings.

*Kevin broke his girlfriend's heart when he announced that he had decided to become a priest.*

**Break the bank** – to spend all one's money.

*I broke the bank supporting his spendthrift ways.*

**Break the ice** – to initiate a conversation or generally promote friendliness in an awkward situation. This comes from whaling days, when whalers would send smaller boats ahead of their ships to break up the ice, so they could pass through.

*It was awkward meeting my boyfriend's family, but his mother broke the ice by complimenting me on my outfit.*

**Break the news** – to tell the latest news to someone.

*Jennifer broke the news that she had gotten a job in Japan and would be moving there in September.*

**Breath of fresh air** – something new and refreshing.

*Taking the art class is like a breath of fresh air.*

**Breathe down someone's neck** – to watch one closely, to the point of standing atop of him/her.

*My boss was breathing down my neck to finish the report.*

**Bring down the house** – to show much enthusiasm and clap so loudly it would almost topples a rickety theatre-house.

*The singing of Luciano Pavarotti was so beautiful that it brought down the house.*

**Bring it on!** – a challenge to fight.

*After being provoked a number of times, the captain said, "If they're ready for a fight, then bring it on!"*

**Bring home the bacon** – to make a living.

*He may be lazy with housework, but at least he brings home the bacon.*

**Bring up to date** – to update on a situation.

*I've been away for a week, so please bring me up to date on the progress of the project.*

**Bring something to light** – to make something known, usually which had been covered up or unknown.

*We had no idea that there was abuse going on until the interview brought it to light.*

**Bronx cheer** – a jeer meant to deride, made in contempt.

*When the disgraced mayor resigned, the gallery gave him the old Bronx cheer.*

**Brown-noser** – a flatterer of a boss; flattery of a higher-up made to gain favor.

*Richard is such a brown-noser that he offered to come in on the weekends just to seem cooperative.*

**Buckle down** – to get serious; to begin to work intently on something.

*O.K., there's a lot of work to do, so we have to buckle down and get started.*

**Bull session** - an informal chat amongst friends.

*Instead of studying, we ended up having a 2-hour bull session.*

**Bum steer** – wrong direction given; to mislead is to give a bum steer.

*That woman didn't want us to find out what was going on, so she gave us the bum steer.*

**Bummer** – a disappointment.

*What a bummer it was that your car broke down and you couldn't go to the concert.*

**Bump into someone** – 2 meanings: 1. literally: accidentally touch someone when walking by, and 2. to run into an old friend or acquaintance.

*1. The kid was running in the supermarket and bumoed into an elderly lady.*

*2. I bumped into an old friend at the bank yesterday.*

**Bundle of nerves** – a description of someone who is very anxious.

*Before her big test, Marie was a bundle of nerves.*

**Burn a hole in one's pocket** – to be consumed with the desire to spend the money one has.

*Julia got her paycheck on Thursday, and it was burning a whole in her pocket by Friday.*

**Burn one's bridges behind one** – to cut off one's way to retreat, making a change of plans impossible.

*She was always nice to everyone, even when she left a job, never wanting to burn any bridges behind her.*

**Burn the candle at both ends** – to work so hard, probably waking up early and staying up late to get the work done.

*I needed to finish writing the book by October, so I was burning the candle at both ends in September.*

**Burst with joy** - to be very happy and proud.

*Jim's mother was bursting with joy that her son had been accepted into the Naval Academy.*

**Bury one's head in the sand** – to ignore or hide from an impending situation. To refuse to acknowledge inevitable trouble.

*Jody refused to admit that his business was failing and buried his head in the sand as the bills mounted.*

**Bury the hatchet** – to forgive. This term is said to come from Native Americans, some of whose tribes bury a tomahawk (hatchet) to signify a truce.

*The two brothers decided to bury the hatchet and be civil toward each other for the sake of their mother.*

**[Get down to] business** – to get serious and start working.

*If we want to finish the house by the end of the summer, we had better get down to business.*

**Busy as a beaver/bee** – very busy; getting many tasks done quickly and efficiently.

*The girls were busy as beavers sewing the pageant flag.*

**Butt out** – to be asked to mind one's own business; keep away from another's affairs.

*I told Carly to butt out when she tried to arrange a reconciliation between my sister and I.*

**Butter someone up** – to flatter someone, especially one in a position to help or do good.

*I knew she was buttering me up so I would help her move.*

**Butter wouldn't melt in his/her mouth** – refers to a cold person who pretends to be so nice and giving but is, in reality, scheming and selfish.

*No one was fooled by Susanna's soft voice and knew that butter wouldn't melt in her mouth.*

**Butterfingers** – one who drops things or is careless, clumsy.

*Don't ask Joanne to carry that vas,e because she is a butterfingers.*

**Butterflies in one's stomach** – to be very nervous.

*Jeremy had butterflies in his stomach when he got ready to ask Gretchen to marry him.*

**Buttinski/ buttinsky** – an inquisitive, nosy person; a busybody.

*Mrs. Pasternak always asks personal questions about everyone, and the neighbors regard her as a buttinski.*

**Button one's lip** – to keep one's mouth shut; keep a secret.

*I'll tell you my secret if you promise to button your lip!*

**Buzz off** – get out; go away!

*My little brother was annoying us, so I told him to buzz off.*

**By leaps and bounds** – very quickly; moving forward rapidly.

*Your son is growing by leaps and bounds!*

**By the book** – to do things according to standard.

*The inspector had us open everything, saying he always goes by the book.*

**By the same token** – a phrase to show that the speaker is about to introduce opposite or conflicting information.

*Sarah can be very introverted, but by the same token, she is also a very giving person.*

**By the skin of one's teeth** – barely making it; avoiding danger. This comes from Job 19:20 in the Bible, which in 1560 was translated to say, "I have escaped by the skinne of my tethe."

*The dogs were chasing us, and we made it inside the house by the skin of our teeth.*

# C

**Cabin fever** – restlessness due to isolation; the feeling of being "cooped up".

*I need to go dancing or out to a movie, because I'm starting to get cabin fever.*

**[In] cahoots with** – to scheme with; to be partners with.

*I just knew that Bobby was in cahoots with Sue regarding the surprise party, as I saw them whispering together several times.*

**Call the shots** – make decisions; be the boss in a situation.

*You'd have to ask Everett, because he calls the shots around here.*

**[Have one's] cake and eat it too** – to experience two competing ideals.

*If Mandy thinks she's going to be the boss but do no work, she can forget it – she can't have her cake and eat it too.*

**Cake-walk** – an easy thing; something that turns out to be unexpectedly easy.

*I was so nervous about speaking in public, but with the teleprompter, it turned out to be a cakewalk.*

**Call a spade a spade** – to tell it like it really is; to be brutally honest.

*He was very direct, always calling a spade a spade, so it was no surprise when he told us we did a shoddy job.*

**Call girl** – a prostitute.

*The newspaper reported that the man was going to call girls and paying for it with company money.*

**Call in on the carpet** – to reprimand; get in trouble with a parent, boss or spouse. This comes from the days when the only person in the company to have a carpet was the boss.

*After Celia took a 3-hour lunch, she was called in on the carpet by the floor manager.*

**Call it a day/night** – to end working/playing; to stop and be content with the progress made on work thus far.

*The firefighters spent hours trying to rescue the house but finally decided to call it a day.*

**Call it quits** – to stop doing something; to give up.

*He was tired of meeting tougher and tougher ratings and decided to call it quits after 35 years in the radio business.*

**Call of nature** – the need to go to the bathroom.

*Halfway through the drive, he got the call of nature, and we had to stop at a rest area so he could go.*

**Call someone's bluff** – to challenge a claim of someone and demand to know if it's true.

*George had been threatening to quit volunteering unless he was given new equipment, so Jean decided to call his bluff and asked when he would make good on his promise.*

**Call the dogs off** – to stop threatening a person; to tell the dogs to end their chase.

*Barry said he would come forward with the evidence if the police would just call off the dogs and stop harassing him.*

**Call the shots** – give orders; be the decision-maker.

*I want to speak with a manager or whoever calls the shots around here.*

**Calling card** - a signature; a unique characteristic.

*The "flower" murderer always left a white rose at the scene of the crime as a calling card.*

**Can of worms** – a problem situation.

*I asked about the wife, and that was another can of worms.*

**Can't fight City Hall** – It's no use getting upset when there's nothing you can do about a matter.

*They tried to save the lighthouse with a petition drive, but in the end, they realized that you can't fight City Hall.*

**Can't get a word in edgewise** – to be over-talked or interrupted by a talkative person.

*I was going to tell Leah about the cats, but she kept talking on and on and I couldn't get a word in edgewise.*

**Can't make heads nor tails of something** – to not be able to understand something.

*This article is written so poorly that I can't make heads or tails of the situation described.*

**Can't stand/stomach something** – for something to make one mad or disgusted.

*I can't stand to hear about animal abuse because I get so upset that I want to strangle the abuser.*

**Cash and carry** – to pay cash for something and be able to take it right away.

*That store doesn't accept credit cards nor layaway, just cash and carry.*

**Cash in your chips** – 2 meanings: 1. to stop playing and tally up the balance. This is a casino reference. 2. One is said to have "cashed in their chips" when they die.

*1. I'm getting tired, so I guess I will cash in my chips now.*

*2. During his eightieth year, he fell ill and cashed in his chips.*

**[Lay one's] cards on the table** – to be honest about one's purpose.

*John said, "Listen, I'm going to lay my cards on the table and tell you my honest intentions."*

**Card-carrying member** – a strong, devoted member of a group.

*Ronald was a card-carrying member of the Libertarian Party.*

**Carpetbagger** – one who is new in town trying to change the already-established way of life. This expression comes from just after the American Civil War, when Northerners went down South to gain political power and carried their belongings in handbags made of carpet.

*Joe was accused of being a carpetbagger as he ran for the Democratic nomination for Governor of Georgia, because he grew up in the North.*

**Carry a lot of weight** – be important and matter.

*Having a doctorate degree carries a lot of weight in the academic community.*

**Carry a torch for someone** – to have a crush on a person or be in love with someone who does not feel the same way.

*Even though they broke up many years ago, Henry still carries the torch for Helen.*

**Carte blanche** – a blank check; the freedom to do as one pleases.

*The college was so glad to get the star athlete that they gave him carte blanche at the school.*

**Cash in on** – to take advantage of something; exploit a situation.

*He cashed in on his father's political fame by getting a job as a Washington lobbyist.*

**Cast pearls before swine** – to waste precious words or resources on one who cannot appreciate it.

*Byron was an elegant speaker, but the students did not listen to him, so it was like casting pearls before swine.*

**Cast the first stone** – to be the first to judge; make the first criticism.

*The Bible says that those without sin should cast the first stone.*

**Castles in the air** – big dreams; ideas of grandeur.

*Francis always had wished for a grand life, dreaming of castles in the air.*

**[Let the] cat out of the bag** – to tell a secret.

*By mistake, Donna let the cat out of the bag about her pregnancy by saying, "Well, I'm eating for two now".*

**Cat got your tongue?** – said to a person who is unusually silent.

*Tommy was very quiet today, so we asked him if the cat got his tongue.*

**Cat's meow/pajamas** – a favorite, special thing.

*My grandmother just loves comedy shows, and she thinks Robin Williams is just the cat's meow.*

**Catch as catch can** – do the best, with whatever resources are available, that one can do in a situation.

*Wendy is a single working mother, so dinner is a matter of catch as catch can.*

**Catch fire** – catch on; enjoy new popularity.

*The hula hoop is catching fire as a weight loss instrument now.*

**Catch on** – understand; comprehend; "get" it.

*I hope I can catch on when they explain the computer program.*

**Catch one's breath** – to breather heavily, especially after rigorous physical activity.

*I couldn't catch my breath after running a mile today.*

**Catch one's eye** – draw attention; attract interest.

*Teresa was hoping to catch the eye of the eligible bachelor.*

**Catch one off-guard** – to surprise someone with unexpected news.

*When Liz told me she married my ex-boyfriend, I was totally caught off-guard.*

**Catch ya' later** – to see someone soon.

*"I'll catch ya' later," said Mimi at the airport.*

**Caught in the crossfire** – to find oneself right in the middle of an argument or fight.

*The kids were caught in the crossfire of their parents' divorce.*

**Caught red-handed** – to be caught doing something bad directly.

*With his hand in the cookie jar, Matt was caught red-handed by his mother.*

**Caught short** – to be without something necessary.

*When the bill came to $120, Carey was caught short with only $99 in his wallet.*

**Cease and desist** – to stop doing a certain activity right away, by order of law.

*The lawyer sent a cease and desist letter to the company infringing on our trademark.*

**C'est la vie** – literally means "that's life" and is said when there's nothing to be done about a situation but laugh.

*Willy didn't let anything bother him and always said, "C'est la vie" when he saw somebody acting weird.*

**Chain smoker** – one who smokes very much, one after another (usually, cigarettes).

*Bill was a chain smoker for many years and now is worried about his health.*

**Chalk something up to experience** – to accept that something was a mistake and vow to move on.

*Even though I never got paid for my work, I chalked it up to experience.*

**Change one's tune** – to quickly reverse one's opinion, usually for a reason; to go from rude to pleasant in moments.

*At first, Joey showed annoyance with the older folks, but he quickly changed his tune when he realized his own mother was in the group.*

**Chapter and verse** – much information on a subject.

*The history teacher told us everything he knew about the war, chapter and verse.*

**Charity begins at home** – family and friends should be tended to before strangers.

*Beth was going to volunteer at the gallery, but then she remembered that charity begins at home and she needed to attend to her kids.*

**Charley horse** - a leg cramp. Reference: a baseball game injury in the late 1800's where a horse named Charley that worked at a baseball game had a limp, so fans termed anyone, especially a player with muscular stiffness, as having a Charley horse.

*Brendan played tennis for many hours that day and ended the day with a Charley horse.*

**[A] Chatty Cathy** - a talkative, shallow person. This comes from a popular children's doll from the 1960's which talked when a string in her back was pulled.

*Emily had become quite a Chatty Cathy since she began school.*

**[A] cheap shot** – an unfair strike; a "hit below the belt."

*To call the wrestler "fat boy" was a cheap shot.*

**Cheapskate** – a reluctant spender of money; a miser.

*Elliott was such a cheapskate that he didn't even bring a present to his daughter's graduation party.*

**Cheek and/by cheek (or jowl)** - very close. This is a modern expression of the early usage/expression, "cheke bi cheke".

*All the kindergarteners were sitting in a circle, cheek by cheek.*

**Chew the fat** – to chit chat, gossip, talk of unimportant things.

*Tina and Mary were both out of work, so they sat around and chewed the fat for hours.*

**Chew someone out** – to scream and yell at a person.

*When Mr. Maguire finds out about the leak, he's going to chew someone out.*

**Chicken-hearted (also called "chicken-livered")**– weak; timid; without courage. This comes from baby chicks, who are so timid that they often hide behind the mother hen's wing.

*Bob couldn't jump off the diving board because he was too chicken-hearted.*

**[With] child** – pregnant.

*Nell hasn't just gained weight from eating too much; she is with child now.*

**[Have a] chip on one's shoulder** – to have a grudge against the world; to be bitter at the world.

*Pedro has a real chip on his shoulder when it comes to his parents' attention.*

**Chip off the old block** – just like one's father.

*Ricky was a chip off the old block, especially in the way he loved antique cars.*

**Chomping at the bit** – to be unable to hold back; to be overly eager to go somewhere or do something.

*Noah was chomping at the bit to go out and play in the snow.*

**Chop shop** – a shop where stolen cars are brought for their parts to be dissembled and sold.

*Within hours of being stolen, the car was brought to a chop shop in New Jersey and stripped of its parts.*

**Circular file** – a nice name for a garbage can.

*That junk mail will be thrown in the circular file.*

**City slicker** – a savvy, urbane person from the city; a sophisticated person.

*Greg had know idea what to do on the farm because he was a real city slicker.*

**Clam up** – to keep quiet, refusing to say anything.

*The gangster clammed up when the police arrested him.*

**[A] class act** – a quality, fine performer or performance.

*Barbara never let on that her foot was sprained since she is a class act.*

**Clean as a whistle** – very clean; pristine.

*I checked for dust after the maid left, but the house was as clean as a whistle.*

**Clean bill of health** – a confirmation of good health; without illness or disease.

*Dr. Pinkston gave her a clean bill of health after her gallstone operation.*

**[A] clean sweep** – a total victory.

*The Dodgers won every game, making it a clean sweep for the series.*

**Clean up one's act** – to reform one's behavior; start behaving.

*After many years of partying, Rick decided to clean up his act.*

**[Take to the] cleaners** – to steal everything from someone.

*The woman that Hannah hired as a nanny ended up taking her to the cleaners.*

**Clear as a bell/crystal** – well-understood; no doubt as to the meaning of something that's "clear as a bell."

*Even though Madame Gireaux spoke with a French accent, her intentions were clear as a bell.*

**Clear the air** – to confront a situation and sort it out.

*The two friends had had a disagreement and needed to clear the air.*

**Clear the decks** – to clean up and start work anew.

*Following the party, they cleared the decks and got to work.*

**Climb the walls** – to go stir-crazy; be very anxious, bored.

*The girls had nothing to do and began climbing the walls.*

**Climb on the bandwagon** – to join others in supporting some cause or person. This comes from when politicians used to march in parades on a bandwagon (an informal stage); their supporters would often join the party as it marched along.

*When Sam found out there would be celebrities at the telethon, he climbed on the bandwagon and volunteered.*

**Clock-watcher** – a bored employee who often looks at the clock.

*Lilly was not challenged by her job and became a champion clock-watcher.*

**Close quarters** – a small, cramped space.

*Before they had successful careers, they lived in close quarters in a tiny apartment downtown.*

**Close up shop** – to stop working, for the day or forever.

*It was a beautiful sunny day,so the Adams decided to close up shop early and go to the beach.*

**[In the] closet** – to be living in secret, regarding homosexuality.

*Tony was in the closet throughout his twenties since he was too afraid to be himself.*

**Clue someone in** – to let someone know the truth that is evident to everyone but them.

*Finally, Karen clued her boyfriend in as to why everyone was laughing – there was toilet paper stuck to his shoe.*

**[In the] clutch** – in a tense, anxious situation.

*Ken always remained clam, so he was a great friend to have in the clutch.*

**Clutch at straws** – to frantically search for ideas for a solution.

*Standing in front of the judges, Laura was clutching at straws to come up with acceptable answers.*

**[The] coast is clear** – without danger.

*We waited until all the photographers had gone and the coast was clear to run out to the car.*

**Cock of the walk** – an arrogant person who acts as if he is more important than others.

*At 65, Donald was the cock of the walk at the Senior's Center.*

**Cold comfort** – not much comfort at all.

*He had been robbed and beaten, so it was cold comfort to hear that laws were being passed to be tougher on crime.*

**Cold feet** – to feel nervous about a situation; be hesitant to the point of canceling.

*Alan had such cold feet before his wedding that he decided to see his therapist.*

**[Give the] cold shoulder** – to ignore someone; be rude to.

*Since Tim never showed up for our date, I have decided to give him the cold shoulder from now on.*

**Cold turkey** – to quit something abruptly; immediate withdrawal from an activity (usually a vice).

*I decided to quit smoking cold turkey on Monday morning.*

**Come apart at the seams** – to break down (also, "come undone" or "come unglued.")

*Their marriage broke down and came apart at the seams.*

**Come clean** – to tell the real story; to reveal a secret.

*Tonya considered coming clean to her parents that she had dropped out of college.*

**Come full circle** – to return to the original position or ways.

*She started out as an artist and now has come full circle by teaching painting at the local community college.*

**Come hell or high water** – no matter what happens; regardless of what comes.

*Come hell or high water, I'm going to make it into New York this Friday.*

**Come into one's own** – for a person to finally have his day; get the proper recognition.

*She really came into her own once she became a doctor.*

**Come of age** – to reach the age or point at which one is old enough to get certain personal liberties.

*Lola came of age in the 1970's, when everyone was testing the boundaries of freedom.*

**Come out in the wash** – to work out okay; for everything to be revealed in time.

*Emma was worried that her secret would be revealed, because sooner or later everything comes out in the wash.*

**Come out/up smelling like roses** – to emerge from a troubled situation looking innocent; looking good compared to others in a situation.

*It's incredible that Jasmine is one of the worst offenders, but she always comes up smelling like roses.*

**Come through with flying colors** – to pass inspection with a good grade; turn out alright.

*We were worried that Jack would choke on the oral part of the exam, but he came through with flying colors.*

**Come to a head** – reach a climax; bring to a boiling point.

*Trouble had been brewing for several months, and it all came to a head one day in late July.*

**Come to blows** – to result in a fight.

*Quinn and Xavier never got along very well, so no one was surprised when they finally came to blows.*

**Come to mind** – to get an idea; to enter into one's consciousness.

*I have been trying to think of what to get you for your birthday, but nothing interesting comes to mind.*

**Come to naught** – to result in nothing; a waste of time/money.

*Despite all the planning and work toward building a new home, it all came to naught when the couple decided to move to France.*

**Come to one's senses** – to wake up and be sensible; to become reasonable.

*Jill was asked to be a partner in a balloon store, but after thinking about it, she finally came to her senses and said no.*

**Come undone/unglued** – to fall apart; have a mini-breakdown.

*Phyllis will come undone when she sees the paint all over the carpet.*

**[Get a] comeuppance** – to receive one's just humiliation.

*One of these days, Carol's going to get her comeuppance after years of walking all over people.*

**Con artist** – a swindler; someone who cheats people out of their money.

*The older woman was befriended by a con artist who later took her for all she was worth.*

**Connect the dots** – to figure something out; to deduce.

*Sally connected the dots that the neighbors were French when she was invited to their Bastille Day party.*

**Conscientious objector** – someone who is against war for moral or religious reasons.

*Tom was drafted into the Viet Nam War, but he didn't go because he was a conscientious objector.*

**Cook the books** – to cheat in bookkeeping.

*The accountant at RK, Inc. went to jail for cooking the books.*

**[That's the way the] cookie crumbles** – the way life goes.

*Even when Jackie She was not accepted into the program, she was still upbeat and said, "Well, that's the way the cookie crumbles."*

**Cooking with gas** – to be moving along quickly and in good stead with a project.

*The book is coming along pretty nicely, and since the author is cooking with gas now, it should be written by June.*

**Cool as a cucumber** – calm and relaxed.

*Even though he was about to give the most important speech of his life, he sat there cool as a cucumber.*

**Cool one's heels** – to wait.

Stop pacing and cool your heels for a couple more minutes!

**Cooped up** – to be stuck indoors for an extended period of time, like when there's a snowstorm or because of illness.

*They were cooped up all winter because of the bad weather.*

**Cop a plea** – to plead guilty to a crime in order to get a reduced sentence.

*Jake didn't want the hassle of a trial, so he ended up copping a plea.*

**Cop-out** – an excuse.

*To say that you didn't play sports because you have allergies is a cop-out.*

**[Put a] cork in it** – shut up; stop talking.

*Halfway through the movie, we told the loud guys in the back to put a cork in it or leave the theater.*

**Costs an arm and a leg** – very expensive.

*It cost an arm and a leg to get my education, but it has been worth it.*

**Couch potato** – one who sits around too much, usually watching TV.

*During her pregnancy, Janet became a real couch potato.*

**[Don't] count your chickens before they're hatched** – don't count on something before it's done.

*I had to tell Denise not to count her chickens before they were hatched, because she was planning a trip with the money she hadn't gotten from the settlement yet.*

**Country mile** – a very long distance.

*Tara would walk barefoot for more than a country mile in the snow for a chance to meet Barry Manilow.*

**Cough up** – to contribute; come up with money for a cause.

*We were told to cough up $10 each for the cancer drive.*

**Cover for someone** – to help conceal an activity, usually one done in secret.

*Jim asked me to cover for him as he left for the rest of the afternoon.*

**[Have a] cow** – to have a fit; get really angry.

*Josephine's going to have a cow when she sees that mess!*

**Coyote ugly** – awful-looking.

*After doing drugs and losing her teeth, that woman was coyote ugly.*

**[Take a] crack at** – attempt; make a stab at.

*Let me take a crack at the crossword puzzle!*

**Crack a joke** – tell a joke.

*Brad  cracked a joke about the scars he got making the movie.*

**Crack a smile** – to smile just a little bit, as if trying to stay mad.

*Mrs. Frederick was finally able to convince the upset child to crack a smile by offering her bear some gumdrops.*

**Crack down on** – to get tough with; to be strict with.

*The city officials announced this week that they were going to start cracking down on littering, jay-walking and other minor offenses..*

**Crack the whip** – to be the boss and get tough with underlings.

*Our manager is really going to have to crack the whip if he wants to finish this project by the end of the year.*

**Cramp one's style** – to get in the way.

*Henrietta found that marriage really cramped her style, so she decided to get a divorce.*

**Crash a party** – to attend a party uninvited.

*I'm glad that Louie crashed the party, because otherwise, we wouldn't have met each other.*

**Cream of the crop** – the best of a lot.

*Only the cream of the crop go to that elite college.*

**Creature comforts** – basic comforts, such as a soft bed, a warm bath and a cup of soup.

*It doesn't cost a lot of money to have creature comforts.*

**Crème de la crème** – a French expression that means "cream of the crop" or the best of a lot.

*That exclusive organization only accepts the crème de la crème as members.*

**Crocodile tears** – fake crying; insincere grief. This comes from a 14th century storyteller, Sir John Mandeville, when he wrote that crocodiles, "slay men, and [then] eat them weeping."

*Cindy wanted everyone to think she was sympathetic, but we all knew that those were crocodile tears.*

**Crop up** – to happen suddenly.

*After five years of running smoothly, all sorts of little problems started to crop up with the car.*

**Cross a bridge when one comes unto it** – to deal with a problem only when it comes up, not in advance.

*I'm not going to worry about the wedding reception seating yet; instead, I'll cross that bridge when we get back the R.S.V.P.s.*

**Cross one's fingers** – to hope and pray for something to happen.

*I was crossing my fingers that Marnie would be chosen to be one of the contestants.*

**Cross one's heart** – to swear to something.

*Do you cross your heart that you won't tell anyone this secret?*

**Cross one's mind** – to occur to someone; to realize.

*It never crossed her mind that she was interested in medicine until she herself became sick and found the whole process fascinating.*

**Cross the line** – to go too far; to "hit below the belt".

*Jerry was always bold, but to go into someone's house to tell them off really crossed the line.*

**Cruisin' for a bruisin'** – looking for trouble.

*Jared is really cruisin' for a bruisin' the way he keeps provoking people with his arm punches.*

**Crux of the matter** – the real essence of an issue; the importance part.

*Discipline is at the crux of the matter when it comes to reforming education.*

**Cry over spilled/spilt milk** – to regret that which has already happened and can't be changed.

*Deena felt awful about crashing the car, but her mother said that what was done was done and there was no use crying over spilled milk.*

**Cry uncle** – to give in; submit; yield. This may come from Roman times, when a boy was in trouble, he would utter the words, "Uncle, my best of uncles!"

*The kids had me in a headlock, so I finally cried uncle so they would let me go free.*

**Cry wolf** – to complain about something that is not really a problem. This comes from an Aesop's fable in which a shepherd boy repeatedly cries, "Wolf" when there is no wolf to see if anyone will come to rescue him.

*If you cry wolf again when its not an emergency, then no one will believe you when there really is a problem.*

**[Off the] cuff** – spontaneously; ad-libbing.

*It was a very relaxing evening, with everyone making comments and jokes off the cuff.*

**[One's] cup of tea** – what one likes very much.

*Traveling is really not my cup of tea.*

**Curiosity killed the cat** – an expression to say that one shouldn't be too inquisitive.

*When she told Dennis that he shouldn't be so nosy and that curiosity killed the cat, he responded with, "But knowledge brought him back!"*

**Curry favor** – to try to win favor from someone; to attempt to gain good will. This comes from Favel, a horse of a medieval legend that became a symbol of dishonesty, so to "curry Favel" was known as seeking favors dishonestly.

*Ann tried to curry favor with the border guard so that he wouldn't object to her expired passport.*

**[A] cut above** – better than average; a degree better than something else.

*The DJ's music selection was a cut above the radio play.*

**Cut and dried** – set; already determined.

*That Jeremy would become a dentist was not a cut and dried plan since he was also interested in podiatry.*

**Cut back** – to reduce or use less of something; diet.

*Melissa is going to have to cut back on eating sweets if she ever wants to lose some weight.*

**Cut corners** – to take the easy route, the shortest way.

*You can't cut corners if you want to make a supreme cake.*

**Cut down to size** – to humble; to bring one who is arrogant back to reality.

*Tyson thinks he is so great at soccer, but he'll be cut down to size when he tries out for the professional league.*

**Cut off one's own legs** – to ruin one's own chances so as not to face success; out of a fear of success, one will unconsciously do something to ruin it.

*Michael is secretly afraid of success and always cuts off his own legs when things are starting to go well for him.*

**Cut off one's nose to spite one's face** – to do something drastic to fix a small problem; to harm oneself to punish another.

*Francis was so jealous of Mark that he was wiling to reject the contract just so Mark wouldn't get any credit, cutting off his own nose to spite his face.*

**Cut one's losses** – to stop doing something when it seems hopeless to continue; to reduce losses.

*I realize that this trip has gone all wrong, and I'm going to cut my losses now and return home.*

**Cut one's teeth** – to experience the chance to practice a new skill.

*She was offered the chance to cut her teeth as an art curator with an internship at the Litke Gallery.*

**Cut out the deadwood** – to fire or get rid of workers who aren't productive enough.

*When the new manager came in, he cut out the deadwood by letting half the promotions department go.*

**Cut some slack** – be lenient with; give some relief to.

*You should cut some slack with Mack, because he is just getting over an illness and can't work so hard yet.*

**Cut the mustard** – to measure up. This phrase comes from before the Pure Food and Drug Act of 1909, when foods were stuffed with mustard seeds, among other things, as fillers. "Cutting the mustard" means having no mustard contained within and thus being of good, pure quality.

*Merle couldn't cut the mustard as a carpenter, so he decided to try his hand at engineering and design.*

**Cut to the quick** – be hurtful; to be unkind in making remarks. This refers to the pain caused when a fingernail is ripped to its quick.

*Jillian had worked so hard on her report that it cut to the quick when her teacher remarked that it seemed like it was just slapped together quickly.*

# D

**Damsel in distress** – a girl who is in trouble or needs to be rescued.

*Quentin had a history of rescuing damsels in distress but then dumping them once he had solved their problems.*

**[Get one's] dander up** – to get upset or mad over something.

*Whenever Mike heard about corporate crime, he would get his dander up and rail on about how wrong it was.*

**Dark horse** - an unexpected front-runner in a race.

*It is a surprise to everyone that Ravi Singh is considered a dark horse in the upcoming election.*

**Dash something off** – to write a quick note; to jot down something quickly and without much thought.

*I didn't have time to write a formal thank-you letter, but at I did dash something off at the last moment.*

**Dawn on someone** – for one to realize something; for one to see the light.

*It dawned on him that he hadn't seen his grandmother in over a year, and he worried that time was running out.*

**Day in and day out** – every day; constantly; all the time.

*She cooked tirelessly for the group day in and day out, but they took her for granted.*

**Day-to-day** – very common; an everyday activity.

*Hank thought he was aware of their day-to-day activities, so he was surprised to find out that they had planned a big party for him in secret.*

**Daydreamer** – a person who is often lost in thought; one who spends time imagining.

*Sometimes the nuns would scold Mary for not paying attention in class and being such a daydreamer.*

**[One's] days are numbered** – someone who is on his/her way out (of a job, school or life).

*Kendrick thinks he will be able to keep leaving early from work, but I tell you, his days are numbered.*

**Dead as a doornail** – completely dead and not usable anymore.

*I tried to use the blender which had been sitting idle for five years, but it was dead as a doornail.*

**Dead heat** – a race/game that is so close as to be tied.

*The two horses were in a dead heat as they neared the finish line.*

**[A] dead ringer** – a look-alike; the spitting image of.

*Once he had a facelift, Rob was a dead ringer for his son!*

**Dead set against** – to be extremely opposed to something.

*My father was dead set against me marrying Bill.*

**Deadbeat** – a person who doesn't pay their bills.

*We tried to collect the debt from Hugo, but we found out what a deadbeat he was.*

**Dear John letter** – a letter written by a woman to break up her relationship with a man.

*He was so heartbroken after receiving the Dear John letter that he had to lie down for a while.*

**Death and taxes** – inevitable; something continual and permanent; that which will never change; a certainty.

*The mail service is very good – as reliable as death and taxes.*

**[At] death's door** – close to dying.

*Jonas revised his final will when he realized that he was at death's door.*

**[To be] decked out** – to be very dressed up; looking flashy.

*The biker was all decked out in an expensive leather outfit.*

**[Off the] deep end** – go crazy; behave irrationally.

*She really went off the deep end when her only niece died.*

**Deep six** – to discard; to throw out.

*Because of the rain, Garrett decided to deep six his plans to go the beach.*

**Desert a sinking ship** – to leave when things get rough.

*My employees got new jobs when they saw that our business was going bankrupt, thereby deserting the sinking ship.*

**Devil-may-care attitude** – a carefree, cavalier manner.

*Even though he was under a lot of pressure, he still maintained a devil-may-care attitude.*

**[Play] devil's advocate** – to take the opposing argument; to challenge long-held beliefs.

*He always played devil's advocate to get us to think of all the possibilities.*

**Diamond in the rough** – a person or thing that has value hidden behind a rough exterior; one with potential.

*I could tell that that kid had raw musical talent and was a diamond in the rough.*

**[The] die is cast** – an irrevocable situation; a situation beyond control; something that happens, forcing a decision.

*Once the letter was put in the mailbox, the die was cast and there was no going back.*

**Die laughing** – to laugh very hard; to be completely amused.

*Judy nearly died laughing when she saw Fred come in wearing that curly wig.*

**Die of boredom** – to be very bored.

*Kim thought she would die of boredom at her factory job.*

**Dig in!** – start eating!

*Supper's ready, so everyone should dig in.*

**Dig one's own grave** – to be responsible for one's own demise.

*By fighting with his supervisor (whose family owned the company), Chuck was digging his own grave.*

**Dig up dirt on** – to get secret information about a person.

*The reporter dug up dirt on the actress and threatened to print it unless she gave him an exclusive interview.*

**Dingbat** – a silly, dumb person.

*What a dingbat that man was to test the fire-starter on his own house.*

**[By] dint of** – because of

*Adam got through medical school by dint of hard work.*

**Do-gooder** – someone who goes around reforming the world, doing good whenever possible (even if unwanted).

*People who help the poor are often looked on as do-gooders.*

**Dog-tired** – exhausted.

*After walking in the 10-mile fund-raiser, I was dog-tired and needed to soak my feet.*

**Dirt cheap** – very inexpensive.

*You can get beautiful vases for dirt cheap prices in China and all over Asia.*

**Dirty old man** – an older man overly interested in sex.

*Since he was always commenting on the young girls' figures, Desmond was called a dirty old man by his friends.*

**Do a double-take** – look twice in disbelief.

*I hadn't seen Alex in two years and did a double-take when he walked into the room 40 pounds lighter!*

**Do as I say, not as I do** – a request to follow one's advice, not actions.

*I realize that I smoke, but please don't you start – do as I say, not as I do!*

**Do someone's heart good** – to make one feel good emotionally.

*It did my heart good to see my mom enjoying her retirement.*

**Do justice to something** – to do a job well; make it worth the effort.

*Deanna always loved decorating, so she decided to refurbish the garage and do justice to the original house.*

**Do someone damage** – to hurt someone.

*The board withdrew funding for the science project before realizing that this would do the children damage..*

**Do someone good** – to be of benefit.

*Going to the beach and forgetting about his troubles for the afternoon did Gerald good.*

**Do something in vain** – to do something without getting any benefit or credit for it.

*They canceled the project right at the end, so all the work I did was in vain.*

**Do something on the sly** – to act in secret; to be sneaky.

*Chris began to read the top-secret documents of his employer on the sly to find out more about the company.*

**Do the honors** – to serve guests; to make a toast.

*The best man was given the opportunity to do the honors at the rehearsal dinner.*

**Do the math** – to add things up

*I looked at my paycheck, then I saw the bills and did the math – I was going to have to get a better job.*

**Do the trick** – to be sufficient; that which is required to complete the job.

*One last coat of paint will do the trick.*

**Doctor up** – to alter; to meddle with.

*He doctored up his transcript to make it look like he got a mostly A's and just a few B's.*

**Dodge a bullet** – barely escape a problem or difficult situation.

*When Jeannie moved away from California the day before that big earthquake, she just barely dodged a bullet.*

**Doesn't hold candle to** – inferior; unequal. In the 16th century, candle-holding was a menial job. People deemed not worthy to hold a candle were held in low esteem. This expression is now used to compare two people in certain abilities.

*Even though he is an all-around better athlete, Gary doesn't hold a candle to Steve when it comes to playing golf.*

**Dog and pony show** – an amateurish demonstration or exhibition.

*They asked Wendell to play his trumpet in the pageant, but he turned his nose up and called it a lousy little dog and pony show.*

**Dog days [of summer]** – very hot weather; uncomfortable heat. This comes from the ancient Romans, who believed that the hottest days of summer were caused by the Dogstar, Sirius' rising with the sun and getting hotter during the day.

*I don't know how I'm going to make it through the dog days of summer without an air conditioner.*

**[In the] doghouse** – in disgrace; in trouble, especially with one's parents or spouse.

*Jim's in the doghouse this week because he forgot his wife's birthday.*

**Dog-eat-dog** – a ruthless situation; sheer survival.

*The competitive world of TV broadcasting is dog-eat-dog so one must have a thick skin and be aggressive.*

**Doggie bag** – a bag or box of left-overs from a restaurant (to be brought home to feed to the dog or eaten later).

*Milo always asks for a doggie bag because he hates to see the food go to waste.*

**[To go to the] dogs** – to be ruined; in a messy, bad state.

*Boy, that club really went to the dogs since the founder died.*

**Doomed to failure** – certain to fail.

*Without good planning, a business is doomed to failure.*

**Don't breathe a word!** – Don't say anything to anybody.

*I'm leaving early today, but don't breathe a word to anyone.*

**Don't hold your breath** – Don't wait.

*If you're waiting for Jack to pay you back, don't hold your breath because he never has any money.*

**Don't look a gift horse in the mouth** – an admonishment not to complain about something given as a present.

*Just be glad that Alice gave you the necklace and don't look a gift horse in the mouth.*

**Don't put all your eggs in one basket** – a warning to spread out risk.

*Charlie owns stocks, bonds, insurance and other investments because he doesn't want to put all his eggs in one basket.*

**Don't put the cart before the horse** – keep things in the proper order.

*First make the money and then worry about spending it, as you don't want to put the cart before the horse.*

**Dose of one's own medicine** – for one to get the same treatment as he/she gives to others.

*For many years, Neve borrowed her sister's clothes without returning them, but now that her daughter is getting bigger, she is giving her mother a dose of her own medicine.*

**Double-cross** – to trick, betray or cheat another.

*I couldn't believe that sweet Elizabeth would double-cross me like that!*

**Double dipper** – a person who receives 2 pensions.

*Jimmy is lucky to be a double dipper with his retirement money from the fire fighters' union and his pension from the corporate job he held.*

**Double talk** – to say two opposing things at the same time; talk designed to deceive.

*That politician was so good at double-talk, that even his family didn't know what he really thought.*

**[A] doubting Thomas** – one who is cynical and doesn't easily believe something without much proof. This is a biblical reference, whereby Thomas, one of Jesus' apostles refused to believe Jesus had risen from the dead.

*We told Justin that we qualified for a housing loan, but he was such a doubting Thomas that he had to verify it himself.*

**Down and dirty** – very nasty, unfair and sneaky.

*It was down and dirty for my opponent to hide my entry so that I missed the deadline for entering the contest.*

**Down in the dumps/mouth** – feeling down and dejected. No one knows what "the dumps" are, but this expression goes back to 1534 when Sir Thomas More wrote, ". . . whiche some of our poore familye bee fallen in suche dumpes."

*Geoff was down in the dumps after he was rejected by the beautiful Bolivian woman.*

**Down the drain/tubes** – wasted; ruined.

*Buying that mountain bike that you will never use is like throwing money down the drain.*

**Down to earth** – honest; without airs; casual, not overly formal.

*Even though Carol was from a very wealthy family, she was remarkably down to earth.*

**Down to the wire** – with only moments left before a deadline.

*I didn't plan well and was working on my paper right down to the wire.*

**[In the] Doldrums** – the blahs; boredom. This expression probably comes from Middle English, when a Dold was a dull, stupid person.

*It rained for 7 days straight, and everyone at our camp was in the doldrums.*

**Drag one's feet** – to procrastinate; to act slowly on purpose.

*He was angry that he had to work on the project, so he was dragging his feet with his part of it.*

**Draw a blank** – to not be able to think of anything.

*Once the camera started rolling, my mind drew a blank and I couldn't think of any of the arguments I had planned to make.*

**Draw fire** – to become the target of; to attract negative attention.

*The Morning Register is drawing fire for publishing the controversial photos.*

**Draw someone out** – to gently coax someone into talking; to get a withdrawn or shy person to open up.

*The interviewer had a wonderful way of drawing people out by talking about things of interest to them before asking them questions.*

**Draw the line** – the deciding point; the point at which objections are made.

*I was willing to answer questions, but when the police officer started getting too personal, I drew the line.*

**Draw to a close** – to begin to end.

*As the meeting drew to a close, I stood up and reminded everyone that next week I would be away.*

**Dream up** – to come up with an idea.

*One day someone will dream up a way for us to have disposable clothes, and we will never have to worry about doing laundry again.*

**Dressed to the nines** – to be dressed very fancily; looking great, with expensive clothes on.

*Jessie was dressed to the nines for her 20th college reunion.*

**[In] dribs and drabs** – in little bits and pieces; in small, irregular quantities.

*Keith paid me back in dribs and drabs,$10 here and $20 there, whenever he could afford it.*

**Drift off** – fall asleep; be inattentive.

*The professor's voice was so dull,I drifted off for a while.*

**Drink like a fish** – drink much alcohol often.

*Back in college, Trevor drank like a fish at frat parties.*

**Drink someone under the table** – to be able to drink more alcohol than another.

*On numerous occasions, Trevor drank me under the table.*

**Drive a hard bargain** – to negotiate without yielding much.

*He was an excellent negotiator, and when he knew how much someone wanted something, he drove a hard bargain.*

**Drive someone up the wall** – to annoy and irritate someone very much.

*Her constant humming and other noises were driving me up the wall!*

**Drop in on someone** – to visit someone without calling first; to casually visit someone without announcement.

*Rita dropped in on me the other day, and we had a nice chat about our families.*

**[A] drop in the bucket** – such a small amount, as to make no difference at all. The metaphor is a single drop of water in a large bucket of liquid.

*Unfortunately, your contribution is only a drop in the bucket of what is needed for the research.*

**Drop me a line** – write me a letter; keep in touch with me.

*Ed dropped me a line about his new job in New York.*

**[At the] drop of a hat** – spontaneously; suddenly.

*The landlord was likely to get mad at the drop of a hat, so we tried to avoid seeing him.*

**Drop the ball** – fall down on the job; not meet one's duties; miss something; to not pay attention and make a mistake.

*Pat really dropped the ball when he hired his crazy cousin.*

**Drop-dead gorgeous** – very beautiful.

*Everyone thought my model aunt was drop-dead gorgeous.*

**Dropping like flies** – people dying or quitting at once.

*When the administration got in trouble, all the bureaucrats began dropping like flies.*

**Drown out** – to be loud enough to suppress other sounds.

*The rap music blaring from Kenny's car was drowning out our conversation.*

**Drum up** – to come up with.

*Valerie tried to drum up business for the restaurant by mailing flyers and distributing menus.*

**Drunk as a sailor** – intoxicated. And it usually implies loud and singing songs.

*They were as drunk as sailors after hitting four bars.*

**[If one has his/her] druthers** – if one could have his/her way or choice in life.

*Mary would live in New York if she had her druthers.*

**Dry run** – a practice situation; a rehearsal.

*Let's do a dry run of the fire drill to see if we are properly prepared.*

**[A] dry town** – a town in which alcohol is not allowed to be sold, bought or imbibed.

*In Texas, there are many dry towns, so no frat parties!*

**Duck and cover** – to dodge a difficult question; to evade giving a possibly damaging answer.

*The spokesperson for the political organization was playing duck and cover with the reporters.*

**Ducks in a row** – to have everything lined up and in order.

*Janis made a list of things to do, putting all her ducks in a row, but then her baby got sick and the plans got put aside.*

**Duke it out** – to fight; settle an argument with words or fists.

*The two sides duked it out until an agreement was reached.*

**Dull as dishwater** – boring; uninspiring. This expression used to be "dull as ditchwater" (in other words, muddy).

*The hospital dinner of soup, boiled chicken and pudding was as dull as dishwater.*

**Dullsville** – boredom.

*The Geology class as taught by Professor Shukharov was Dullsville.*

**Dutch date/treat (also, go dutch)** – to split the cost of a date; for each person to pay for himself/herself.

*Since we both earned money at our jobs, we decided to go on a Dutch date.*

**Dyed-in-the-wool** – a true, blue example of something.

*Catherine and Frank listened to dyed-in-the-wool jazz musicians in New Orleans.*

**Dynamite** – something terrific; great.

*The band that played at Sophie and Richard's wedding was dynamite, and everyone wanted to dance!*

# E

**Eager beaver** – a very ambitious person; one who works hard.

*Cecilia is an eager beaver and always gets her work done up early so that she has time to practice the cello.*

**Eat crow** – to admit mistakes; to be humble

*After insisting that no woman could beat him at tennis, Bobby had to eat crow when he lost to Billie Jean.*

**[Get an] earful** – to listen to a harangue or long-winded talk, usually complaints or gossip.

*Before I got married, I got an earful of advice from Mom.*

**[The] early bird gets the worm** – a saying meaning that the first to arrive gets rewarded.

*I woke up at 5:00 a.m. to get concert tickets, because the early bird gets the worm, and I didn't want to miss out.*

**Early to bed, early to rise [makes a man healthy, wealthy and wise]** – a proverb (attributed to Benjamin Franklin, though he is not believed to have said it first) meaning that people are most productive when they go to sleep early and rise rested.

*Angie always practiced the early to bed, early to rise doctrine, because she believed it was best for health.*

**Earn one's keep** – to pay for one's rent by doing chores, such as cleaning, cooking and household jobs in general.

*Hilda earned her keep by working in the garden and preparing the fruits and vegetables she grows.*

**Easier said than done** – a deceptively difficult task.

*To remove a glass sliver in your right finger by your left hand is easier said than done.*

**Easy as ABC / apple pie / taking candy from a baby** – very simple; quick to figure out.

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*Going to Canada to buy medicine turned out to be as easy as ABC.*

**Easy come, easy go** – said when something that was easy to get is suddenly gone.

*I lost my umbrella that given out free at the baseball game, so I guess it was a case of easy come, easy go.*

**Easy does it** – be careful; go slowly and carefully.

*Hey easy does it with the salt – I don't want to get thirsty.*

**Easy on the eyes** – very good-looking; this is said of an attractive person, male or female.

*Estelle is a smart girl, not to mention that she's easy on the eyes.*

**[On] easy street** – to be very lucky, to have an easy life. Attributed to the 1902 book, It's Up to You, by George V. Hobart, describing a young man, "who could walk up and down East Street."

*With his good education and family backing, it looks like Josh is on easy street.*

**Eat out of one's hand** – to obey someone and follow every order; to do what someone else wants.

*The preacher was so charismatic that he had his followers eating out of his hand.*

**Eat away at one** – a thought that is obsessive is said to "eat away" at a person.

*Jonathan broke his mother's vase, and it ate away at him, so he admitted it to her and bought her a new one.*

**Eat crow/humble pie/one's words** – to be humble; to apologize.

*He had to eat his words by admitting that his plan failed.*

**Eat like a bird** – to eat very little.

*Rena is so thin because she eats like a bird.*

**Eat like a horse** – to eat a lot of food.

*You will gain weight if you keep eating like a horse.*

**Eat one out of house and home** – to eat very much.

*Mark stayed for a week, and I thought he was going to eat us out of house and home!*

**Ebb and flow** – to fluctuate between coming in and going out, like the ocean tides; to decrease, then increase back and forth.

*Cara enjoyed the ebb and flow of working at a resort; it's fun in busy season, but off season is quiet and relaxing.*

**Edge someone out** – make a person leave, either by fair competition or underhandedness.

*The new secretary was aggressive and edged out one of the long-time administrative assistants.*

**Egg on** – to encourage to do something, often devious.

*The crowd egged on Farrah to slap Risa, the two main women characters in the play.*

**Egg on one's face** – humiliation; facing embarrassment.

*Victor had egg on his face after failing on national TV.*

**Egg-head** – a smart, nerdy student.

*Harry was teased for being an egg-head in school, but he proved he was an athlete, too, by winning the marathon.*

**[To put all your] eggs all in one basket** - to put all of your chances into one opportunity.

*Wanda put all her eggs in one basket when she took all her money and ran off to Hollywood to pursue an acting career.*

**Ego trip** – a situation in which one is glorified and gets a boost to his/her ego.

*It was a real ego trip for Van to be greeted in his hometown with a welcome back parade.*

**[Behind the] the eight ball** – in a difficult situation. This expression comes from the game of pool (billiards).

*Under increasing pressure at work, Phil often felt like he was behind the eight ball.*

**El cheapo** – that of inferior, shoddy quality; a thrifty person.

*The radio that Roger bought was an el cheapo piece of tin.*

**Elbow grease** – actual physical work, usually involving scrubbing (floors or walls).

*Put some elbow grease into cleaning the sink and it will shine like new again.*

**Elbow one's way in/through** – to push forward aggressively, usually knocking others out of the way.

*Dan elbowed his way through the crowd to get a good photo of the performer.*

**Eleventh commandment** – informally known as "thou shall not tell."

*She broke the 11th commandment when she blabbed the story in an interview, prompting an immediate investigation.*

**[At the] eleventh hour** – at the last-minute possible.

*The governor pardoned the inmate at the eleventh hour.*

**End of one's rope** – be frustrated to the point of quitting.

*Liza didn't know what to do and was at the end of her rope.*

**Enough is enough!** – an expression to show frustration and unwillingness to withstand a situation anymore.

*The overworked carpenter threw up his hands and said, "Enough is enough!" the third time the plans were changed.*

**Even steven** – paid up; divided in half, with each person getting the same amount; exactly fair and even.

*Betty paid me back and so we were even steven until I then borrowed $10 from her.*

**Even the score** – to make things more fair, with a negative connotation.

*When the hockey player tripped Alain, the coach privately told him to even the score by hitting that player back in the next round.*

**Every cloud has a silver lining** – a proverb which means that there is good in every bad situation.

*Though the concert was canceled due to a snowstorm, the musicians got to relax that night in front of a nice fire, proving that every cloud has a silver lining.*

**Every dog has his day** – a proverb which says that everyone will have his/her chance.

*Every dog has his day was shown when the TV station did an on-air tribute to Greg, who had worked there tirelessly over the years behind the scenes.*

**Every inch [of something]** – totally; completely.

*Gino was every inch the cook in his family-owned Italian restaurant.*

**Every man for himself** – a situation where everyone is on his/her own.

*The food was brought out and it was every man for himself.*

**Every minute counts** – time is important.

*In the emergency room, the nurses act quickly because they know that every minute counts in most cases.*

**Every now and again/then** – from time to time.

*I get a yen for chocolate every now and then.*

**Every Tom, Dick and Harry** – anyone and everyone.

*When the donut shop opens, every Tom, Dick and Harry is waiting at the door for his morning treat.*

**Everyone and his brother** – many people; a crowd.

*The play was so good there that everyone and his brother tried to get tickets.*

**Everything but the kitchen sink** – virtually everything; of a wide variety.

*The Monster Mash ice cream contains fruit, nuts, chocolate and everything but the kitchen sink.*

**Excess baggage** – a thing or person who is not wanted or needed.

*After her children were raised, Gertrude felt like excess baggage at home with nothing left to do.*

**Excusez moi** – saying "excuse me" with emphasis (sometimes contempt).

*"Excusez moi," the girl said loudly. "I was here first!"*

**Explore every avenue** – look at every possibility; same as "leave no stone unturned".

*Wally isn't sure what his major will be yet and wants to explore every avenue.*

**Extenuating circumstances** – an unusual or special situation.

*Visiting hours are over at 8:00 p.m. except for times when there are extenuating circumstances.*

**Eye to eye** – to look at things in the same way; to agree.

*The architect and the engineer saw eye to eye on the plan for the building.*

**[Make] eyes at** – to look at flirtatiously.

*The two beach-goers were making eyes at each other.*

**[Only have] eyes for** – to want or desire only one person or thing.

*In applying for jobs, Tim only had eyes for sales or marketing jobs.*

**[Keep one's] eyes on the prize** – always think of the end goal, without getting caught up in the details.

*Sherry didn't want to get distracted by the office gossip; she had her eyes on the prize – which was the being manager..*

**[Up to my] eyeballs in** – inundated, flooded.

*The new mother felt like she was up to her eyeballs in diapers and feedings.*

**[An] eye-opener** – an event or thing showing the true nature of something; that which (often surprisingly) shows the truth.

*It was a real eye-opener to win that trip to the Ivory Islands and see how the wealthy live on vacation.*

**[Give an] eye-tooth for** – to want something so badly, one would be willing to give up much.

*Jasmine would give an eye-tooth to be able to go away to college and get an education.*

# F

**Face the music** – to face the consequences; to accept the punishment or penalty.

*Gary spent all week long goofing around, but when his boss asked for the report on Friday, it was time to face the music.*

**Face value** – the value at first glance, without probing too much.

*I believed him at face value when he claimed that his dog got sick and that's why he was late for work.*

**Fair and square** – to achieve or accomplish without cheating; in a straightforward way.

*She won the arm wrestling contest fair and square.*

**Fall all over someone** – to gush and fuss over another person; to lavish attention on someone.

*The waiter was so enamored of the actress that he fell all over her throughout the meal.*

**Fall asleep at the switch/wheel** – to be negligent; to fail to perform one's duties; to be inattentive.

*Fred fell asleep at the switch by failing to notice when the furnace boiled over.*

**Fall into line** – to conform; agree with the accepted position.

*I knew if we could convince the teachers that this was a good idea, then the parents would fall into line.*

**Fall down on the job** – to fail to perform one's duties; to stop being effective in a job.

*Ross fell down on the job when he bought boats instead of bolts.*

**Fall short** – be insufficient; fail to meet a goal; fall through the cracks.

*So many poor people fall through the cracks of the health care system every year and don't get proper treatment.*

**Fall to pieces** – disintegrate; break down.

*Patsy fell to pieces when Ed said they were through.*

**Familiarity breeds contempt** – After knowing people well, it is common to see their flaws and resent them for it.

*After living with Cheryl for two years, I was ready to move out – sometimes familiarity does breed contempt!*

**False alarm** – an emergency that doesn't come to pass.

*The bell sounded, but it turned out to be a false alarm; it was triggered by running squirrels.*

**Far and away** – obviously; clearly; by far.

*My mother is far and away the best cook in this town, if not the county.*

**[A] far cry** – something completely different; not what is expected.

*Being a nanny was a far cry from what Siobhan had imagined.*

**Farm out** – to delegate; commission another firm to do a job.

*The company farmed out most of its graphics work to independent contractors.*

**Fat of the land** – the best or richest part.

*After years of doing without luxuries, finally Calvin was able to live off the fat of the land.*

**[The] fat's in/on the fire** – the trouble has begun; an action is provoked.

*Once Felicia had disclosed that she had called the police, the fat was on the fire.*

**Feather in one's cap/hat** – an attribute; a triumph.

*Scoring highest on the test was a feather in Brenda's cap.*

**Fed up with** – to be sick of; out of patience for; tired of.

*Romy was fed up with never having enough money, so she started looking for a higher-paying job.*

**Feeling blue** – being depressed.

*Pam was feeling blue all day long on the anniversary of her husband's death.*

**Fenced in** – a feeling of being limited; to be without choices.

*I feel so fenced in living in this small town.*

**Fender bender** – a minor car accident.

*No, she wasn't hurt in the fender bender, but the car really got messed up.*

**Fiddle around with** – play with; adjust; fix at something.

*John fiddled around with the can opener, but instead of fixing it, he broke it even further.*

**Fight fire with fire** – to stoop to another's low tactics when defending oneself; to use extreme measures in extreme situations.

*Fine, if he's going to sue me, I'll fight fire with fire and get a lawyer myself.*

**Fifty-fifty** – equal; each party paying half.

*We should buy a tent, going fifty-fifty on it, then share it throughout the summer.*

**Fight tooth and nail** – to hang on and fight vigorously.

*The dogs fought tooth and nail over that silly little bone.*

**Figure of speech** – an expression; a way of talking.

*Lars heard such unusual figures of speech when he visited Texas.*

**Figure on** – to expect or count on.

*I didn't figure on spending an additional $100 on a new dress for the wedding – the gift and transportation are already expensive enough.*

**[Have one's] fill** – to be satisfied; to have one's full share.

*Alison had her fill of family visits after staying in the cramped cottage for two weeks.*

**Fill one in** – to tell someone the full story.

*Troy's been away for a while, so I'll fill him in on all the news here.*

**Fill the bill** – to fit the requirements; satisfy the needs of.

*The modeling agency is looking for a child of about 6, but Miriam is small for 10 and can probably fill the bill.*

**[Have a] finger in the pie** – be active in; participate in; have a share in.

*He has his fingers in many community pies.*

**[Keep one's] fingers crossed** – to be hopeful; wish for something.

*I'll keep my fingers crossed that you get that job!*

**[At one's] fingertips** – readily available; able to found immediately.

*Most writers keep a dictionary and thesaurus at their fingertips for quick reference.*

**First dibs** - first shot at something. This comes from a child's game of the 1930's.

*Vanessa called first dibs at choosing a game-piece.*

**[The] first step is always the hardest** – getting started is always the hardest part of a task.

*Just begin –taking the first step is always the hardest and it gets easier as you go along.*

**[A] fish out of water** – someone out of their element. This expression goes as far back as the late 1300's in John Wyclif's English Works, "And how thei weren out of ther cloister as fishis withouten water."

*The librarian felt like a fish out of water when it came to playing sports.*

**[A] fish story/tale** – an unlikely story; a fib; an exaggeration.

*That little David would have hit ten homeruns in the game sounds like a fish story to me.*

**[Bigger/better] fish to fry** – more important things to do.

*I have bigger fish to fry than sew up loose buttons on a Saturday morning.*

**Fit as a fiddle** – in great health. In Haughton's *England for My Money* (1616), he writes, "This is Excellent, I' faith; as fit as a fiddle."

*You wouldn't believe that Skip was a premature baby because today he's as fit as a fiddle.*

**[Throw a] fit** – to become very upset; to get angry and yell.

*Phoebe threw a fit when she wasn't allowed to go skating.*

**[In a] fix** – to be in trouble; to have a problem situation.

*Ryder was in a fix because he lost the class notes.*

**Fix it up** – to make prettier, better-looking.

*This place is going to look so nice once we fix it up with curtains, a fresh coat of paint and a new rug.*

**Flash in the pan** – a brief success.

*That new pop star is only a flash in the pan, and we won't even remember her name in a couple of years.*

**[In a] flash** – very suddenly; quickly.

*In a flash, the thief grabbed my purse, knocked me down and took off.*

**Flat as a pancake** – totally flat.

*The plains in Kansas are as flat as a pancake.*

**[In the] flesh** – in person; to be present physically.

*I couldn't believe that standing before me in the flesh was my long-lost friend from childhood.*

**[Have a] fling** – to have a non-serious, fun affair; to be in a short-term relationship.

*Julie and Philip had a fling during their vacation last summer.*

**[On the] fly** –something done hastily; extemporaneously; making it up as one goes.

*He made up a speech on the fly to give to the graduating students, and it actually turned out to be quite interesting and witty.*

**Fly in the ointment** – a small problem in an otherwise perfect situation; a drawback.

*The visit to my cousin's farm was wonderful, but the fly in the ointment was that the dinner was all vegetables.*

**Fly-by-night operation** – A very temporary business, usually set up to defraud people; to "take the money and run".

*Herman bought a watch at some fly-by-night operation, and when it broke, he had no recourse.*

**Fly by the seat of one's pants** – to go by instinct rather than by planning.

*Trenton never studied the blueprints and would fly by the seat of his pants when the engineers asked questions.*

**Fly off the handle** – get angry quickly; lose one's temper.

*Alex was touchy today and flew off the handle at us.*

**Fly the coop** – to leave home; to move on.

*Soon, Brett will grow up and fly the coop to be on his own.*

**Follow the golden rule** – live by the expression, "Do unto others as you would have others do unto you."

*He wasn't very religious, but he did believe in following the golden rule.*

**Follow up on/with** – keep in touch with a person or situation; pursue an interest in an idea.

*Ethan followed up on his idea to invent a better cereal bowl.*

**Follow suit** – to imitate or follow another.

*Gwen decided to become a lawyer and her younger sister followed suit.*

**Food for thought** – something to consider; an interesting idea.

*Sue's unusual suggestion was food for thought.*

**[A] fool and his money are soon parted** – a foolish person often spends his money on wasteful, silly things.

*When her poor son bought an expensive lava lamp, Mrs. Ferris warned him that a fool and his money are soon parted.*

[**Put one's] foot down** – to be firm and not tolerate something any longer; to refuse to accept a situation anymore.

*If my uncle borrows my car without asking again, I'm going to put my foot down.*

**[Put one's best] foot forward** – to try to make a great impression.

*She's going to put her best foot forward tomorrow on her first day of work.*

**Foot the bill** – to pay for something; pick up the tab.

*Who foot the bill for the rehearsal dinner last night?*

**For crying out loud** (as a euphemism for "for Christ's sake) – an expression of frustration.

*I am doing all the work in this house, for crying out loud!*

**Fork out/over** – to pay up

*My son broke the store window, and now I'm going to have to fork over $60 to fix it.*

**[A] foregone conclusion** – something predictable; a given.

*It was a foregone conclusion that the two lovebirds were going to get married.*

**Fourth estate** – the profession of journalism, particularly the newspaper industry.

*The New Haven Register, the Hartford Courant and the Waterbury Republican are all important members of Connecticut's Fourth Estate.*

**[Catch] forty winks** – take a short nap.

*Bradley was able to catch forty winks on the train home.*

**Frame of mind** – state of thinking; a way of feeling.

*Dahlia was very nervous and couldn't get in the right frame of mind for the party.*

**[As] free as a bird** – unencumbered; carefree.

*After finishing the project on which he spent six long months, Francis felt as free as a bird.*

**Freeload** – take advantage of one's generosity; be a user.

*Jim slept on his sister's couch and freeloaded food quite often.*

**Fresh as a daisy** – clean and energetic; not tired.

*All I needed was a nap and a shower to feel as fresh as a daisy.*

**Frown upon** – look unfavorably on; be disapproving of.

*Mr. MacGregor frowned upon littering and hung a big warning at the edge of his property.*

**Full blast** – as loud or with as much power as possible.

*The plumber was running the fan full blast to dry out the wood under the sink.*

**[With a] full head of steam** – with much vigor and power.

*We started our diet with a full head of steam Monday morning, but by Tuesday evening, temptation was calling..*

**Full of hot air** – nonsense.

*His argument that people shouldn't vote because the machines are rigged was full of hot air.*

**Full of oneself** – self-absorbed; narcissistic.

*Tommy would be a nice guy if he weren't so self-absorbed.*

**[In] full swing** – in the middle of; going strong; at the maximum point of activity.

*By the time Julian arrived at the clubhouse, the party was already in full swing.*

**Funny bone** – the sensitive elbow nerve.

*While playing tennis, Charlie hit his funny bone and dropped his racket.*

**Fur is going to fly** – there is going to be anger; a commotion or tirade is expected.

*When my father finds out about this, the fur's going to fly!*

# G

**[Be] game for** – to be willing to try an activity; to be up for or in favor of something.

*At 80, Grandma Bello was still so much fun and game for anything!*

**[Like] gangbusters** – with great intensity.

*The cleaning team came in like gangbusters and had the place sparkling in just three hours.*

**Gather from** – understand; interpret.

*Candice gathered from the memo that there were going to be layoffs in the near future.*

**Gender bending** – being ambiguous about gender, i.e., for a woman to have a mustache or for a man to wear a skirt.

*That modern movie had a lot of gender bending in it, like when it showed all the men getting their nails painted at that salon.*

**Get a grip** – a plea to take control of oneself.

*Gee, that woman needs to get a grip if a little thing like my dog barking at her from the window makes her cry.*

**Get a move on** – start moving; leave; show some forward motion toward an activity.

*We need to get a move on if we hope to make the 9 o'clock movie.*

**Get a word in edgewise** – to be able to enter a conversation finally; to squeeze a word in with a talkative person.

*Mary tried to tell her brother about the book, but she couldn't get a word in edgewise.*

**Get away with** – escape without punishment; act bad but avoid penalty; not have to pay any consequences.

*Rob has such a sweet smile that he's able to get away with murder in school, and no one ever says anything to him.*

**Get back at** – to take revenge on someone.

*Shana did it to get back at Mira for being so spiteful.*

**Get even with** – exact revenge.

*Ilsa didn't invite Jed to her party in order to get even with him for not bringing her to the prom.*

**Get in touch with** – make contact with; resume contact.

*Many old friends got in touch with me after they saw me on the reality TV show.*

**Get off easy** – get a light penalty; escape with just a small punishment.

*Even though Paul was caught stealing a car, he got off easy with just probation and no jail time.*

**[To] get off (or "go") scot-free** – get out of punishment, penalty. Back in the 1200's, a scot was a tax. Someone going scot-free got out of paying his share of taxes.

*Misty got off scot-free because this was her first offense, and the judge wanted to show mercy.*

**Get on board with** – to accept; to go along with.

*Is Jerry going to get on board with the plan to go to India?*

**Get on in years** – to get older; to become elderly.

*His health has been good, although he is getting on in years.*

**Get on the ball** – be more focused; pay more attention.

*You're going to have to get on the ball with your schoolwork.*

**Get one's comeuppance** – get what one deserves; receive the merited fate.

*One of these days, Skye will get her comeuppance from one of the people she has cheated.*

**Get one's feet wet** – make a first attempt at something; start to become accustomed to something.

*Tim got his feet wet with singing when he joined the high school chorus.*

**Get one's goat** – bother or annoy someone.

*It gets my goat that Gavin is being praised for helping to clean up, when all he did was a little sweeping.*

**Get out of line** – cause trouble; be mischievous.

*The nun was very strict, so we didn't dare get out of line.*

**Get over it!** – an expression requesting someone to stop complaining.

*It was five years ago that the neighbor's dog dug up your lawn, so when are you going to get over it?*

**Get real** – to be honest.

*I wish Bob would get real with me and tell me how he feels for once and for all.*

**Get something off one's chest** – admit something; unburden oneself of a secret.

*Dara asked to meet with the group, saying she had something she wanted to get off her chest.*

**Get the better of** – defeat someone; succeed over.

*Peter got the better of Mike in the wrestling match.*

**Get the dirt/goods [on someone]** – find about something negative, usually secret, about someone.

*The reporter got the dirt on Anthony by talking to his high school buddies.*

**Get the gist** – to get the idea or main point of something; the feeling.

*I get the gist of your argument, but give me some examples.*

**Get to the bottom of** – find out the real story, the details.

*The school principal wanted to get to the bottom of why so many of the kids were failing their classes this year.*

**Get-together** – a meeting; a small party; a social event.

*The Byrds had a get-together for the students last night.*

**Get up on the wrong side of the bed** – wake up in a bad mood.

*Boy, you must have gotten up on the wrong side of the bed because you seem so grouchy today!*

**Ghost of a chance** – a very slim chance; almost no hope of something happening.

*With his poor grades, Spencer has a ghost of a chance of getting into a good college.*

**Ghost writer** – a writer whose identity is not revealed and writes for another who gets all the credit.

*That movie starlet wasn't very literary, so she hired a ghost writer to pen her "autobiography".*

**Gift of gab** – one who has the ability to articulate their side well; one who has persuasive debating powers.

*Jimmy would be a great lawyer, because he really does have the gift of gab.*

**Gild the lily** - add to an already perfect situation to the point of ruining it. Shakespeare wrote of this in *King John* in 1199: ". . . To gild refined gold, to paint the lily, To throw a perfume on the violet . . .". Superfluous. Excessive.

*Putting a rose on the top of that hat would be to gild the lily, as it is already beautiful enough.*

**Give and take** – a mutual exchange; compromise.

*In many relationships, there is a give and take in leisure activities, going fishing one day and to the mall the next.*

**Give away the shirt off one's back** – be extremely generous.

*Andrea is so generous that she would give away the shirt off her back if someone would need it.*

**Give rise to** – cause or provoke a situation.

*The rationing of gas in the 1970's gave rise to smaller, more fuel-efficient cars.*

**Give someone a break** – give someone an opportunity, a chance to succeed.

*The coach decided to give Terence a break and let him on the varsity team.*

**Give someone a hand** – help someone out; lend assistance.

*The guys were asked to give Grady a hand with moving.*

**Give the cold shower** – be unfriendly, dismissive of another.

*Danny was giving the cold shower to Janelle because he overheard her gossiping about him recently.*

**Go astray** – get lost; go the wrong way; depart from the expected path.

*Parents need to give extra attention to their kids in the teenage years so that they don't go astray.*

**Go ballistic** – have a major fit; be very angry and show it.

*When Marta finds out that her neighbor chopped down her trees, she's going to go ballistic.*

**Go bananas** – be very enthusiastic about; like a lot.

*When Gaye sees that big, beautiful beach, she's going to go bananas.*

**Go by the book** – follow all the rules; do things properly.

*We are planning to go by the book in planning the wedding, because we want it to be traditional.*

**Go fly a kite!** – an expression meaning "Get out of here!"; a response of irritation.

*He can go fly a kite if he thinks I'm going to give up my Saturday morning to help him clean.*

**Go gaga over** – fall in love with, be crazy about.

*Perry goes gaga over any kind of chocolate.*

**Go like the dickens/wind** – go very fast; speed away.

*From the minute Renee got her driver's license, she would go like the dickens in her truck.*

**Go off the deep end** – go crazy, lose it.

*I fear that Delina will go off the deep end if her daughter doesn't make it through the operation.*

**Go out of one's way** – take extra measures to accomplish something; make a special effort.

*Trish is very thoughtful and goes out of her way to make others feel comfortable.*

**Go to any length** – try to do one's best, doing whatever's necessary.

*She would go to any length to be successful in business.*

**Go to bat for** – to support verbally or through actions.

*Maris always goes to bat for her students.*

**Go to pieces** – to fall apart; lose one's composure.

*Sharon will go to pieces if her husband is convicted of the crime and has to go to jail.*

**Go to pot** – to totally fall apart; to deteriorate.

*The neighborhood is going to pot since the liquor store moved in.*

**Go through the proper channels** – to go about a project in the prescribed, traditional way.

*The publishing house is going through the proper channels by getting its first book reviewed, edited and distributed by reputable companies.*

**Go to town** – to spare no expense; to put on a big party.

*If the Hansons win the settlement, they will go to town fixing up their house, buying a new car and taking a vacation.*

**Go with the flow** – to let whatever will happen, happen; to take things as they come.

*I hope Kai will relax and go with the flow while traveling because it will be no fun for anyone if he's uptight.*

**Gobbledegook** – nonsensical babbling or writing.

*He tried to write a letter to his girlfriend, but he was so upset that it turned out to be all gobbledegook.*

**Gofer** – one who does errands; a low-level office worker.

*Jake the intern acted as a gofer by getting coffee, picking up dry-cleaning and mailing packages for the office.*

**[As] good as gold** – having good behavior; valuable; worthy.

*Our dog acted as good as gold while the company was here.*

**Good things come in small packages** – small boxes often contain valuable things (like jewelry).

*Margie is only 4'10" tall, so her husband tells her that good things come in small packages.*

**Golden handshake** – a large amount of money given to a departing employee (usually a manager) in order to get him/her to leave.

*The company was going through financial hardship, and since it could no longer afford the high salaries of the senior employees, it offered them golden handshakes.*

**Golden oldie** – a music hit that has lasted years.

*Fred and Ethel loved to dance to the golden oldies, especially the songs of Frank Sinatra.*

**Golden rule** – an expression that says, "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you."

*Hector believed in the golden rule regarding his relationships with friends and family.*

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**Golf/Football widow** – a woman who has "lost" her husband to sports-watching; the wife of a busy sports fan.

*Jeannie took up knitting during the afternoons that she was a golf widow.*

**[The] grass is always greener** – a reference to the expression, "the grass is always greener on the other side", meaning that one always thinks a situation other than his/her own might be better, although it probably isn't; what other people have looks more appealing than what you own.

*When their neighbors bought a pool, the Browns envied them in a case of "the grass is always greener on the other side".*

**Graveyard shift** – to work overnight hours; the night shift.

*Bess hated to work graveyard shift because then her sleep would get all messed up.*

**Grease one's palm** – bribe someone. Back in the age of chivalry, a highly valuable grease was used by men for cleaning their hands. It was often given as a "gift" to an official for a special favor. Money later replaced this bribe, but the expression of using grease prevailed.

*In some countries, it is customary to grease the import agents' palms to get your shipment through quickly.*

**Greasy spoon** – usually refers to a diner that serves heavy or greasy food.

*When he was a traveling salesman, Fred got sick of eating at greasy spoons so much.*

**[The] green light** – approval; the go-ahead.

*We got the green light from the studio to make the movie.*

**[Have a] green thumb** – be a good gardener; have the ability to make plants grow.

*You should see the Grace's garden; she really does have a green thumb.*

**Guilt trip** – the experience of having regret; being sorry.

*Michelle was on a guilt trip about leaving her dogs home alone for so long.*

**Gum up the works** – act incompetently; obstruct; limit progress by one's ineptitude.

*Those incompetent builders really gummed up the works, and the architect had to re-design the building.*

# H

**[Get in someone's] hair** – be in the way; annoy or irritate someone.

*Baby-sitting was not for Lana, because the kids began getting in her hair after a while.*

**[Let down one's] hair** – relax; be comfortable enough with another person to tell private thoughts; be confidential.

*Once you get to know Priscilla, she really lets down her hair and is less formal than how she appears from a distance.*

**[Split] hairs** – argue or squabble over minor points.

*I simply refuse to split hairs over the cost of breakfast.*

**Half the battle** – half the struggle; an expression to mean that a good chunk of the work is done.

*Getting the children to put on their pajamas is half the battle in getting them to go to bed.*

**Half-cocked** – without planning; only partially ready.

*John has a bad temper, and I worry when he leaves the house half-cocked.*

**[An old] hand** – an experienced person; a veteran; a seasoned worker.

*Go ask Barry for advice – he's an old hand at fixing machines.*

**[Give/lend a] hand** – be of assistance; give help.

*I bet Cindy will lend a hand with the food preparation.*

**[Have the upper] hand** – have control or dominance over someone else.

*When it comes to spending money, Mike has the upper hand and makes the final decisions.*

**[On the other] hand** – conversely; however.

*I love going to the theater, but on the other hand, sometimes the plays are long and boring.*

**[Try one's] hand at something** – attempt something new; experiment.

*Barb wanted to try her hand at dancing, so she took lessons.*

**Hand in glove/hand** – in close alliance with; working together with.

*The art and editing departments work hand in hand to produce the children's books.*

**Hand over fist** – much; in large quantity.

*The summer was so hot that the ice cream bar was making money hand over fist.*

**Hand to mouth** – living at subsistence level; barely earning a living.

*Because the dictator had mismanaged and robbed the country, many people there were living hand to mouth.*

**Hand-me-downs** – clothes that belonged to an older sibling or friend.

*Kim was the Lee's last child and often wore hand-me-downs.*

**Handle with kid gloves** – treat gently; deal with a difficult person or situation delicately.

*Lee was emotional and had to be handled with kid gloves.*

**Handwriting on the wall** – a forecast or prediction of an event.

*The employees could see the handwriting on the wall when their company was sold to a foreign conglomerate.*

**Hang around/out** – spend time relaxing by doing nothing in particular; loiter.

*In the summer, the city kids who don't go away to camp usually hang around at the Sisson Avenue public pool.*

**Hang on by a thread** – be in a precarious position, just barely surviving; to be in a dangerous, threatening situation.

*Manuel had serious heart surgery last week and has been hanging on by a thread ever since.*

**Hanky-panky** – trickery, usually having to do with sex.

*There is some hanky-panky going on with the teenagers.*

**[As] happy as a clam** – very secure, comfortable and content.

*When I throw a cover on my short-haired dog, she seems as happy as a clam.*

**Happy camper** – a satisfied, content participant.

*They were happy campers after the ice cream truck arrived.*

**Hard as nails** – brittle, cold and even cruel.

*Lou Ann knew the garment business and was hard as nails when negotiating with the dress-makers.*

**Hard row to hoe** – a tough life; a difficult journey.

*The miners of Appalachia have a hard row to hoe.*

**Haste makes waste** – rushing often leads to ruined work.

*Take your time painting that delicate scene, because haste makes waste, and you don't want to spoil such a pretty picture.*

**Hats off to you!** – Congratulations; good job!

*I said, "Hats off to you, Jack, for getting that promotion!"*

**Have a ball** – have a great time; have much fun.

*Erin and Adam had a ball on their camping trip.*

**Have a hand in** – deserves credit in; takes part in.

*Jessie had a hand in developing the acclaimed Animal Alphabet video.*

**Have a screw loose** – act crazy; do stupid, foolish things.

*She must have had a screw loose to give all her money away to that cult leader.*

**Have it out with someone** – to discuss a problem with another person; to get into a heated discussion with someone.

*Trudy didn't like how Liz was treating her and decided to have it out with her.*

**Have one's heart set on** – be counting on something; be looking forward to and expecting a pleasant event.

*Monica had her heart set on vacationing in Paris, which is said to be one of the most romantic cities in the world.*

**Have the game sewn up** – be winning by so much already that the outcome is practically decided.

*It's the 3rd quarter, and so far the Colts have the game sewn up because there's no way that the Giants can catch up.*

**Have up one's sleeve** - have a trick left, to keep something in reserve just in case.

*It looks like Brigitte has lost the bet, unless she has some trick up her sleeve.*

**[Go] haywire** – become chaotic; things to get out of control.

*I think things would go haywire if Mom went on vacation.*

**He-man** – a masculine manly man.

*Jeff works out every day and looks like a he-man.*

**Head and shoulders above the rest** – to be much better than everybody else in some way.

*Tiger Woods was always head and shoulders above the rest of the kids when it came to golf.*

**Head for the hills** – leave quickly; scurry; get out fast.

*The actress saw the crowd coming toward her and headed for the hills.*

**Head honcho** – the person in charge.

*Maureen succeeds her father as head honcho at JMS Corp.*

**Head over heels in love** – totally in love; smitten.

*Amber fell head over heels in love with Rob after a month on the island.*

**Head start** – to begin earlier than the others; to have an advantage time-wise in a certain activity.

*The marathon organizers gave David a head start in the race because he was competing in a wheelchair.*

**Healthy as a horse/ox** – very fit and healthy.

*Now that he has recovered from pneumonia, Mike is as healthy as a horse.*

**Heard through the grapevine** – information passed along by talking, usually through gossip.

*Marilyn heard through the grapevine that the mayor was a big drinker.*

**[To] hem and haw** – to hesitate. "Hem" is the clearing of the throat, and "haw" is from hawk (to cough); to stall.

*Asked about her recollection, Alicia hemmed and hawed about how much to reveal.*

**Higher than a kite** – intoxicated; drunk or on drugs.

*When the police officers stopped the motorist for weaving in and out of traffic, they saw that he was higher than a kite.*

**Hit the nail on the head** – have answered something exactly right; was correct in assessment.

*Jack hit the nail on the head when he said that the problem was caused by poor leadership.*

**Hogwash** – nonsense.

*When he was accused of favoritism, Jay replied, "Not true. That's hogwash!"*

**Hokey** – overly sentimental; too sweet.

*That movie was kind of hokey, especially the violins playing at the end.*

**Hold down the fort** – take care of everything; make sure everything runs smoothly; in charge.

*Can you hold down the fort while your parents are away this weekend?*

**Hold one's horses** – be patient; wait.

*Betsy told Jim to hold his horses because he would have plenty of time later to tell his story.*

**[The] honeymoon's over** – back to real life; not sugar-coated; the grace period has ended..

*Roberta knew the work honeymoon was over when her new boss demanded that she stay late to complete her report.*

**[By] hook or by crook** – by any means necessary; to do what it takes to get what one wants; one way or another.

*Marla knew that, by hook or by crook, she was going to get to Carnegie Hall one day.*

**Hooligan** – a rough, boisterous guy.

*Artie used to hang around a bunch of hooligans at the pool hall until most of them were sent to jail.*

**Hotfoot it** – go quickly; leave fast.

*When work lets out, Tyrone is going to hotfoot it down to the casino to spend his paycheck.*

**[In] hot water** – in trouble.

*Pierre has been in hot water with his landlord since he hasn't paid rent in three months.*

**Hungry as a bear** – famished; very hungry and ready to eat.

*Chris was hungry as a bear after skipping lunch today.*

# I

**[An] ice queen** – a cold woman; a woman without feelings.

*Only an ice queen like Olivia would make her own mother wait on the doorstep while she got ready.*

**Icing on the cake** - anything good that's extra. Cake is good enough, but to have icing on it is all the better.

*My new house is beautiful, and the icing on the cake is that there is a public tennis court down the street.*

**Idiot box** – the television set.

*Louis just sat around all day eating junk food and watching the idiot box.*

**Ill at ease** – uncomfortable; awkward.

*Diane felt ill at ease when she saw her ex-boyfriend and his new girlfriend at the supermarket.*

**In a nutshell** – briefly; to summarize.

*In a nutshell, Babe Ruth hit a lot of home runs.*

**In no time flat** – right away; immediately.

*We moved to the beach, and in no time flat, my sons had learned to surf.*

**In one ear and out the other** – hear, but not process what someone else is saying, usually advice. Around 1374, Chaucer wrote of this in Troilus and Criseyde: "Oon ere it herde, at tothir out it wente."

*It seems like teenagers don't listen to parents' warnings; whatever they're told goes in one ear and out the other.*

**In one fell swoop** – in a single time; at once.

*Garth was able to buy all the materials he needed to build a shed in one fell swoop by going to the superstore.*

**In stitches** – laughing very hard.

*Louie had us in stitches when he described all the poorly-translated signs he had seen while traveling overseas.*

**In the doghouse** – in trouble; being reprimanded.

*Jack was in the doghouse after he took the car without his parents' permission and put a dent in it.*

**In the picture** – present; hanging around; in someone's life.

*We haven't seen Clarissa that much since Jorge has been in the picture.*

**In the red** – to be in debt; to owe money.

*For the first time since it was founded, the clothing manufacturer ended the year in the red.*

**In the same boat** – having the same situation as; being in a similar position.

*Petra enjoyed the support group for widows, as it was helpful to talk with other women in the same boat.*

**In the works** – in process; being developed.

*There's a new policy in the works which correct some of the problems in the health care field.*

**[To] iron something out** – to resolve an issue; to talk out a problem.

*Jean and Carmelo ironed out the details of the budget in several sessions.*

**[To have many (or several)] irons in the fire** - to have many alternate plans; jobs at hand; projects.

No wonder you're tired with all those irons in the fire; just thinking about one of those activities makes me want to take a nap!

**It takes two to tango** – In an argument or contention, both sides are somewhat to blame.

*Leah always plays the innocent victim, but I think it takes two to tango and she may be contributing to the arguments somehow.*

**It's not rocket science** – not a difficult task.

*"Here is the cake mix," showed Aunt Anne. "You won't have any trouble - it's not rocket science, you know."*

# J

**[To] jack up the prices** – to raise prices; to charge more.

*During the winter, the hotels in Acosta really jack up their prices because they know people want to vacation there.*

**Jack of all trades** – a person who is good at many jobs.

*Herb is a jack of all trades when it comes to renovating; he knows carpentry, plumbing, painting, rug-laying, etc.*

**Jailbait –** a young girl who's sexy; on the brink of womanhood, but not there yet.

*At 14, Cindy was considered jailbait and off-limits for dating.*

**Jammies –** pajamas.

*Devon's grandmother told him to put on his jammies after he took a bath.*

**Jam-packed** – full; filled to capacity.

*The dance was jam-packed with kids from all over the city.*

**[To] jawbone** – to strong-arm; to persuade another or others.

*The senior senators jawboned their colleagues into signing a controversial pay raise.*

**Jazz up** – to decorate something (a room, an outfit, etc.)

*The den is so plain and needs to be jazzed up with some paintings or other decorations.*

**[Dr.] Jekyll-[Mr.] Hyde personality** – describes a person who appears normal but then turns into a menace at times. The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde describes two parts of one personality in an 1886 book written by Robert Louis Stevenson.

*I thought Victor was very pleasant, but then I saw his true Jekyll-Hyde personality one frightful day.*

**[The] jitters** – being nervous; having anxiety.

*Many people have the jitters before getting married.*

**Job hop** – go from one job to another; this describes a person with a sketchy work history.

*Gretchen is very picky and job hopped until she found the perfect position.*

**John Hancock** – signature.

*Put your John Hancock on the dotted line if you agree with all the stipulations in the contract.*

**John Q. Public** – the average person; a normal citizen.

*I wonder how John Q. Public will react to that ad campaign.*

**[A] Johnny-come-lately** - a newcomer, one who enters a race at the last minute; an inexperienced, usually young person.

*It was surprising when that Johnny-come-lately beat the popular incumbent.*

**Jump the gun** – act prematurely; start too early.

*The brothers agreed to surprise their mother after dinner with a birthday song, but Joey jumped the gun and sang it to her first thing in the morning.*

**Jump on the bandwagon** – to do what the majority is doing.

*When some of his neighbors put up fences around their yards, Hal jumped on the bandwagon and installed one, also.*

**Jump ship** – abandon; leave sneakily.

*All the kids who were helping to paint the house jumped ship when the ice cream truck rolled by.*

**Jumpy** – nervous; acting scared.

*After she was attacked by that dog, she acted jumpy around all animals.*

**Just fell off the turnip truck** – describes a person who is very naïve and ignorant; a hick.

*Tanner may look like a simple country boy, but he's savvy and didn't just fall off the turnip truck.*

**Just what the doctor ordered** – exactly what one needs.

*Sissy made brownies for Al when he was feeling down, and he lit right up, saying it was just what the doctor ordered.*

# K

**Kangaroo court** – a sham of a legal hearing, so unfair as to be laughable. This comes from when the English first brought kangaroos back home from Australia, they were so unusual to people that anything else odd was deemed to be "kangaroo-like". The term stuck regarding very unfair courthouse trials.

*The judge didn't seem to care and the defense lawyer slept through the trial in that kangaroo court.*

**Kaput** – over; ruined; broken.

*The car was 15 years old, and one day, it just went kaput.*

**Keep a lid on** – to stay quiet about.

*It's important that reporters keep a lid on any testimony that is deemed "off the record".*

**Keep a stiff upper lip** – don't show any emotions; be stoic.

*Boys are often taught to keep a stiff upper lip when they injure themselves.*

**Keep an eye on** – to watch something.

*Angela is too young to play alone and needs someone to keep an eye on her.*

**Keep it down!** – a request to keep the noise level low.

*The police responded to a neighbors complaint and told the partiers to keep it down or else they would be arrested.*

**Keep one's word** – keep a promise.

*You can count on Marisa, who always keeps her word when she says she will do something.*

**Keep one's head above water** – try to survive by doing what's necessary; struggle to pay bills.

*The young family is barely keeping its head above water with their son's medical expenses.*

**Keep tabs on** – to follow or "keep track of".

*Ginnie keeps tabs on her son by monitoring his cell phone call log.*

**Keep the ball rolling** – continue to act, do one's part.

*Kwame kept the ball rolling with the project by giving the workers frequent pep talks.*

**Keep track of** – follow the activity of; stay up-to-date with.

*I keep track of my expenses with the help of my digital assistant.*

**Keep up with the Joneses** – compete with friends and/or neighbors in material ways.

*He bought a pool like everyone in the neighborhood to keep up with the Joneses.*

**Keep your fingers crossed** – hope and wish for.

*Please keep your fingers crossed that Lori gets a good job soon, as she's running out of money.*

**[Put the] kibosh on** – to not allow; to say no.

*Dad put the kibosh on plans to backpack across Europe this summer by requiring that I earn money for college.*

**[To get a] kick out of something** - to be amused at. To derive pleasure and amusement from an event or person.

*Marita got a kick out of how her new puppy chased his tail around in a circle.*

**Kick the bucket** – to die.

*When I kick the bucket, my art collection will be donated to the local museum.*

**Kick the habit** – to quit an addiction, such as stop smoking.

*Rosie only smoked one cigarette a day, but she couldn't completely kick the habit.*

**[The] kiss of death** – a fatal blow; a betrayal.

*If I found out that a friend had cheated me, that would be the kiss of death for him or her.*

**Kit and caboodle** – the whole thing; the entire contents.

*He looked at my fishing gear and offered to buy the line, the bait, the tackle box, the whole kit and caboodle.*

**Klepto** – short for kleptomaniac; thief.

*The teenage girls acted like a bunch of kleptos when they stole the test answers from the teacher's desk..*

**Klutz** – a clumsy person; someone who trips or falls a lot.

*Jim is a big klutz, especially the way he dropped his coins all over the subway station*.

**Knock on wood** – this expression means the person wants to continue having good luck in a certain area. Knocking on wood is imagined to ward off bad luck. It may have come from the old custom of touching a crucifix for protection.

*I've always been in pretty good health, knock on wood.*

**Knock oneself out** – make a big effort; go to great trouble.

*If you want to arrange a baby shower for Gina, knock yourself out.*

**[A] knock-out** – a real beauty; a stunner.

*Lisa was a knock-out, and all the boys had a crush on her.*

**Know the ropes/score** – to understand the ways things operate.

*It takes years of working behind the scenes in theater to really know the ropes.*

**Know-how –** expertise; knowledge.

*Are you sure that Arthur has the know-how to operate the steamroller by himself yet?*

**Know-it-all –** someone who thinks he is smarter than everyone else.

*The new guy in Accounting seems like a know-it-all – he didn't even want to listen when I tried to explain how we salespeople like to have our commissions calculated.*

**[A] knuckle sandwich** – a punch.

*I suggested that Regis give that bully a knuckle sandwich if he continued to shove him down and take his lunch money.*

**Kosher** – accepted; authentic.

*It's not kosher to publish family secrets in a book.*

# L

**Laid off** – released from a job due to lack of work or hard times.

*It took Xavier five months to find a job after he was laid off by the city.*

**Land on one's feet** – to solve a problem; to have no repercussions after a fall.

*I wouldn't worry about Mimi, as she always lands on her feet.*

**Larger than life** – exuberant; showy; extravagant.

*My aunt's friends were larger than life and always up to something fun and crazy.*

**Laugh it off** – to dismiss; to make light of a situation.

*He was warned that the car was in bad shape, but he just laughed it off and got in to drive.*

**Laugh up one's sleeve** – to secretly take delight at another's misfortune.

*Margaret didn't realize that everyone was laughing up their sleeves at her outlandish outfit.*

**To] lead someone around by the nose** - to dominate or have control over another person.

*That domineering woman led her husband around by the nose and made him give up all his old friends.*

**Learn the ropes** – apprentice; learn the way things are done; find out how the game is played.

*With Frank as your mentor, you'll really learn the ropes in this profession.*

**Leave no stone unturned** – to try every possible way to achieve something; same as "explore every avenue".

*When I worked in sales, I never left any stone unturned in pursuit of customers.*

**Leave well enough alone** – to be satisfied at good enough.

*Her hair looked just fine how it was, but she had the compulsion to cut it more because she could never leave well enough alone.*

**Left holding the bag** – get caught in an embarrassing, awkward situation; be the victim of a hoax.

*Jimmy got left holding the bag when his so-called friends took off right before the police arrived.*

**Left in the lurch** – happens when a person is left or outdistanced by others. A game called Lurch (like Backgammon) was popular in the 16th century and it was very competitive, often leaving the losers far behind money-wise.

*I hope my prom date doesn't cancel at the last minute because I would hate to get left in the lurch.*

**Let bygones be bygones** – forgive and forget.

*Joan and Cathy decided to let bygones be bygones and resume their friendship.*

**Let one down** – disappoint.

*June really let her mother down when she was arrested.*

**[To] let sleeping dogs lie** - let things be, allow a matter to rest. This comes from Chaucer, who wrote in Troylus and Criseyde in 1374, "It is nought good a slepying hound to wake."

*Maybe I should have said something about the past overtime abuses, but I thought it was better to let sleeping dogs lie.*

**Let the cat out of the bag** – to tell a secret.

*Brianne had no idea that her niece was getting married, but then her sister let the cat out of the bag.*

**Level with someone** – be brutally honest with someone.

*Bob decided to level with Miriam and tell her that her work needed some improvement.*

**Lie like a rug** – to lie and speak mistruths repeatedly.

*Nola lied like a rug about her involvement in the crime.*

**Lift oneself up by the bootstraps** – to raise oneself up by one's own efforts, mostly unaided.

*Tony was from a working class family, but he lifted himself up by the bootstraps and eventually became a professor.*

**Light a fire under someone** – to motivate and inspire someone to act.

*Mr. Jackson had to light a fire under the students to get them to come to class.*

**Lighten up** – tell someone not to be so dour; a request to take life less seriously.

*Gee, I wish you would lighten up a little – you're so hard on yourself!*

**Live and let live** – mind one's own business and live one's own life, not worrying about others.

*Erin has a wonderful live and let live attitude that I admire.*

**Living it up** – having a great time, a party.

*The kids were really living it up at the beach party.*

**Long story short** – an expression to sum up a story.

*Long story short, it ended up costing much more money than I expected.*

**Lookie-loo** – a curious onlooker; a person who inspects an item with no intention of buying it.

*Many lookie-loos came to our auction, but only a few people put in bids.*

**[The] loony bin** – a sanatorium; a mental hospital.

*They had to send Courtney to the loony bin when she stopped taking her medication.*

**Loose cannon** – an impetuous, talkative person.

*There's no telling what Leah the loose cannon will do.*

**[At] loose ends** – unsettled; restless; not knowing what to do with oneself.

*In the year after college, Georgia seemed to be at loose ends and couldn't decide which career was right for her.*

**Lose one's shirt** – lose everything, specifically money.

*Jim lost his shirt when the stock market crashed.*

**Lose touch with** – to fall out of contact with another.

*The childhood friends lost contact when they went off to different high schools.*

**Love is blind** – love is not the sole purvey of the beautiful.

*I don't get what she sees in Craig – love is blind, I guess!*

**Low man on the totem pole** – one ranked very low. In Native American culture, the totem pole had symbols showing each tribe members' history. The "low man" on the pole was usually the youngest and least experienced.

*Travis was low man on the totem pole at work, as he held the most menial job there.*

**[A] lump (sometimes "bump") on a log** – a person who just exists, not doing much of anything; signifies lazy.

*Don't just sit there like a bump on a log – get off the couch and help me lift it up so I can finally clean under it.*

# M

**M.Y.O.B.** – Mind your own business.

*When I opened my son's drawer to see if there was any dirty laundry in there, I saw a big sign that read, "M.Y.O.B."*

**[As] mad as a hornet/wet hen** – extremely angry.

*Troy was mad as a hornet when the men came to repossess his car because he HAD made the payments to the dealership.*

**Make a bee-line for** – to go straight to.

*A soon as we were admitted into the buffet, I made a bee-line for the delicious chicken wings.*

**Make a bundle/killing** – to win big; to get a lot of money quickly.

*Brad made a bundle in the stock market in a very short amount of time.*

**Make a mountain out of a molehill** - making a big deal out of a small matter. It was first written in Foxe's Book of Martyrs (in 1570): "To much amplifying things y' be but small making mountains of Molehils."

*Jerri was quite a drama queen and frequently made a mountain out of a molehill.*

**Make do with** – to settle or be content with.

*We don't have cream for the coffee, so you'll have to make do with powdered milk.*

**Make ends meet** – make enough money to pay all expenses.

*Kevin got a raise, but he still had trouble making ends meet.*

**Make fun of** – ridicule; laugh at.

*Everyone made fun of Maggie's old-fashioned shoes.*

**Make hay while the sun shines** – try to get as much done while you can or while there's opportunity.

*The Tai Chi instructor will only be here for another hour, so we'd better make hay while the sun shines.*

**[Can't] make heads or tails of** – try to figure out; find the meaning of. This expression is usually made in negative terms.

*Zara looked at the map every which way but could still not make heads or tails of the routes.*

**Make no bones about it** – speak directly; be forthright.

*My father made no bones about it when he warned that I would be grounded for a month if I failed any courses.*

**Make up one's mind** – decide.

*Ella had trouble making up her mind which movie to see.*

**Make waves** – cause trouble.

*Alvin loved making waves at the library or any other quiet place.*

**Meet each other halfway** – for two parties to compromise.

*Brandon and Kelly agreed to meet each other halfway when it came to food shopping and cooking the food.*

**Midas Touch –** the ability to make money easily.

*Mr. Buffett really has the Midas Touch with his stock portfolio doubling in 6 months!*

**Might makes right** – sometimes, the strongest person bulldozes their way through.

*I wasn't sure if Cole was correct, but in his case, might makes right so I agreed with him.*

**Miss out on** – lose an opportunity or chance due to slowness of response.

*Shannon missed the boat when she forgot to check her phone messages – there was a last-minute dinner invitation.*

**Muddy the waters** – make confusing; stir up trouble.

*Mario didn't want to muddy the waters by telling his mad wife that besides crashing the car, he also got a ticket..*

**Mum's the word** – be quiet; please keep a secret.

*I'll tell you some gossip, but mum's the word, O.K.?*

# N

**Naked as a jaybird** – without clothes on; bare.

*The toddler waddled into the kitchen naked as a jaybird.*

**[The] name of the game –** the essence; the important thing.

*The name of the game in public speaking is to always smile, relax and appear confident.*

**Neck and neck** – a very close race. This expression comes from horse racing.

*The two top students spent their senior year neck and neck in competition to be valedictorian.*

**Necessity is the mother of invention –** a solution is often borne out of need.

*When the mechanic got stuck on the road and needed a funnel, he used a styrofoam cup, as necessity is the mother of invention.*

**Neither here nor there** – not relevant or important; doesn't matter.

*It's neither here nor there whether I like my Greenland; I have to be there for my marine biology work.*

**Nest egg** – money put aside; savings.

*Little by little, Matt is building a nest egg for the future.*

**[In the] nick of time** – just in time; almost too late.

*The paramedics arrived in the nick of time to save Anton from a heart attack.*

**Nickel and dime one to death** – to charge, little by little, until one has no money left; to drain with many little charges.

*My bank doesn't have a monthly charge, but it does nickel and dime me to death with many little charges.*

**Night and day** – completely different; polar opposites.

*The sisters were about as different as night and day.*

**Nightcap** – one last drink before leaving or going to bed.

*Would you like to join me for a nightcap before turning in for the night?*

**Nip and tuck** – 2 meanings: 1 -to be close in a race; 2-to have plastic surgery.

*1. I wasn't sure which of you was going to win because it was really nip and tuck there for a while.*

*2. Gertrude stated to notice how wrinkled her neck was getting, so she decided to have a little nip and tuck done.*

**Nip it in the bud** – stop something negative right away; put an end to bad behavior as soon as it starts.

*My mother saw that I was sucking my thumb and wanted to nip it in the bud, so she made me wear gloves until I stopped.*

**No bed of roses** – an unpleasant, uncomfortable position or situation.

*Living in the same house with a neat freak is no bed of roses, believe me.*

**No dice!** – no way; the answer is no!

*When John asked me to help him steal, I said, "No way!"*

**No news is good news** – this means that when there is no news, there is nothing to worry about.

*James' parents haven't heard from him in a while, but they figure that no news is good news.*

**No pain, no gain** – nothing good can be accomplished with hard work and effort.

*The workout was intense, so Gloria just kept telling herself, "No pain, no gain" to keep going.*

**No skin off one's back/nose** – no big deal, not bothersome.

*Bob said that it was no skin off his nose if they hated him.*

**Nobody's fool** – a clever, aware person

*Katie is nobody's fool, and she knows how to play the game.*

**Nose to the grindstone** – to work diligently toward achievement; no goofing around.

*From now until May, the students really need to put their noses to the grindstone.*

**Nothing to sneeze at** – a big deal; something to be taken seriously.

*The prize money, $10,000, is nothing to sneeze at.*

**Nothing ventured, nothing gained** – Without taking a chance, one doesn't get ahead.

*I might as well apply, I figured, because nothing ventured, nothing gained,*

**Nuts about** – to be crazy about; love a lot.

*Owen was nuts about the beach, and he went at every chance possible.*

**Nutty as a fruitcake** – bizarre; crazy.

*That muttering woman is as nutty as a fruitcake.*

# O

**Odds and ends** – miscellaneous things.

*The bottom drawer was filled with odds and ends.*

**Off one's rocker** – crazy; having delusional thoughts.

*She's off her rocker if she thinks I am going to take accordion lessons.*

**Off the cuff / top of one's head** – extemporaneously; spontaneously; said or done on the spur of the moment.

*The rock musician made an off the cuff remark about wanting to perform at the White House.*

**Off the record** – said secretly or privately; not official.

*He told the reporter some political gossip off the record.*

**[As] old as the hills** – ancient; very old.

*That dress is as old as the hills, but it's back in fashion now.*

**Old habits die hard** – It's very difficult to change one's engrained behavior.

*Amber still locked her car, even though she now had a garage, because old habits die hard.*

**[An] old hand** – an experienced person; a veteran; a seasoned worker.

*Felix was a tailor for 30 years and is an old hand at installing zippers.*

**Old school** – old-fashioned; traditional.

*My parents are old school when it comes to dating, wanting me to wait until I'm 20!.*

**Old stamping (or "stomping") ground** – a place where one was raised or spent a large amount of time in the past; a familiar haunt. This comes from where horses or other animals gathered in early America. It was first used in H. R. Howard's 1836 book, The History of Virgil A. Stewart: "I made my way from Milledgeville to Williamson County, the old stamping-ground."

*When I got back to my hometown, I visited the diner, my old stamping ground.*

**On easy street** – being very lucky; having a blessed life.

*Now that Kristin won the lottery, she lives on easy street.*

**On guard** – watchful of others; wary.

*Ken knew that the bill collectors were after him, so he was on guard every time the telephone would ring.*

**On the ball** – to be astute about a matter; effective.

*I have to get on the ball and start organizing my money better.*

**On the fly** – to be unprepared and make it up while proceeding forward; to ad-lib; be spontaneous.

*The actor was busy when his film came out, so he gave the reporters interviews on the fly.*

**On the fritz** – broken; out of order.

*Oh no, the refrigerator is on the fritz again.*

**On the lam** – to be on the lam is to have escaped from custody and have the authorities looking for you.

*Kenny went on the lam after getting out on bail.*

**On the other hand** – conversely; however.

*Jenny spends too much money on clothes, but on the other hand, she does have to dress well for her job.*

**On the rocks** – 2 meanings: 1- to be in trouble, such as a relationship, and 2 - on ice, like a drink.

*1. The Daly's marriage seems to be on the rocks.*

*2. I'll have a vodka on the rocks.*

**On the wagon** – abstaining from something (usually referring to alcohol).

*Bill has been so much easier to be around now that he's back on the wagon.*

**On the warpath** – very mad; ready to vent anger.

*Watch out for Sally – she's on the warpath today.*

**On one's high horse** – acting as if in a high, mighty position; arrogant.

*Colby was really on his high horse after surviving in the competition until the end.*

**One's own worst enemy** – be the main source of one's own problems; said of someone who creates self difficulties.

*John is his own worst enemy when it comes to speeding, parking and cars in general.*

**Open book** – very honest; easy to understand.

*Elizabeth didn't have any secrets, and everyone said that she was like an open book.*

**Out of bounds/line** – inappropriate; not in good taste.

*It was out of bounds for Pierre to go into your closet and borrow your leather jacket without asking permission.*

**Out of one's league** – be overwhelmed and under-qualified.

*She realized that she was out of her league in her new job.*

**Out of the clear blue sky** – unexpectedly.

*Out of the clear blue sky, the company announced that it would be re-locating its offices to Tennessee soon.*

**Out of the frying pan and into the fire** – from a bad to a worse situation.

*I thought the New York fashion world was tough, but I jumped out of the pan and into the fire when I went to Milan.*

**Out of the question** – it will never happen; there's no question; absolutely not.

*My Dad said it was out of the question when I asked him for a raise in my allowance.*

**Out of the running** – not to be considered.

*Jay was out of the running as far as being considered as a boyfriend by Corrine.*

**Out on a limb** – taking a chance; in a risky position.

*I'll go out on a limb and support the unpopular measure.*

**Out the window** – tossed out; thrown away.

*When the car wouldn't work, our plans to travel to Boston went out the window.*

**Out to lunch** – 2 meanings: 1- really gone to eat a midday meal, 2 – daydreaming; inattentive.

*1. No one could reach Ted when he was out to lunch.*

*2. The reason I said Cameron was out to lunch is that he was looking at me but not focusing on anything I was saying.*

**Over one's dead body** – No, never, not going to happen.

*Over my dead body will the state seize our house!*

**Over the hill** – too old for an activity; past one's prime.

*Calvin felt like his father was getting to be over the hill and shouldn't be riding a motorcycle anymore.*

**Own up to** – admit guilt; take the blame for.

*Ryan owned up to the fact that he cheated on his taxes.*

# P

**Paint the town red** – have a great time; party hard.

*We are going o paint the town red when we go to New Orleans during Mardi Gras.*

**Pass the hat** – make a collection; ask for contributions.

*After the stump speech, the politician's aides passed the hat for campaign contributions..*

**Pay the piper** – to have to pay for something received; suffer the consequences of an action. This comes from medieval times, when street musicians would go around playing their flutes. Since this was very entertaining and provided a break for villagers, they would contribute money for the piper.

*Ned ordered drinks for everyone in the tavern, and at the end of the night, he had to pay the piper.*

**Peeping Tom** – a person (usually a man) who spies on another (usually a woman) through the window while she is dressing.

*Mia was convinced that there was a peeping tom in her yard.*

**[The] pen is mightier than the sword** – it is more important and powerful to change people's minds through writing rather than suppress them with physical force.

*He channeled his anger through his written words rather his fists, realizing that the pen is mightier than the sword.*

**Pick up on** – to understand what may or may not be said.

*Kathy picked up on my sad mood, even though I was trying to smile through the pain.*

**[In a] pickle** – in a bind, jam, difficult situation.

*Tracy was in a pickle when the bank called in the loans on her business which were overdue.*

**Plain as day/the noise on your face** – quite obvious; evident and simple.

*That the dog was underfed was as plain as day.*

**Play ball with someone** – cooperate; negotiate.

*Henry played ball with the FBI and gave them information.*

**[Will it] play in Peoria?** – an expression which asks if some product/act is ready for a mainstream audience?

*The movie was very controversial, and the distributors didn't know if it would play in Peoria.*

**Play phone tag** - call someone and leave a message, then when he/she calls you back, you're not there, etc. (this comes from the child's game of tag, whereby you touch people ("tag" them), then they try to touch you back.

*We played phone tag all morning long but finally got in touch at lunchtime.*

**Play devil's advocate** - take the opposite side of an argument so as to make sure one's opponent has valid reasons for pursuing a course of action.

*I thought it was a good idea for Jamal to join the army, but I played devil's advocate to find out if he had considered all the dangers of that choice.*

**Play "fast and loose" (usually paired with "the truth")** – bend the facts to fit one's needs; lie recklessly.

*I knew not to believe Trish right away, as she had a habit of playing fast and loose with the facts.*

**Play it by ear** – to go with the flow of a situation and decide at the last moment, according to how the situation goes.

*The young couple thought they might get married while on vacation but decided to play it by ear when they got there.*

**Pleased as punch** – very happy.

*Millie is pleased as punch to be a doting grandmother.*

**[As] poor as a church-mouse** – living without money, in poverty.

*I can't believe Greg is driving a brand new car when he is as poor as a church-mouse.*

**Possession is 9/10s of the law** – one who holds something, even if they don't own it, has the most power over it.

*The cook tried to take over the restaurant from the absentee owner reasoning that possession is 9/10s of the law.*

**Pot calling the kettle black** – hypocrite; one who accuses another of something that that one is doing.

*Mel calling Joy fat was like the pot calling the kettle black.*

**Practice makes perfect** – doing something many times makes one better at it.

*Every night, Melissa spends some time doing her pronunciation exercises hoping that practice makes perfect.*

**[The] proof of the pudding is in the eating of it** – the only way to assess something is by trying it.

*You have to try on the clothes to see if they fit before buying them, just like the proof of the pudding is in the eating of it.*

**[As] proud as a peacock** – strutting around, haughty.

*Ronald was as proud as a peacock for having done well in the tough real estate world of New York.*

**[Doesn't] pull any punches** – describes a person who is very honest and direct, saying exactly what he/she means.

*At least you know when you're in trouble with Joe because he doesn't pull any punches.*

**Pull an all-nighter** – to stay up all night, usually in preparation for a school exam.

*Jill procrastinated until a day before the test, so she decided to pull an all-nighter to study.*

**Pull one's weight** – to contribute fairly; to do one's share of work.

*Even when Rocco was on crutches, he still managed to pull his weight in the spring clean-up effort.*

**Pull oneself up by the bootstraps** – describes a self-made success, without help from anyone.

*Tony pulled himself up by the bootstraps and worked his way all through graduate school.*

**Pull out all the stops** – to try every way or manner to impress.

*Rob pulled out all the stops o plead his case before the jury.*

**Pull rank with someone** – remind another of your position of importance to dominate.

*Susanna pulled rank by reminding me that she had the power to hire and fire subordinates who were insubordinate.*

**Pull strings** – make something happen by contacting an important person with connections.

*Jan pulled strings with the theater manager and got us tickets to the show.*

**Pull together** – join together to get a hard job done.

*We all have to pull together during this difficult time.*

**Pull the wool over one's eyes** – fool someone; connive.

*Buddy thought he was pulling the wool over our eyes, but we were well aware of his activities.*

**Pull up stakes** – move from somewhere, as in putting away a tent by pulling up the pegs which tether it to the ground.

*The fraudulent insurance office pulled up stakes in the middle of the night, making away with its clients' money.*

**Pussycat** – 2 meanings: 1- a feline, 2 – a tender or harmless person who seems tough.

*Ed seemed tough with his ripped clothing and big beard, but he was really a pussycat underneath it all..*

**Put on airs** – act very important and snobbishly; behave in a self-important way.

*Deanna puts on airs when she joined the country club.*

**Put one on the spot** – to surprise (and thus embarrass) someone with probing questions.

*My boss put me on the spot at the meeting by asking why my reports were so sloppy and confusing.*

**Put one's foot down** – to finally say no; to not allow a situation to prevail.

*I told Marcus I would give him a ride, but I put my foot down when it came to him borrowing my car.*

**Put heads together** – to come up with a solution together; to consider ideas together.

*If we put our heads together, I'm sure we can figure out how to make the yardwork easier and more enjoyable.*

**Putting on airs/the dog** – being pretentious; acting important and grand.

*The Carsons really put on the dog to impress their new friends.*

# Q

**[On the] Q.T.** – quiet; secretive.

*We had to plan the party on the q.t. since we wanted it to be a surprise.*

**Quack** – a dumb or dishonest doctor.

*I began thinking that Dr. Devereaux was a quack when he told me that the best way to get rid of a sore throat was to rub olive oil all over the neck and sing show tunes.*

**Queer as a 3-dollar bill** – phony; suspect.

*Well, that cop in the pink uniform certainly seemed as queer as a 3-dollar bill.*

**Quick as a wink** – instantly; immediately.

*When the family finished dinner, the dog jumped up onto the table and ate the scraps quick as a wink.*

**Quick fix** – a short-term solution.

*Putting a tarp over the roof is only a quick fix to the repair problem.*

**Quid pro quo** – something for something; an even exchange.

*It was a case of quid pro quo in which I provided the district attorney with information in return for leniency.*

**[As] quiet as a mouse** – silent.

*She had to be as quiet as a mouse when the baby was sleeping.*

**Quit cold turkey** – to stop doing something abruptly; to cease an activity, usually a vice.

*Benjamin smoked for about twenty years and then quit cold turkey when he started coughing a lot.*

**Quite a few/number** – a lot; many; more than a couple.

*We had no idea if any customers would come to our garage sale that rainy day, but quite a few stopped by.*

# R

**Rack one's brain** – try hard to recall.

*I was racking my brains to remember where I put the washing machine warranty.*

**Rain cats and dogs** – rain heavily. The first literary reference to this idiom appears in Dean Jonathan Swift's Polite Conversation of 1783: " . . . I know Sir John will go, though he was sure it would rain cats and dogs. . . ."

*There was no question that the picnic would be canceled, as it was raining cats and dogs.*

**Raise cain** – make a disturbance; cause trouble.

*Whenever the cousins would get together, they would drink a lot and raise cain.*

**Raise eyebrows** – cause people to be shocked or surprised.

*Wearing that mini-skirt to the funeral is really going to raise a lot of eyebrows.*

**Raise one's hackles** – describes someone who has gotten angry. This comes from a time when the tool, a hackle, was used in making flax (medieval days). Back then, farmers noticed that chickens had a way of raising the feathers on their neck when they were disturbed, looking like the feathers were ruffled by a hackle.

*Just hearing that shrill woman's voice raises my hackles.*

**Rake over the coals –** to yell at severely; reprimand strongly.

*Jim was raked over the coals by his boss for sleeping on the job, which is not a good thing for a bus-driver to do.*

**Rally the troops** – to buoy the spirits of any group. This comes from the military, when the superior commands and motivates the troops to continue on.

*Everyone's energy was low because we had lost the past five games in a row, but the coach brought us out for pizza and tried to rally the troops for the next game.*

**[Take the] rap on** – to take responsibility for; to receive punishment for.

*Buffy took the rap for breaking the vase, even though it was Jody who did it.*

**Rat race –** a hard job; a situation in which there is much competition.

*Carolina wanted to quit modeling because she thought of it more and more like a rat race.*

**Razzle-dazzle** – glitz and glimmer; excitement.

*I'm not fooled by the razzle-dazzle of that soda company's ads, choosing instead to buy products based on taste and cost.*

**Read between the lines** – to figure out the meaning by interpreting the words, rather than taking them at face value.

*When the newspaper said that holiday sales were halting but hopeful for the next year, I read between the lines that the economy is still in a recession.*

**[The] real McCoy** – the true thing, usually referring to a thing of quality.

*Do you think that her diamond is the real McCoy or cubic zirconium?*

**[In the] red** – owing money; being in debt.

*The store was still operating in the red after two years.*

**Red herring** - an unusual example given to be considered or prove the norm.

*To say that women like to go fishing, just because Bea enjoys it and she's a woman, is to cite a red herring.*

**[No] rhyme or reason** – to not make sense; baffling; for no good reason.

*There didn't seem to be any rhyme or reason to how he chose the final contestants, but later we found out it was based on their height.*

**Rich as Rockefeller** – very rich. Possibly first used in the 1930 Cole porter song, Sunny Side of the Street. Jay Rockefeller, an oil baron, was one of the richest men in America in the 20th century.

*Though you wouldn't know it from his appearance, Bill Biedens was as rich as Rockefeller and twice as nice.*

**Right as rain** – perfectly correct; exemplary.

*The period costumes designed by Edith Head were as right as rain.*

**Right up one's alley** – in his/her field of expertise; a subject with which one is very familiar; an undertaking which is well-suited to one's talents.

*My uncle Sal, who is a carpenter, got a job that was right up his alley: renovating the headquarters of the woodworkers' union.*

**Right-hand man/woman** – the most helpful assistant.

*Jessica is an executive secretary and the right hand woman to the president of the company.*

**Rinky dink** – small and insignificant.

*I'm not willing to settle for some rinky dink job when I could qualify for a better position.*

**[The] road to hell is paved with good intentions** – good intentions are often only wishes and don't come through.

*June meant to save some money for college, but she frittered it away on a vacation and jewelry, proving that the road to hell is paved with good intentions.*

**Robbing the cradle** – to date/marry a much younger person.

*Heather, though only 20 years old, was accused of robbing the cradle when she went out with the teenaged Mickey.*

**Rock one's world** – to have a wonderful effect on; to dazzle.

*Franny fell in love with Zell over summer vacation and said he rocked her world.*

**Rock the boat** – to disturb or upset the way things are normally done.

*I was lucky to get onto the game show, and I don't want to do anything to rock the boat.*

**Rome wasn't built in a day** – important things take time to happen and can't be rushed.

*"All right, fellows, it's quitting time," announced the foreperson. "Let's not rush things – remember, Rome wasn't built in a day and neither will this stadium we're working on."*

**Rub elbows/shoulders with** – hang around and be friendly with (having the feeling of knowing important people).

*Alana is a talk show host and, as such, rubs elbows with the rich and famous who appear on her show.*

**Rub the wrong way** – irritate or bother another.

*That new guy on the crew just rubs me the wrong way with all his complaints and whining.*

**Rub salt in the wound** – to aggravate an already-painful situation; to add insult to injury.

*The dilemma was that the manager needed to fire Lauren, but she was already feeling bad about her car accident, so he didn't want to rub salt in her wound.*

**Rug rat** – a crawling child; a toddler.

*Tanya has only been married for three years, but already she has a couple of rug rats.*

**Rule the roost** – be in command/control; be the boss.

*My grandmother rules the roost in our family.*

**Run amok (amuck)** – become chaotic; operate in a confused, manic manner. This comes from an Italian account of strange doings in Malaysia in 1519 in which the Italians described the crazy actions and people as "Amuco".

*After a short vacation, the head housekeeper returned to find that the hotel cleaning operation had run amok.*

**Run around in circles** – go in many directions at once, accomplishing very little; seem busy, without doing much.

*Bob may look busy but is often just running around in circles.*

**Run around like a chicken with its head cut off** – to run around with no plan; crazy; manic.

*Please slow down and think about the next step – don't run around like a chicken with its head cut off.*

**[The] run-around** – sent in different directions as a way of getting rid or distracting a person.

*I got the run-around from bureaucrats the whole time.*

# S

**[In the] same boat** – to be in a similar situation

*Now that Gary is unemployed, he's in the same boat as me.*

**Save (or lose) face** – to avoid being humbled; to keep one's dignity.

*Larry saved face when the distributor took full responsibility for the incomplete order.*

**[To have the] scales fall from one's eyes** – to finally see the truth; to know the real truth.

*I had so much trust in the government, but with this latest scandal, the scales fell from my eyes and I saw that we have a good system ruled by imperfect people.*

**Scare the (living) daylights out of** – to frighten to the core.

*When Katherine saw the diesel truck come barreling down the highway going the wrong way, it scared the living daylights out of her.*

**Scratch the surface** – to only find out the beginning of a problem/story; not a detailed look at.

*The bribery reported by the paper is just the beginning of the scandal; that doesn't even begin to scratch the surface.*

**Screw it up** – ruin an opportunity; fail.

*Ellen worked so hard through cooking school, and so when she finally got a job as a chef, she didn't want to do anything to screw it up.*

**Scot-free** – to get out of a difficult situation with no harm or repercussions.

*Oh it makes me so mad how these gangsters always get off scot-free because juries are afraid to convict them.*

**[On] second thought** – to change one's mind after some thought.

*I said I didn't want to go to the mountains, but on second thought, it does sound nice and cool up there.*

**See eye to eye** – to be in agreement.

*We don't agree on much, but we do see eye to eye when it comes to child rearing.*

**[Can't] see the forest for the trees** – to be unable to see the big picture; to only see the immediate details.

*Leslie was so worried about chapter 20 of 45 chapters in the book she was writing until her manager chastised her for not seeing the forest for the trees.*

**See the handwriting on the wall** – to be able to foresee a negative event coming; a forewarning of danger.

*When she read the company memo about company cutbacks, Lyndsey saw the handwriting on the wall and knew her job would be among the first to be eliminated.*

**See the light** – to realize something; to understand the truth.

*Darlene finally saw the light on why the folk singer's music meant so much to her friends.*

**[To be in] seventh heaven** – to be completely happy.

*After spending so much time on her project, Hannah was in seventh heaven when she won the science fair.*

**[As] sharp as a razor/tack** – quick-witted; smart.

*Carl was such a great comedian because he was sharp as a razor at seeing the humor in a situation.*

**Shoot straight from the hip** – someone who says the first thing which pops into his/her head; one with no internal censure button.

*William would often shoot straight from the hip, which got him into trouble from time to time.*

**[A] shot in the arm** – a remedy or cure. This derives from the act of a doctor giving a shot of medicine in the arm.

*Visiting with her grandkids in the hospital was a shot in the arm for Helen, and she soon recovered from the hip surgery.*

**Show off** – brag; display one's talents.

*The gymnasts showed off their stunts to their parents.*

**[As] sick as a dog** – ill; vomiting.

*Kaden couldn't possibly go to work today since he was as sick as a dog.*

**Six of one, half a dozen of the other** – the same thing; not much difference.

*Chocolate or strawberry? It's six of one, half a dozen of the other to me, as long as it's ice cream.*

**Skate on thin ice** – risk getting in trouble; be in a dangerous situation, close to danger.

*Jude was skating on thin ice to ride around in that car with bad brakes.*

**Skeleton in the closet** - A secret, usually a family secret.

*Nobody's life is perfect; everyone has some skeleton in their closet.*

**[As] slippery as an eel** – devious; slick; manipulative.

*Don't trust Ned – he's as slick as an eel.*

**[As] slow as molasses** – slow-moving.

*You have to wait forever at that restaurant, since the waiters are as slow as molasses.*

**[As] sly as a fox** – very deceptive, manipulative and clever.

*You have to watch Ian at all times, because he's as sly as a fox and will try to pull a fast one if you're not careful.*

**Smart alec** – a know-it-all; an impudent person; a joker.

*Anya was a smart alec, and the teachers sometimes wished they could tape her mouth shut for the day.*

**[To] smell a rat** – to suspect someone of wrong-doing.

*Since her outgoing letters were not reaching their destinations, Judy smelled a rat in the mailroom.*

**Smoke and mirrors** – a mirage; a ruse to deceive.

*The young pop star couldn't sing very well at all, but with the electronic smoke and mirrors available to the music editors nowadays, it was possible to fool the public.*

**[As] smooth/soft as a baby's bottom** – very soft and smooth.

*After shaving off his beard, Julio's face was as smooth as a baby's bottom.*

**Smooth sailing** – going very easily; having no problems.

*The event was planned very well and everything went smooth sailing, except at the end when the power went out.*

**[At a] snail's pace** – very slowly.

*The maid moved at a snail's pace, and it took her over an hour to clean the bathroom.*

**Snake in the grass** – a sneaky person; a traitor.

*I didn't realize what a snake in the grass Godfrey was until I found out that he was the one who tattled on me.*

**Snap out of it!** – Stop being so worried! A command to wake up and face the truth.

*The patient was so worried over getting a little mole removed that the dermatologist finally had to tell her to snap out of it!*

**[As] snug as a bug in a rug** – cozy, secure, comfortable.

*After a long day delivering mail in the rain, Fred settled into bed and felt as snug as a bug in a rug finally.*

**Soft as a marshmallow** – weak, with wavering morals.

*Niles needs to toughen up to join the wrestling team because as of now, he is as soft as a marshmallow.*

**Sour grapes** – bitterness; complaints arising from jealousy.

*It was hard to tell if Jerri had a legitimate complaint or if it was just a case of sour grapes.*

**Sowing his wild oats** – having fun; being wild.

*Marshall is still sowing his wild oats and is too young to settle down just yet.*

**Spinning a yarn** – telling a story; fibbing.

*The little kid was spinning a yarn about seeing a dinosaur.*

**Spitting image of** – a look-alike; a "dead ringer" of.

*Your son is the spitting image of you at that age!*

**Split hairs** – to argue or squabble over minor points.

*The lawyers wanted to settle the divorce fairly and not split hairs over every little thing.*

**Splitsville –** breaking up; divorce.

*Pam and John are headed toward splitsville, because they have grown apart.*

**Spur of the moment** – last-minute decision; impulsive.

*We decided to take the day off and go to the beach at the spur of the moment.*

**[The] squeaking wheel gets the oil** – the loudest complainer often gets more attention than the patient one.

*Often it's good to speak up, as the squeaky wheel gets the oil.*

**[Take a] stab at** – to try; to attempt.

*Even though I have two left feet, I took a stab at learning to dance the tango.*

**[At this] stage of the game** – at a certain point in the process; currently; at a time in one's life.

*Sanjay didn't know if he wanted to switch careers at this stage of the game.*

**[To] start from scratch** – to begin at the very beginning, often with no help.

*After their office was gutted due to a fire, the Andersons had to re-build their business, starting from scratch.*

**State of the art** – the most modern technology; the latest, most updated equipment

*This stereo has state of the art speakers.*

**[It's a] steal** – to be very inexpensive; cheap.

*At $2.00 per bottle, that Chanel perfume is a steal!*

**Steal one's thunder** – to usurp or appropriate another's glory. This comes from the relatively-unknown dramatist, John Dennis, who had invented a thunder noise-making machine for a play. After his play had shut down, he noticed that the theater continued to use his machine.

*Joey was jealous that his sister was getting so much praise from everyone, but he was warned not to steal her thunder.*

**Steer clear of** – avoid; don't have contact with.

*It's a good idea to steer clear of Lee when he is in one of his bad moods.*

**Stick to one's guns** – to persevere despite many hurdles; to insist on something.

*Everyone thought Wyatt was being a perfectionist to require all workers to wear hard hats, but they are glad he stuck to his guns when a beam fell and they could have been killed were it not for the protective hats.*

**Stay the course** - maintain one's position; continue on as planned.

*Even though half the crew abandoned the ship, the seamen decided to stay the course.*

**Sticker-shock** – to be surprised at how expensive an item is.

*Wow, I got sticker-shock the last time I filled my car with gas – it's now $2.00 per gallon!*

**Stiff upper lip** – a show of bravery. This dates back to 1833, when John Neal wrote in Down Easters: ". . . Keep a stiff upper lip; no bones broke – don't I know?"

*Despite being hurt by the crowd's jeers, Martha kept a stiff upper lip and walked by them with her head held high.*

**Still in the game** – remaining viable, a contender.

*Just because Will is a senior citizen, don't count him out yet – he's still in the game as far as the lumber business goes.*

**Stop dead in one's tracks** – come to a complete stop; have an abrupt halting of activity.

*That woman looked so much like my late Aunt Marge, I stopped dead in my tracks when I first saw her.*

**[With a] straight face** – honestly; earnestly.

*Can you believe that Tess said that with a straight face?*

**Strapped for cash** – to have little or no money.

*Helene wanted to get a higher-paying job since she's so tired of always being strapped for cash.*

**[The] straw that broke the camel's back** – the final action that ruined everything; enough!

*Mrs. McCarthy planned to quit watching that soap opera, and when the trite "twins separated at birth" plot was shown, that was the straw that broke the camel's back.*

**Strike while the iron's hot** – take advantage of a good situation while it lasts; to act on or seize the most fitting moment to go ahead with an action.

*Jane's parents were proud of her for making the honor roll and said that merited a gift, so she decided to strike while the iron was hot and ask for a raise in her allowance.*

**Stringing one along** – to make another person wait for one's answer or action; lead one on.

*Marisa kept stringing along Tad after he asked her to go to the dance, because she thought she might get a better offer and didn't want to be tied up.*

**[As] stubborn as a mule** – inflexible; describing one whose mind is already made up; unable to be persuaded.

*Liz was stubborn as a mule about the issue of the death penalty – she was dead set against it.*

**Stumbling block** – an obstacle. The expression came from William Tyndale's 1534 translation of the Bible into English. In Romans 14:13, a "skandalon" was put in someone's path to cause him to fall from grace.

*The high monthly membership fee is a stumbling block for many people who want to join the local health club.*

**Surf 'n turf** – seafood and steak in one meal.

*Would you prefer surf 'n turf or just steak by itself for dinner?*

**Swan song** – the last time doing something; a goodbye.

*Eyes Wide Shut was Stanley Kubrick's swan song film.*

**Sweeten the deal** – to add to the benefits, especially when trying convince someone to buy something.

*The car salesman offered a free paint job to sweeten the deal.*

# T

**Take a dim view of** – to disapprove of; to be negative about.

*The school takes a dim view on cheating.*

**Take a powder** - to leave (as in flee) when one is needed; to disappoint by disappearing.

*My so-called friends took a powder when I got sick and needed rides to therapy.*

**Take a shot at** – to attempt; to try.

*Asked if she could guess the fat man's weight, Esther said she would take a shot at it.*

**Taken down a peg/notch** – humbled; have one's ego deflated.

*Cal was taken down a peg when his son beat him at chess.*

**Take into account** – to consider while judging something.

*I hope they take into account that I only had an hour to prepare.*

**Take it easy!** – a warning to calm down; told to go slowly.

*Tim should take it easy with the candy or else he'll get fat..*

**Take it lying down** – suffer silently; accept without challenge.

*When Linda learned of her father's stroke, she seemed to take it lying down.*

**Take shape** – start to come together; come into fruition.

*The plans for building our house are really starting to take shape.*

**Take one to the cleaners** – to "clean some one out"; to steal everything from someone.

*Shari got a lawyer to take her ex-husband to the cleaners.*

**Take the bull by the horns** – take charge of a situation; be in command; get a situation under control.

*He was asked to take the bull by the horns and straighten out the inventory and the mess in the warehouse.*

**Take under one's wing** - to mentor or show the way to an underling or newcomer.

*Karen took Todd under her wing and taught him everything she knew about the music industry.*

**Taken aback** – to be surprised to the point of mild shock. This is a term used in sailing. When the sails are carried by the wind back against the mast, the ship is "taken aback" and stopped.

*The teacher was taken aback by the boldness of the students this year.*

**Talk a blue streak** – talking a lot, and usually in a fast and furious way.

*Leah was talking a blue streak last night and has a hoarse voice today.*

**Talking out both sides of one's mouth** – to be contradictory; say opposite things.

*At first, the contractor said he could install a hot tub on the deck, but then he said that there wasn't enough room – he's talking out both sides of his mouth.*

**Tan one's hide** – beat someone up; give strong punishment.

*My father's going to tan my hide when he finds out I used his credit card to buy alcohol for the party.*

**Tempest in a teapot** – much ado about nothing.

*The dog tracked in mud on his paws, and Dana made a tempest in a teapot over the incident.*

**There but for the grace of God go I** – a reminder to oneself when seeing someone less fortunate that it could happen to anyone without God's providence.

*Oliver looked at the young soldier who lost a leg in the war and thought, "There but for the grace of God go I."*

**There's more than one way to skin a cat** – there are usually many ways to accomplish a goal.

*When the train was filled to capacity, George decided to take the bus, as there's more than one way to skin a cat.*

**[As] thick as thieves** – very friendly; closely allied.

*The girls were as thick as thieves and shared many secrets.*

**The third degree** – 2 meanings: 1- intense scrutiny; heavy questioning, 2 - a test of final demonstration/proficiency. In the Masonry, there are 3 degrees of proficiency to be measured for becoming a Master Mason. The third and final stage is usually a rigorous test of ability.

*1. His boss gave him the third degree about where he went during lunchtime.*

*2. The army put Jeremy through the third degree to make sure he was qualified as a marksman.*

**[Not to] think twice about** – to decide right away for something; to make up one's mind immediately.

*Georgia didn't think twice about taking us in after the flood destroyed our home.*

**Thorn in one's side** – a constant irritant or bother.

*The teenager's loud music was a thorn in his mother's side.*

**Through the grapevine** – by way of gossip. This expression arose after the first telegraph was sent. Soon after, there were wires haphazardly strung everywhere, resembling a grapevine.

*Bettina heard through the grapevine that the Farrells were expecting another baby.*

**Through thick and thin** – sticking by a person (or a job) during the good and bad times.

*Antoine's faithful wife stuck by him through thick and thin.*

**Throw caution to the wind** – be daring; take risks.

*Jenna threw caution to the wind and jumped into the lake.*

**Throw in the towel** – give up (usually out of frustration); quit; surrender.

*Sam struggled to make his business succeed, but after several tough years, he decided to throw in the towel.*

**Throw the book at** – give the maximum penalty to; be harsh in dispensing punishment.

*The judge threw the book at the incorrigible thief since it was the third time he had been convicted.*

**Tickled pink** – delighted; charmed at something.

*Joan was tickled pink with her new grandson.*

**Tie the knot** – get married. In the olden days, a clergyman would tie the ends of the bride and groom's robes into a knot, to bind them together, signaling the permanence of the union.

*Gretchen and Charlie will tie the knot in Puerto Rico during the fall.*

**Till the cows come home** – continuously; for a long time.

*You can beg me until the cows come home, but I still won't go skydiving with that reckless group of daredevils.*

**Tilt at windmills** – do battle against an imaginary enemy. This comes from Don Quixote, the 1605 book by Cervantes, in which the main character imagined that the windmills he encountered were monstrous giants.

*Lynn made things difficult for herself, always tilting at windmills.*

**Time to kill** – a period of time when one has to wait; a period where one has to busy oneself while waiting.

*Felicia had some time to kill while the cake was baking, so she organized her recipe box.*

**[On the] tip of my tongue** – on the verge of being said, but the speaker can't remember it temporarily, like a name.

*Oh, I can't think of the name of that movie – it's on the tip of my tongue.*

**Toe the line/mark** – live up to standards; conform. This expression probably comes from England, where the parliamentary seating used to have a white line surrounding it; if a British politician crossed the line while speaking, then he/she would be reprimanded.

*Josie had been outspoken in the past, but really has to toe the line now that she is a teacher.*

**Tone it down!** – a request to quiet down, keep the noise level down.

*Tommy was asked to tone it down when he repeatedly revved his motorcycle outside the restaurant.*

**Toot/blow one's own horn** – brag; boast about one's achievements.

*It gets tiresome to listen to Willy tooting his own horn all the time.*

**[At the] top of one's lungs/voice** – very loudly; yelling.

*The baby was screaming at the top of his lungs after he got a shot from the doctor.*

**Touch and go** – a state of uncertainty, usually in illness.

*Jed finally recovered from tuberculosis, but it was touch and go for a while there.*

**Touch base with** – get in contact with someone; communicate.

*Kim called her friends from high school to touch base with them before the 10-year reunion.*

**Touchie-feelie** – very sensitive; concerned with emotions.

*The New Age retreat was filled with touchie-feelie types.*

**Try one's hand at something** - to attempt a new activity; to experiment.

*Viv tried her hand at golf at the encouragement of her husband..*

**Tuckered out** – tired from physical activity.

*The kids were all tuckered out from their day at the beach and slept in the car on the way home.*

**Turn one down** – to say no; to decide against.

*Dee applied for a job as a waiter, but Nero's Diner had to turn her down because she had no experience and the lunch crowds there can be very demanding.*

**Turn over a new leaf** - start anew or mend one's ways. It refers to a page in a book (a leaf), not a leaf from a tree.

*Justin was so sick of being overweight that he pledged to turn over a new leaf and start a diet Monday morning.*

**Turn the tables** – to reverse a situation.

*Annie turned the tables on her brother and began borrowing money from him for once.*

**Turnout** – attendance.

*There was a big turnout on opening night of the play.*

**Twist one's arm** – convince or talk someone into something.

*Her boss didn't have to twist Marina's arm to go on a conference in the Bahamas.*

**Twist around one's (little) finger** – to unduly influence another; to control or dominate one with charm.

*Emily knew she could twist her father around her little finger and get what she wanted anytime at all.*

**Two heads are better than one** – having two people trying to solve a problem works better than just one.

*Let's get together and discuss the docks problem, Jason, because two heads are better than one and we may come up with a solution.*

**Two's company; three's a crowd** – couples often want to be alone together, without a 3rd person hanging around.

*The way Judy told her mother-in-law that she and Buddy wanted to be alone was by making up a poem which said that even though they loved her company, there are times when two's company and three's a crowd.*

# U

**[As] ugly as sin** – awful-looking; hideous in appearance.

*That poor man with the warts is as ugly as sin.*

**[For the] umpteenth time** – to happen numerous times; to occur a lot.

*Theo asked his mother again if he could get a dog, and she laughed back, "I'm telling you for the umpteenth time, not until you are older!"*

**Under fire** – being attacked or criticized.

*The commissioner came under fire when it was revealed that he had accepted gifts from contractors.*

**Under one's thumb** - to be under the influence or control of.

*My father has got my mother under his thumb, and it's sad to see the way she jumps when he calls out for her.*

**Under one's breath** – mumbled; a murmured insult.

*After a co-worker complained about the disorder in the shipping room, Pam said under her breath, "He should clean it himself!"*

**Under the gun** – to be under pressure.

*Jim suffers from anxiety when he's under the gun at work.*

**Under the influence** – drunk or high on liquor or drugs.

*The guy in the car ahead of must be under the influence, because he is driving so erratically.*

**Under the table** – paid illegally, without taxes being withdrawn. Also used to suggest an underhanded or dishonest way of doing things.

*Miguel was paid under the able because he didn't have working papers.*

**Under the weather** – sick; ill.

*Sanaa won't be coming to the concert with us since she's feeling a little under the weather today.*

**Under wraps** – a temporary secret; hidden for a while.

*The name of the winner will be kept under wraps until the awards party next Friday night.*

**[To go] underground** – to be clandestine, secretive.

*The nightclub went underground when it started allowing minors in.*

**[You can't] un-ring a bell** – something which can't be undone.

*She regretted the words she had said because they couldn't be taken back, just like you wouldn't be able to un-ring a bell.*

**Until hell freezes over** – forever; an eternity; a lifetime.

*She says he will have to wait until hell freezes over before she would ever date him again.*

**Unwind –** relax; let go of stress.

*A cup of tea helps me unwind after a stressful day at work.*

**[On the] up and up** – honest, above-board.

*When questioned about the financing of the project, Carlo swore that everything was on the up and up.*

**Up for grabs** – open; available.

*There are still tickets up for grabs, if you want to attend.*

**Up in arms** – very angry and annoyed.

*The homeowners were up in arms over the property tax increases.*

**Up in smoke** – to evaporate; to disappear.

*Our plans to go camping last weekend went up in smoke when the weather report forecasted rain.*

**Up in the air** – unsettled; not known for the moment.

*My move to Hong Kong is still up in the air because I don't know when the visa will be approved.*

**Up one's alley** – to the interest of one; suited to one's taste.

*Diving is right up Si's alley since he is a champion swimmer.*

**Up the creek [without a paddle]** – in trouble (with no apparent solutions).

*If anything goes wrong with my car, I'm going to be up the creek since I need it to do my job.*

**Up to date** – accounted for; modern; in a finished state.

*Chuck is keeping all of our records up to date, so that we will pass the impending inspection.*

**Up to my ears/eyeball in** – inundated; flooded.

*The housing commissioner was up to his eyeballs in requests for building permits once the economy picked up.*

**Up to par/snuff** – meeting a usual standard; qualified.

*The book needed to be edited further, because the grammar wasn't up to par yet with the publisher's standard output.*

**Up-front** – honest; direct; straightforward.

*Maddie was very up-front about the fact that she wanted to take over the business one day.*

**Uphill battle –** a tough fight; a difficult endeavor.

*She faced an uphill battle getting her son to clean his room.*

**Upper crust** – high society.

*James aspired to be part of the upper crust of Atlanta society, so he started going to art openings and other functions which people in that set attend.*

**Upset the applecart** – to ruin a well-planned event; to stir up trouble.

*Juanita's admission of guilt in the courtroom upset the applecart for the defense.*

**Upstage** – to take the attention away from another.

*Marilyn had a bad habit of upstaging anyone who was getting the attention.*

# V

**Vamoose –** scram; exit quickly.

*When the cops came, the robbers tried to vamoose out the window.*

**Vanish into thin air –** to disappear.

*The snow was so thick that the skiiers seemed to vanish into thin air.*

**Vanity mirror** – a small face mirror.

*Felicia checked her vanity mirror to see if she had anything in her teeth.*

**Veep –** a short form of vice president.

*Gina was made veep of accounting once she completed her studies and became a CPA.*

**Veggie** – a cute way to say vegetables.

*"Did you eat all your veggies?" the mother asked her toddler.*

**Vent –** to air out feelings; to complain.

*The customer started venting to the manager about all the problems in the store.*

**Vibe** – short for vibration or feeling about something.

*I got a weird vibe from that quiet guy in the black hat.*

**Vicious circle –** an unpleasant event/situation which keeps repeating itself.

*The mystery writer was caught in a vicious circle of killing off his characters until finally no one was left to write about.*

**Vote with one's feet** – to show disapproval by leaving.

*The night courses were so boring that the class voted with its feet and went to a new school.*

# W

**Walking papers –** a notice of firing; a rejection; a break-up.

*The company gave him his walking papers after he took 5 weeks of vacation, which was three weeks longer than he was allowed.*

**War of the Roses** – fight; divorce. This comes from the 1989 movie of the same name.

*Oh boy, when Alyssa and Hammond get divorced, it's going to be the War of the Roses, they way they fight!*

**War paint –** cosmetics; woman's make-up.

*Darla wouldn't even go to the supermarket without applying war paint to her face.*

**[It will come out in the] wash** – something will be found out eventually; the full story must emerge after a while.

*Don't worry about them getting away with bribery, because it will all come out in the wash of the hearings.*

**[All] washed up** – to be discounted; spent and useless.

*That actor is all washed up after his past five movies flopped.*

**Waste your breath** – argue unsuccessfully.

*Don't even waste your breath defending Mike, because I already know what he's like.*

**Watch like hawk** – to keep close eye on someone.

*Cindy stood in front of the one-way mirror and watched the suspect like a hawk to see if she would try to put anything in her purse.*

**Watch one's step** – to be careful.

*If I were you, I'd watch my step around Susan because she can be very nasty at times.*

**Wear the pants** – be the boss; make the rules.

*Who wears the pants in your family – Mom or Dad?*

**Weasel one's way out of something** – try to get out of doing an unpleasant task; scheme to be excused from an unwanted obligation.

*Rachel tried to weasel her way out of doing the dishes by saying that she had a wrist ache (which no one believed).*

**[The] weight of the world** – a heavy burden or worry.

*With that frown, Jim always appears to have the weight of the world on his shoulders.*

**Well-heeled** – wealthy. It probably came from a person rich enough to have good heels on his shoes.

*"Our well-heeled patrons sit in corner booths," explained the Maitre D'.*

**Wet behind the ears** – young, naïve and inexperienced.

*The young reporter asked an inappropriate question, showing how wet behind the ears he was.*

**Wet blanket –** someone who ruins other people's fun.

*Sidney was a real wet blanket at the beach party when he told us we were at risk for skin cancer.*

**[To] wet one's whistle** – to take a drink (usually alcohol).

*Ben wanted to stop and wet his whistle at the next bar.*

**Wham, bam, thank you, Ma'am** – a very quick, neat transaction.

*I didn't realize it would be so simple – wham, bam, thank you, Ma'am – to open a checking account.*

**What a drag!** – How disappointing!

*What a drag it was to leave the beach early in order to get ready for my night shift job.*

**What goes around comes around** – a kharmic thought that the way one acts will be rewarded or punished by a future action.

*That Kiki got left at the altar is probably a case of what goes around comes around since she'd hurt many past boyfriends.*

**What makes him/her tick?** – trying to discover the thing that motivates or drives a person in life.

*I don't understand what makes Rob tick – he's so eccentric.*

**What's cooking/happening/shaking?** – an expression to ask what's going on, what's been happening lately.

*Upon seeing me, Gill smiled and yelled out,"Hey, what's cooking, honey?"*

**When in Rome, do as the Romans do** – when in another country, follow the customs of the local people.

*Sydney didn't want to wear a head scarf in the Middle East, but that was their custom and when in Rome, do as the Romans do, right?*

**When the cat's away, the mice will play** – when not being watched, some workers will slack off.

*Ted saw that very little work was done during his absence and realized the when the cat's away, the mice ill play.*

**Where there's smoke, there fire** – usually there is evidence of a problem before it happens.

*We should have known this would happen by all the complaints we had been getting; where there's smoke, there's fire.*

**Whipping boy** – one who is punished for the sins of others; to be treated unfairly due to others' mistakes.

*Logan was the whipping boy of this administration, which blamed him for getting us into war.*

**[As] white as a ghost** – very pale, as if one had seen a ghost.

*Elise looked as white as a ghost after hearing that the man who tried to kill her had escaped from jail.*

**White elephant** – a big, almost worthless piece; something which is thought valuable, but after purchase, turns out to be more trouble than it's worth..

*The stately mansion in the middle of nowhere is really a white elephant to own.*

**White-collar worker** - a professional, non-manual worker. This expression originated in World War I, when an important part of business attire became the white shirt.

*My grandfather aspired to be a white-collar worker.*

**Whodunit** – a mystery (usually a murder) story that begs the question, "Who [has]done it?"

*Before going on the long train trip, get a good old-fashioned whodunit mystery to read.*

**[The] whole enchilada/kit and caboodle/shebang** – the whole thing; completely; the entire amount.

*Rebecca wanted the successful husband, a couple of kids, the house with the white picket fence – the whole enchilada.*
.

**Wigging out –** acting crazy; losing self control.

*Cheryl was wigging out when she found out that her boyfriend was married!*

**Wild goose chase** – a hopeless, fruitless search.

*Jasmine sent her husband on a wild goose chase to get him out of the house in preparation for the surprise party.*

**Willy-nilly** – chaotically; in a crazy way; all over the place.

*When he got burned by the barbecue grill, Mike ran willy nilly all over the yard screaming in pain.*

**[Get the] wind knocked out of one** – to be unable to breathe momentarily; to become unconscious.

*Terry got the wind knocked out of her when the softball hit her in the head.*

**Windbag** – a talkative, boring person.

*Oh no, I really don't feel like listening to that windbag all afternoon.*

**Wishy-washy** – unable to commit or decide.

*George was so wishy-washy on the subject of marriage that Mary Beth got discouraged.*

**[At] wit's end** – so frustrated; about to give up.

*I was at my wit's end with my six-month old puppy who still wasn't house-trained.*

**[Take] with a grain of salt** – believe something, but be skeptical at the same time; accept with some doubts.

*I take with a grain of salt everything he says because much of the time, his predictions don't come true.*

**With one's tail between his/her legs** – this condition is one of embarrassment; to be in a state of humiliation. A dog puts his tail between his legs when in trouble.

*He came to me with his tail between his legs and confessed that he was the one who had taken the $10 from my drawer.*

**Within an inch of its life** – extremely close to dying.

*John drove that old car until it was within an inch of its life.*

**Without fail** – each time; without exception.

*Without fail, every time I sit down to relax, the dog bugs me to go for a walk.*

**Word of mouth** – hearing something, rather than reading it.

*What really helped that movie was not the advertisements but word of mouth.*

**Word on the street** – rumor; gossip; scuttlebutt.

*Word on the street is that Victor is smoking cigarettes again.*

**Workaholic** – describes someone who works all the time; someone obsessed with his/her job.

*Decker's father is a workaholic and even brings his laptop to the beach the few times he does go there with the family.*

**Work one's fingers to the bone** – to work very hard.

*Herb worked his fingers to the bone building a fishing boat as a present for his son.*

**Worked up** – excited.

*Don't get so worked up – it's just a TV show, not real life!*

**[The] works** – everything available.

*I want the works on my pizza – from anchovies to zucchini.*

**[No] worse for the wear** – not affected negatively by an event.

*Mimi didn't appear any worse for the wear after her tiring trip to the Himalayas.*

**[Not] worth a hill of beans** – to be of little value

*We had the coins evaluated, and it turns out that they aren't worth a hill of beans.*

**Worth its weight in gold** – very valuable.

*I hope Bobby never retires, because his advice is worth its weight in gold.*

**Wouldn't touch with a ten-foot pole** – to stay far away from something. This expression came about from the pioneers who used flat-bottomed boats to navigate back-water swamps and rivers. They got into the practice of using ten-foot poles to measure the depth of the murky water. Sometimes, they would dredge up gunk, stuff that people wouldn't want to touch.

*Gary and Bruce asked me which one of them did I think was smarter. My reply was that I wouldn't touch that with a ten-foot pole.*

**[All] wrapped up in** – to be engrossed in a matter.

*You can't talk to Russ when he's all wrapped up in his comic books.*

**Wreak havoc** – destroy; ruin some person, place or thing.

*Years of constant sun exposure wreaked havoc on her once-pretty face and caused many deep wrinkles.*

**Wring his/her neck** – to be so mad at someone as to want to hurt them physically.

*I'd like to wring David's neck for ruining my nice silk shirt when he shook up the soda and sprayed it all over me.*

**Written all over his/her face** – an emotion that is very apparent; an obvious feeling.

*Disappointment was written allover his face when he was rejected by the Air Force Academy.*

**Written off** – to be dismissed, forgotten about.

*I've already written off the debt, because I know I'll never see that money again.*

**[From the] wrong side of the tracks** – from the poor section of town; from a lower-class family.

*Ashley was a sweet girl from the wrong side of the tracks.*

# X

**[One's] X** – a signature.

*Put your X on the dotted line if the agreement looks alright to you.*

**XL** – Extra large; a clothing designation.

*She gained a lot of weight and now wears an XL dress size.*

**X marks the spot** – the location on a map; one's destination.

*Dad would only tell us that Xopictures we*

**X's and O's** – how kisses and hugs are expressed in a letter.

*The touching letter was signed: XXOO, Noelle (your love).*

**X-rated/XXX** – sexually obscene; very lewd.

*The naked pictures we found in his drawer were positively x-rated!*

# Y

**Yada yada yada** – an expression to signify that a repetitive, boring story follows; on and on; etcetera . . .

*This morning, everything went wrong: my coffee-maker broke, it was raining, the bus was late, yada yada yada, so now I hope I have a better afternoon.*

**Y'all –** a short form of "you all", mainly used by Southern Americans. This is used when addressing one or more people.

*"Hey y'all," the Southern preacher greeted us, "How's everybody doing today?"*

**Yakety-yak –** chit chat; idle conversation.

*There was much yakety-yak in the boardroom, then we go down to business.*

**Yarn –** a fib; a made-up story.

*Bill was fond of telling a yarn or two in which he always came out as the good guy.*

**Year in and year out** – consistently, year after year.

*They got tired of going to Jones Beach year in and year out, so they decided to drive up to the Connecticut shore this year.*

**Yell bloody murder** – to complain loudly; to scream.

*If you lay a hand on me, I'm going to yell bloody murder and the cops will come to arrest you.*

**Yellowbelly** – a coward; a fearful person

*Jeff was scared of his own shadow, so the kids called him a yellowbelly.*

**Yes man** – someone who agrees with everybody in order to be liked.

*His assistant was the ultimate yes man, always buttering him up to gain his favor.*

**[Local] yokel** – a real country person; a hick

*We knew that guy was a real yokel when he showed up for an interview with socks and sandals.*

**You can lead a horse to water, but you can't make him drink** - that you can show someone the way to do something, but you can't actually make them do it themselves.

*You know, I showed Dad how to use the computer – that he will actually do it is a different story; you can lead a horse to water, but you can't make him drink it.*

**You can't teach an old dog new tricks** – it's hard to teach an older person a new method or way of doing something.

*Grandma has a certain way of doing things and is unwilling to try anything new, so I guess it's true that you can't teach an old dog new tricks.*

**You reap what you sow** – one usually gets rewarded in proportion to their efforts.

*Since Dwayne didn't bother working over the summer, he was broke in the fall. When he tried to borrow money, I said, "No way, you reaped what you sowed – nothing."*

**Yo-yo** – a silly, foolish person.

*What a yo-yo our waitress turned out to be when she spilled the milkshake all over me.*

# Z

**Zero/zoom in on** – to hone in on; concentrate on.

*The detectives narrowed the list of suspects and finally zeroed in on the ex-boyfriend.*

**Zilch** – zero; nothing.

*The art teacher knows zilch about managing the money end of running an art studio.*

**[A] zillion** – a great many; too many to count.

*He was really popular and received a zillion party invitations.*

**Zinger** – a critical remark; a sharp comment.

*Mrs. Brown came up with some great zingers, like when she told her nosy neighbor that she should win an award for artful eavesdropping.*

**Zip it!** – shut up; quiet!

*We were talking really loud, so the teacher told us to zip it or else we'd get detention.*

**Zipperhead** – administrator; bureaucrat.

*When the school budget needed to be reduced, a bunch of zipperheads went in and slashed the music program, saying it was just a luxury.*

**Zonked out** – passed out; sleeping.

*Joel worked so hard today, he is now zonked out on the couch.*

**Zoom in on** – notice and focus on.

*Henry was watching a video and zoomed in on one of the actors, saying, "I think I went to high school with that guy!"*

**Zzzzzz's** – a written expression to convey sleep

*I was really tired and wanted to catch some zzzzz's.*

# Exercises

## Match-ups:

Match each idiom with the correct definition (putting the letter of the definition next to the idiom):

| Idiom | Definition |
|---|---|
| 1. Birthday suit _____ | A. the latest fashion trend |
| 2. Castles in the air _____ | B. to reverse a situation |
| 3. All the rage _____ | C. refuse to say anything |
| 4. Cook the books _____ | D. naked (no clothes on) |
| 5. Easy on the eyes _____ | E. cheat at bookkeeping |
| 6. Clam up _____ | F. having a big party |
| 7. Fall to pieces _____ | G. held secret for a while |
| 8. Blind as a bat _____ | H. attractive-looking |
| 9. Turn the tables _____ | I. sight-impaired |
| 10. Living it up _____ | J. go crazy; lose control |
| 11. Under wraps ____ | K. big dreams |
| 12. Fit as a fiddle _____ | L. in great health |

*The answers to all exercises are on page 274.*

## Fill-ins:

Insert the letter of the correct idiom choice within each sentence.

**Sentence**

1. Maria _____ when she saw an elephant juggling basketballs at the beachside attraction.

**Idiom choices**

A. did a double take B. bury the hatchet C. saved face

---

**Sentence**

2. Charles was so mad at Leo that he wanted to _____.

**Idiom choices**

A. back down B. fall asleep at the wheel C. wring his neck

---

**Sentence**

3. Jenny worked as a _____ , always fetching things for her office mates.

**Idiom choices**

A. pussycat B. gofer C. skeleton in the closet

---

**Sentence**

4. Everything was split _____, right down the middle.

**Idiom choices**

A. behind the scenes B. fifty-fifty C. on the war path

---

*The answers to all exercises are on page 274.*

## Underlines:

There are many idioms used in the following story.
Underline or circle at least ten of them.

### The Air of Uncle Rob

When I was a kid, I admired my Uncle Rob very much. He was a pilot for one of the big airlines, but he had cut his teeth flying in the Air Force. What I liked most about him was that, despite his gruff looks, he was really a pussycat inside. Because I was interested in learning to fly, Uncle Rob had taken me under his wing and often talked to me about his job.

One day out of the clear blue sky, Uncle Rob called to ask if I would be interested in going up in a plane with him. I was tickled pink! I didn't think twice about it and exclaimed, "Of course! When do we leave?" He laughed, "Cool your heels, Lucy, the airport is about an hour away."

Soon, we were there and getting into the cockpit. Once inside, he turned to me and said, "O.K., now let's get down to business." He spent the next hour teaching me the basic functions of levers and switches. Then he said, "I don't have to worry about you, though, because you're cool as a cucumber." I was grateful to him.

We spent a wonderful day flying around the state of New York. I was in seventh heaven. I really wanted to learn the ropes, and he was a great mentor. He said I picked up on the instructions quickly and came through with flying colors.

Every now and then, I look back on that day and remember how exciting it was. My uncle is getting on in years now, but he's still in the game. His generosity is nothing to sneeze at. I still appreciate his thoughtfulness and inspiration. To me, he is still larger than life.

*The answers to all exercises are on page 274.*

## **Relatives:**

The first group below contains idioms which are similar in meaning to the group under it, such as “snap out of it” and “get a grip”. Match up these related idioms by drawing a line connecting them.

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1. | snap out of it | cake-walk | pleased as punch |
| | butterfingers | washed up | Dear John letter |
| | dirt cheap | fly off the handle | cough up |
| | baloney | jump ship | fit as a fiddle |
| | cut one’s teeth | sharp as a tack | [Do an] about-face |

---

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| 2. | walking papers | all thumbs | over the hill |
| | bargain-basement | hogwash | fork over |
| | fly the coop | healthy as a horse | tickled pink |
| | on the ball | change one’s tune | get a grip |
| | learn the ropes | easy as ABC | blow a fuse |

*The answers to all exercises are on page 274.*

# Answers

## Match-ups

1. D
2. K
3. A
4. E
5. H
6. C
7. J
8. I
9. B
10. F
11. G
12. L

## Fill-ins

1. A
2. C
3. B
4. B

## Underlines

cut his teeth
pussycat
taken me under his wing
out of the clear blue sky
tickled pink
didn't think twice about it
cool your heels
get down to business
cool as a cucumber
seventh heaven
learn the ropes
picked up on
came through with flying colors
Every now and then
getting on in years
still in the game
nothing to sneeze at
larger than life

## Relatives

snap out of it / get a grip
cake-walk / easy as ABC
pleased as punch / tickled pink
butterfingers / all thumbs
washed up / over the hill
Dear John letter / walking papers
dirt cheap / bargain-basement
fly off the handle / blow a fuse
cough up / fork over
baloney / hogwash
jump ship / fly the coop
fit as a fiddle / healthy as a horse
cut one's teeth / learn the ropes
sharp as a tack / on the ball
[Do an] about-face / change one's tune