English Idioms & Idiomatic Expressions

Descriptions of people

(personality - character - appearance)

abbreviated piece of nothing	This slang expression refers to someone who is considered to be insignificant or worthless. Bob doesn't think much of his new colleague. He calls him an 'abbreviated piece of nothing'.
all brawn and no brain	Someone who is physically very strong but not very intelligent is said to be *all brawn and no brain*. He's an impressive player to watch, but he's all brawn and no brain.
all sizzle and no steak	Someone who turns out to be disappointing, after a promotional campaign which led us to expect something better, is called *all sizzle and no steak*. Because of the electoral promises he made, which so far he has failed to keep, many people call the new president 'all sizzle and no steak'.
all things to all people	If you are *all things to all people*, you please or satisfy everyone. She's exhausted tying to be a good wife, a good mother and a good teacher, but she can't be all things to all people.
alter ego	The term *alter ego*, which in Latin means 'other self', refers to a very close and trusted friend who is very like yourself.
apple of your eye	A person, usually a child, who is *the apple of your eye* is one for whom you have great affection. My grandson is the apple of my eye.
armchair critic	An *armchair critic* is someone who gives advice based on theory rather than practice. That guy is such an armchair critic - no experience but plenty of advice.
armchair	Someone who reads books or watches TV programmes about

traveller	other places and countries, but doesn't actually travel anywhere, is called an *armchair traveller*. A surprising number of adventure books are bought by armchair travellers.
bad egg	Someone who is a *bad egg* is an untrustworthy person often involved in trouble whose company should be avoided. I don't want my son to be friends with Bobby Smith. Bobby's a bad egg.
behind the times	A person who is *behind the times* has old-fashioned ideas and does not keep up with modern life in general. Jane doesn't have a mobile phone. She's completely behind the times.
big cheese	This expression refers to a person who has a lot of power and influence in an organization. Tom's father is a big cheese in the oil industry.
big fish in a small pond	This term refers to an important or highly-ranked person in a small group or organization. He could get a job with a big company but he enjoys being a big fish in a small pond.
born with a silver spoon in one's mouth	A person who is *born with a silver spoon in their mouth* is born into a very rich family. She never has to worry about money; she was born with a silver spoon in her mouth.
butter wouldn't melt in your mouth	If you say that someone looks as if *butter wouldn't melt in their mouth,* you mean that they look completely innocent, but that they are capable of doing unpleasant things. The boy who stole the purse looked as if butter wouldn't melt in his mouth.

Descriptions of people

(personality - character - appearance)

(Idioms page 2: call a spade → down to earth)

call a spade a spade	A person who *calls a spade a spade* speaks openly and truthfully about something, especially difficult matters. What I like about the new manager is that he calls a spade a

	spade - it makes things so much easier for everyone.
fat *cat*	To refer to a rich and powerful person as a *fat cat* means that you disapprove of the way they use their money or power. The place was full of fat cats on their big yachts.
cat's whiskers (also: cat's pyjamas)	This expression refers to someone who considers themselves to be better than others in a particular area : beauty, competence, intelligence, sport, etc. Ever since she got a promotion, she thinks she's the cat's whiskers!
chip off the old block	A person who is a *chip off the old block* resembles one of their parents in appearance, character or behaviour. James is a chip off the old block - he reacts the same way as his father.
class act	To say that someone, for example an athlete or entertainer, is a *class act* means that they are very good at what they do. Her career is just beginning but she's already a class act.
cog in the machine	If you say that someone is *a cog in the machine*, you mean that, while they are necessary, they only play a small part in an organization or plan. The police quickly realized that the suspect was just a cog in the machine.
couch potato	If you refer to someone as a *couch potato*, you criticize them for spending a lot of time sitting and watching television. Don't be such a couch potato. There are better ways of spending your time than in front of the TV.
not cut out for something	If you are *not cut out for something*, you are not the sort of person to succeed or be happy in a particular activity. I started studying medicine but I quickly realized that I wasn't cut out for it.
dead loss	Someone described as a *dead loss* is absolutely useless or a complete failure. When it comes to gardening, my brother is a dead loss.
dead man walking	A *dead man walkin*g is someone who will inevitably be in great trouble very soon, especially a person who is about to lose their job or position. Because of the way he handled the recent riots, the minister is a dead man walking.
dog in the manger	A person referred to as a *dog in the manger* is someone who stops others from enjoying something he/she cannot use or

	doesn't want. She hates the guitar so she won't allow her son to learn to play it - a real dog in the manger!
doubting Thomas	A 'doubting Thomas' is a person who will not believe something without proof, or without seeing it for themselves. I had to show him my membership card. What a doubting Thomas!
down at heel	A person who is *down-at-heel* is someone whose appearance is untidy or neglected because of lack of money. *The down-at-heel student I first met became a successful writer.*
down to earth	Someone who is *down to earth* is not a dreamer but a realistic and practical person who has sensible reactions and expectations. Don't ask Suzy for help. She's fun, but not very down to earth.
dressed to kill	When someone, especially a woman, is *dressed to kill*, they are wearing very fashionable or glamorous clothes intended to attract attention. She arrived at the reception dressed to kill.
dressed up to the nines	Someone *dressed up to the nines* is wearing very smart or glamorous clothes. Caroline must be going to a party - she's dressed up to the nines.
dyed-in-the-wool	This expression is used to describe a person who has fixed, uncompromising, deep-felt beliefs to which they are committed. Bob and Jane are dyed-in-the-wool ecologists who use only biodegradable products.
eager beaver	The term *eager beaver* refers to a person who is hardworking and enthusiastic, sometimes considered overzealous. The new accountant works all the time - first to arrive and last to leave. He's a real eager beaver!
even steven	Two or more people who are *even stevens* are equal to each other. None of them has more than the others; none is owed anything or has anything due.

	The two boys shared equally the money they made delivering pizzas so now they're even stevens.
face like a bulldog chewing a wasp	To say that someone has a *face like a bulldog chewing a wasp* means that you find them very unattractive because they have a screwed-up ugly expression on their face. Not only was he rude but he had a face like a bulldog chewing a wasp!
face like thunder	If someone has a *face like thunder*, they look very angry. When Dad is really angry, he has a face like thunder!
face like a wet week-end	If someone has a *face like a wet week-en*d, they look sad and miserable. What's wrong with Pete? He's got a face like a wet week-end!
face only a mother could love	This is a humoristic way of saying that someone is ugly or unattractive. The poor guy has a face only a mother could love.
face that would stop a clock	Someone who has a *face that would stop a clock* has a shockingly unattractive face. You'll recognize him - he's tall and thin, with a face that would stop a clock!
fast talker	A person who speaks quickly and easily but cannot always be trusted is called a *fast talker.* The salesman was a fast talker who persuaded the old lady to buy a new washing machine.
fat cat	To refer to a rich and powerful person as a *fat cat* means that you disapprove of the way they use their money or power. The place was full of fat cats on their big yachts.
to a fault	To say that someone has a good quality *to a fault* means that they have a lot, or even too much, of that quality. My aunt is generous to a fault, always ready to help anyone who claims to be in need.
eet of clay	If someone who is admired is found to have a weakness, fault or defect of character, they are said to have *feet of clay*. No one is perfect. Many successful people have feet of clay.
fifth wheel	This expression refers to a person who find themselves in a situation where their presence is unnecessary and as a result they feel useless. Everyone seemed to have a specific role except me. I felt

	like a fifth wheel
fixed in our ways	People who are *fixed in their ways* do not want to change their normal way of doing things. My grandparents are very fixed in their ways and dislike any changes.
fresh as a daisy	Someone who is *(as) fresh as a daisy* is lively and attractive, in a clean and fresh way. I met Molly the other day. She looked as fresh as a daisy.
full of beans	A person who is *full of beans* is lively, active and healthy. He may be getting old but he's still full of beans.
full of hot air	Someone who is *full of hot air* is full of nonsense and talks a lot without saying anything worthwhile. Don't listen to Alex - he's full of hot air!
full of piss and vinegar	People who are *full of piss and vinegar* are very lively, boisterous or full of youthful vitality. I had to look after a group of kids full of piss and vinegar.
full of the milk of human kindness	Someone who is full of the *milk of human kindness*, is naturally kind and compassionate to others. She's a wonderful person - full of the milk of human kindness.
full as a tick	If someone is (as) *full as a tick,* they have eaten or drunk too much. The little boy ate biscuits and drank lemonade until he was as full as a tick.
fur coat and no knickers	A person who tries to appear distinguished but has no real class is referred to as '*fur coat and no knickers*'. Don't let her impress you. She's what we call 'fur coat and no knickers'!
going places	To say that someone is *going places* means that they show talent and ability that will no doubt lead to a successful future. Even at college it was obvious that Paul was going places.
hairy at the heel	A person who is *hairy at the heel* is thought to be untrustworthy or even dangerous. Rumour has it that the owner of the club is a bit hairy at the heel.
hale and hearty	Someone, especially an old person, who is *hale and hearty* is in excellent health. My grandmother is still hale and hearty at the age of ninety.

happy-go-lucky	If you are a *happy-go-lucky* person, you are cheerful and carefree all the time. He's a happy-go-lucky sort of guy - always in good humour.
hard as nails	A person who is (as) *hard as nails* is unsentimental and shows no sympathy. Don't expect any sympathy from him. He's as hard as n
have the makings of	A person who *has the makings of something* has qualities and potential that could be developed. The teacher says Sarah has the makings of an excellent journalist.
head and shoulders above	To say that one person is *head and shoulders above* the others means that they are much better than the rest of them. *The award winner was head and shoulders above the others*.
old head on young shoulders	This expression refers to a child or young person who thinks and expresses themselves like an older more-experienced person. When she heard Emily warning her brother to stay out of trouble, her mother thought : "That's an old head on young shoulders."
high and mighty	Someone who is *high and mighty* behaves in a haughty manner as though they were superior to others. "Don't get all high and mighty!" said my grandmother to my cousin. "Everyone helps with the housework in this house."
holier-than-thou	The attitude of people who consider themselves to be more virtuous or morally superior to others can be called '*holier-than-thou*'. I can't stand the holier-than-thou attitude of some political candidates.
horse of a different colour	To describe a person or a problem as *a horse of a different colour* means either that the person does things differently from others, or that the nature of the problem is entirely different. I expected to negotiate with the sales manager, but the chairman turned up - now he's a horse of a different colour!
dark horse	If you refer to someone as *a dark horse* you mean that they are secretive or that little is known about them. I can't say I know my neighbour. He's a bit of a dark horse.
in a class of	If someone is *in a class of their own*, they are unequalled and

one's own	considered better than anyone else of their kind. As a singer, Maria Callas was in a class of her own.
jack of all trades	A *jack of all trades* is a person who can do many different things but is not very good at any one of them.. I'm looking for a skilled worker, not a jack-of-all-trades.
just off the boat	A person who is *just off the boat* is naive and lacks experience. How do you expect me to work with a trainee who's just off the boat!
larger than life	A person who is *larger than life* attracts special attention because they are very impressive or unusually remarkable in their appearance, behaviour or personality. He was a larger-then-life character, both onstage and behind the scene.
laughing stock	A person who does something stupid or ridiculous which causes others to laugh becomes *a laughing stock.* If you wear that to school you'll be the laughing stock of the class!
life and soul of the party	The *life and soul of the party* is the most lively and amusing person present at an event. I'm so glad we invited Emily. She was the life and soul of the party.
live wire	Someone who is highly vivacious, energetic and full of enthusiasm is a *live wire.* Things have brightened up since Charlie arrived. He's a real live wire!
long in the tooth	A person who is *long in the tooth* is a bit too old to do something. She's a bit long in the tooth for a cabaret dancer, isn't she?
look the part	If you *look the part*, your appearance makes you ideally suited for a particular job or role. It was a mistake to choose a pretty young girl to play the witch. She didn't look the part at all.
look the picture	If someone *looks the picture,* they look very pretty. The little girl looked the picture in her new dress.
look the picture of health	To *look the picture of health* means to look extremely healthy. Nice to see you again Mr. Brown. I must say you look the picture of health.

look a sight	If a person *looks a sight,* their appearance is awful, unsuitable or very untidy. She looks a sight in that dress!
loose cannon	Someone who is referred to as *a loose cannon* cannot be completely trusted because of unpredictable and irresponsible behaviour which can cause trouble. Keep an eye on Jamie. He tends to turn into a loose cannon when he has a few drinks.
lower than a snake's belly	To say that someone is *lower than a snake's belly* means that they are bad, dishonest or have very low moral standards. Anyone who is capable of taking advantage of young vulnerable children is lower than a snake's belly.
mouse potato	This term refers to a person who spends a lot of time in front of the computer. My son and his friends are all mouse potatoes - constantly glued to the computer!
all mouth and no trousers	This is said of someone who talks a lot about doing something but never actually does it. He keeps saying he's going to resign and travel around the world, but he's all mouth and no trousers.
nice as pie	If a person is *as nice as pie*, they are surprisingly kind and friendly. After our argument, she was as nice as pie!
not a hair out of place	If someone does *not have a hair out of place*, their appearance is perfect. Angela is always impeccably dressed - never a hair out of place.
not the only pebble on the beach	To say that someone is *not the only pebble on the beach* means that they are not the only person worth considering. He thinks his refusal to join the team will cause problems, but there are other alternatives ...he's not the only pebble on the beach!
pen pusher	A person who does work that requires little action, just office work, and who lacks operating experience, is called *a pen pusher.* *Those pen pushers have no idea what it's like on a building site.*
pie-eyed	Someone who is *pie-eyed* is completely drunk. He had never taken an alcoholic drink so after one beer the boy was pie-eyed.

plastic smile	A person with *a plastic smile* is wearing a forced smile which makes them appear happier that they really are. A receptionist greeted customers with a plastic smile.
sleeping/silent partner	This term refers to a person who invests in a business without taking an active part in its management, and whose association with the enterprise is not public knowledge. He works alone but his business is partly financed by a sleeping partner.
slippery as an eel	To say that someone is as *slippery as an eel* means that they are difficult to catch and they manage to avoid answering questions. The man was as slippery as an eel. He was arrested for theft several times but was never convicted.
small dog, tall weeds	This expression is used to refer to someone who does not have the ability or the resources necessary to perform a task. *It may be too difficult for the trainee - small dog, tall weeds!*
small fry	People or organizations that are considered unimportant can be referred to as *small fry.* *This term can also refer to young children.* *The police seized a large quantity of drugs, and some small fry, but not the organizers they were hoping to catch.*
smart alec	A *smart alec* is an annoying self-assertive person who tries to show off how clever they are. Some smart alec interrupted the game claiming that the answers were incorrect!
social butterfly	A person who has a lot of friends and acquaintances and likes to flit from one social event to another is called a *social butterfly.* Jessica is constantly out and about; she's a real social butterfly.
spitting image	If one person is *the spitting image* of another, they look exactly like each other. Sarah is the spitting image of her mother.
square peg in a	To say that a person is *a square peg in a round hole*

round hole	means that they are not suitable for the job they are doing or the situation they are in. He was a bad choice for the job - a square peg in a round hole.
(made of) sterner stuff	If someone is made of *sterner stuff*, they have a strong character and are better able to deal with difficulties than others. I was surprised to see him so upset. I thought he was made of sterner stuff.
stickler for the rules	Someone who is *a stickler for the rules* is a disciplinarian who demands strict observance of the rules or procedures. Be sure to use the proper form. Mr. Brown is a stickler for the rules.
straight as an arrow	Someone who is *as straight as an arrow* is a morally upright person who is extremely honest. You can leave the keys with Andy. He's as straight as an arrow.
stubborn as a mule	If someone is *as stubborn as a mule,* they are very obstinate and unwilling to listen to reason or change their mind. His friends advised him to accept the offer, but you know Larry - he's as stubborn as a mule!
talk the hind leg off a donkey	This expression is used to describe a very talkative person. It's difficult to end a conversation with Betty. She could talk the hind leg off a donkey!
talk nineteen to the dozen	If someone *talks nineteen to the dozen,* they speak very quickly. He was talking nineteen to the dozen so I didn't catch the whole story.

arred with the same brush	When a person is *tarred with the same brush*, they are regarded as having the same faults or bad qualities as those they associate with. Don't hang around with those guys or you'll be tarred with the same brush.
thin on the top	If someone, usually a man, is *thin on the top*, they are losing their or going bald.

	Dad's gone a bit thin on the top in the last few years.
top dog	To say that a person is *top dog* means that they are better or more powerful than others. She's top dog in cosmetics today.
tough as old boots	If something, specially meat, is *(as) tough as old boots*, it is hard to cut and difficult to chew. (This can also refer to a person who is strong either physically or in character.) I was served a steak as tough as old boots.
tough cookie	A person who is a *tough cookie* is one who is self-confident and ambitious and will do what is necessary to get what they want. I'm not worried about Jason's future - he's a tough cookie!
tower of strength	The term *tower of strength* is used to describe a person who is very helpful and supportive during difficult times. All during my illness, my sister was a tower of strength.
ugly as sin	This expression is used to refer to people or things that are considered to be very unattractive. Have you seen the new neighbour's dog? It's as ugly as sin!
upper crust	This term refers to the higher levels of society, the upper class or the aristocracy. William hides his working-class background and pretends to be from the upper crust.
vertically challenged	This term is a humoristic way of referring to someone who is not very tall. High shelves are difficult for vertically challenged shoppers.
wet blanket	A person who is *a wet blanket* is so boring or unenthusiastic that they prevent others from enjoying themselves. Come on! Relax ! Don't be such a wet blanket!
whistle-blower	If you report an illegal or socially harmful activity to the authorities, and give information about those responsible for it, you are a *whistle-blower.* The poor working conditions were reported by a whistle-blower.
whiz kid	A *whiz kid* is someone, usually young, who is very talented and successful at doing something. Apparently the new engineer knows what he's doing - a real whiz-kid from what I've heard.
winning ways	A person who has *winning ways* has a charming or persuasive manner of gaining the affection of others or

	obtaining what they want. My grandson is hard to resist - he's got such winning ways.
worth one's weight in gold	Someone who is *worth their weight in gold* is considered to be of great value. We couldn't run the farm without him. He's worth his weight in gold.
yellow-bellied	A person who is *yellow-bellied* is cowardly, or not at all brave. The bus was full of yellow-bellied passengers who disappeared when the driver was attacked by two youths.

ANIMAL DESCREPTION

act of God	This term refers to an natural event or accident, for which no person is responsible (such as an earthquake, lightning and similar acts of nature). The insurance company refused to pay for the damage because it was caused by an act of God.
been through the wars	If something has *been in or through the wars*, it show signs of rough treatment or damage. He arrived in a car that looked as though it had been through the wars.
beyond recall	Something which is *beyond recall* is impossible to retrieve, cancel or reverse. I'm afraid we can't recover the pictures - your camera is beyond recall.
beyond redemption	If something is *beyond redemption*, it is in such a poor state that there is no hope of improvement or recovery. With the latest scandal, his reputation is now beyond redemption.
bodice-ripper	A novel, usually on a historical theme, with a plot that involves romantic passion between a vulnerable heroine and a rich, powerful male character, is called a *bodice-ripper.* *The novel is a bodice-ripper set in the French revolution.*
broad strokes	If something is described or defined with/in *broad strokes*, it is outlined in a very general way, without any details. In a few broad strokes he summed up the situation.
clean as a whistle	Something *as clean as a whistle* is extremely clean. This can also mean that a person's criminal record is clean.

	Bob spent the afternoon washing and shining his car until it was as clean as a whistle.
collecting dust	If something is *collecting dus*t, it hasn't been touched or used for a long period of time. My dad doesn't play golf any more. His clubs are collecting dust now.
come in handy	To say that something may *come in handy* means that it may be useful some time or other. Don't throw away those old shelves; they may come in handy one day.
copper-bottomed	To describe something such as a plan, a contract or a financial arrangement as *copper-bottomed* means that it is completely safe or reliable. He signed a copper-bottomed agreement with a distributor.
creature comforts	This expression refers to modern conveniences (such as hot water or central heating) that make life comfortable and pleasant. I need my creature comforts. I don't know how I'd survive without air-conditioning in this climate!
(a) cut above	Something which is *a cut above* everything else is better or of higher quality. The articles in this magazine are a cut above the others.
cut and dried	If you refer to a situation, problem or solution as *cut and dried,* you mean that it is clear and straightforward with no likely complications. When the new manager arrived, he didn't find the situation as cut and dried as he had expected.
dead as a dodo	To say that something is (as) *dead as a dodo* means that it is unquestionably dead or obsolete, or has gone out of fashion. (A dodo is a bird that is now extinct.) The floppy disk is an invention that is now (as) dead as a dodo.
dead as a doornail	This expression is used to stress that something is very definitely dead or no longer exists. They've started fighting again, so the peace agreement is now as dead as a doornail.

dog and pony show	A *dog and pony show* is a marketing event or presentation which has plenty of style but not much content.
dog's breakfast	To describe something as a *dog's breakfast* means that it is a complete mess. The new secretary made a dog's breakfast out of the filing system.
doggie bag	A bag provided by a restaurant so that you can take the leftover food home with you is called a *doggie* (or *doggy*) *bag*. The portions were so big that I decided to ask for a doggie bag
fait accompli	This French expression refers to something that has been done and cannot be changed. He used his savings to buy a motorbike and then presented his parents with a fait accompli.
falls between two stools	If something *falls between two stools*, it is neither totally one thing nor another, and is therefore unsatisfactory. The book didn't sell because it fell between two stools. It appealed neither to historians nor to the general public.
few and far between	Items, places or events which are *few and far between* are rarely found or do not happen very often. Restaurants in this part of the country are few and far between.
(of the) first water	Something that is *of the first water* is of the finest or most exceptional quality (like being compared to a diamond). The violinist gave a performance that was of the first water.
fit the bill	If someone or something *fits the bill*, they are exactly right for a particular situation. They wanted a quiet place to stay and the country inn fitted the bill.
fit for purpose	Something that is suitable for a particular function and is fully operational is said to be *fit for purpose.* The mayor promised that the new leisure centre would be ready on time and fit for purpose.
flag of convenience	If a ship, boat or yacht sails under a *flag of convenience*, it is registered in a foreign country in order to avoid regulations and taxes, and reduce operating costs.
fly-by-night	A *fly-by-night* person, business or venture is considered untrustworthy because they operate briefly and disappear overnight

	I bought it in one of those fly-by-night stores and now I can't exchange it. The place has closed down.
for the birds	If you describe something as *for the birds*, you consider it to be uninteresting, useless or not to be taken seriously. As far as I'm concerned, his theory is for the birds.
free-for-all	This term refers to an uncontrolled situation such as a discussion, argument or fight where everyone present can do or say whatever they like. It started as a serious debate but turned into a free-for-all.
freudian slip	A Freudian slip is a mistake made by a speaker which is considered to reveal their true thoughts or feelings. So you got the job - I'm so sad ... Sorry, I mean 'glad'!
gizmo	The term '*gizmo*' refers to a gadget or any small technological item which is unusual or novel, and for which the proper term is unknown or forgotten.
going downhill	When something *goes downhill*, it deteriorates or gets worse little by little. His health has been going downhill since the last operation.
going to hell in a handcart	If something is *going to hell in a handcart,* it is in a bad state and continues to deteriorate. This used to be a nice place to live but now the area is going to hell in a handcart.
going to rack and ruin	If something *is going to rack and ruin*, it is falling into very bad condition because of lack of care. When the factory closed down, the building went to rack and ruin.
gutter press	This term refers to newspapers that print a lot of sensational stories about people's private lives. Of course the gutter press was quick to print a sensational version of the incident!
hard and fast	Something which is *hard and fast* is inflexible or cannot be altered. Unfortunately there are no hard and fast rules related to English spelling.
hard to come by	Something that is *hard to come by* is rare or difficult to find. Experienced carpenters are hard to come by these days.

hard to swallow	When something is difficult to accept or believe, it is *hard to swallow.* She invented an excuse that the teacher found hard to swallow.
here today, gone tomorrow	This is said of something which appears and disappears very quickly, or does not last long, The shops in this area change very often - here today, gone tomorrow.
hive of activity	A place where there are lots of things happening, and everyone is very busy, is called *a hive of activity.* *When I went to offer help, the kitchen was already a hive of activity.*
hollow victory	A victory obtained in unsatisfactory conditions, which as a result seems worthless or without significance for the winner, is called a *hollow victory.* Won in the absence of the major ski champions, his gold medal was a hollow victory.
household name	When the name of something becomes very familiar because it is so often used, it is called a *household name* or *word*. The product was so successful that its name became a household word in no time.
hustle and bustle	This term refers to busy energetic activity in an atmosphere of general excitement. I prefer to live in the country. I hate the hustle and bustle of city life.
icing on the cake	If something is referred to as *icing on the cake*, it is an extra benefit that makes a good situation even better. Good news! I get the job ... and the icing on the cake is that I get a company car too!
idiot box	Some people consider television to lack educational value and refer to it as the *idiot box.* He spends all his free time in front of the idiot box.
in keeping with	If something is *in keeping with*, for example, a style or tradition, it is suitable or appropriate in a particular situation. We exchange presents at Christmas in keeping with

	tradition.
in mint condition	Something that is *in mint condition* is in such perfect condition that it looks new or as good as new. The car is 10 years old but according to Tom it's in mint condition.
in tatters	Something that is badly torn, in very poor condition or damaged beyond repair is *in tatters.* *His reputation is in tatters after the latest scandal.*
in inverted commas	When describing something, if you use a word which you say is 'in inverted commas', you indicate that the word is not quite true or appropriate. We were served a 'meal', in inverted commas, but we were too hungry to complain.
industrial strength	This is a humorous way of referring to something which is very strong, powerful or concentrated. I've got an industrial-strength headache this morning!
just the ticket	If something is *just the ticket*, it is exactly right, or just what you need. I'm not hungry enough for a meal. A bowl of soup would be just the ticket.
last word	Something described as *the last word* is the most recent or most fashionable in its category. Steve's new computer is the last word in technology.
less is more	This expression, used particularly in architecture and design, conveys the idea that things that are simple in style and smaller in size are better. Simplicity is fashionable today. Less is more.
light years ahead	If something is *light years ahead*, it is far more advanced in tems of development or progress. We've got to invest more in research - our competitors' new product is light years ahead!
lives up to reputation	If something *lives up to its reputation*, it is as good, or as bad, as people say. The guesthouse lived up to its reputation; the owners were as friendly and hospitable as we had been told.
middle of nowhere	If a place is *in the middle of nowhere*, it is in a remote area, far from towns, villages or houses. The campsite was in the middle of nowhere so I couldn't send you a postcard.

middle of the road (MOR)	This term refers to anything moderate, unadventurous or inoffensive that avoids extremes and appeals to the majority of people. It's a middle-of-the-road restaurant that's ideal for families.
mixed blessing	Something pleasant which also has disadvantages is called a *mixed blessing.* He inherited as 18th century mansion but the maintenance costs make it a mixed blessing.
name written on it	If something *has someone's name (written) on it,* it is intended for that person or it is ideally suited to them. That dress would be perfect for you - it's got your name on it!
next best thing	If you can't have exactly what you want, the *next best thing* is the best alternative possible. The camera I wanted was far too expensive so I opted for a cheaper one that was the next best thing.
not a patch on	If something or someone is *not a patch on* an other, they are not nearly as good. His second conference wasn't a patch on the first one.
not in the same league	If something is *not in the same league,* it is of much lower standard than something else. He had a good voice but he wasn't in the same league as Pavarotti.
not up to par	If something is *not up to par,* it does not meet the required standard. He didn't get the job because his English wasn't up to par.
not up to scratch	Something which is *not up to scratch* fails to reach the expected standard. The quality of the material is not up to scratch. We'll have to change our suppliers.
a notch above	Something that is *a notch above* something else is a little better in every way. His rendering of the song was a notch above the others.
odds and ends	*Odds and ends* are small articles, or bits and pieces of all sorts, usually of little value. I keep my odds and ends in this drawer.

over the top (OTT)	Something which is *over the top* is totally excessive or not suitable for the occasion. Her dramatic speech was way over the top.
pie in the sky	If an idea or project is *pie in the sky,* it is completely unrealistic or unlikely to be achieved. The promise of low-cost housing for everyone turned out to be pie in the sky.
the pits	If something is referred to as *the pits,* it is considered to be absolutely the worst. That magazine is the pits!
recipe for disaster	If you refer to a plan or idea as *a recipe for disaster,* you think it is likely to produce bad results. Our two families together for Christmas? Sounds like a recipe for disaster!
red light district	An area of a town or city where there is a concentration of sex shops, prostitution, strip clubs, etc. is known as the *red light district.* A photograph of the politician taken in a red-light district caused a scandal.
right up your alley	If something is *right up your alley,* it is the sort of thing you like or have knowledge about. You like cooking do you? This book will be right up your alley.
a rip-off	To say that something is *a rip-off* means that it costs much more than it should. $10 for an orange juice? That's a rip-off!

second to none	Something that is *second to none* is excellent or much better than any other. The service was perfect and the food was second to none.
seen better days	If something has *seen better days,* it has aged visibly in comparison with when it was new. My much-travelled suitcase has seen better days!
set in stone	When something is *set in stone*, it is permanent and cannot be changed in any way. The agenda isn't set in stone; we can add an item if need be.
(comes in) all shapes	Something that can be found in many different forms, types or varieties, *comes in all shapes and sizes.*

and sizes	Computers come in all shapes and sizes nowadays.
small potatoes	Something that is *small potatoes* is considered unimportant or insignificant. Her first publication was considered small potatoes but her new book has lead to a change of opinion.
snail mail	This term refers to the standard system of mail delivery, or postal service, considered very slow compared to electronic mail. More and more people are using e-mail rather than the traditional postal service, snail mail.
stand the test of time	If something *stands the test of time*, people continue to find it valuable or useful after many years. The teaching method has stood the test of time. It is still used in schools today.
stick out a mile	If something *sticks out a mile,* it is very obvious or very easy to see. You can see she's had a facelift - it sticks out a mile!
stink to high heaven	If something has a very strong unpleasant smell, it *stinks to high heaven.* Take off those socks - they stink to high heaven!
streets ahead	To say that something is *streets ahead* of something else means that it is much better or more advanced. In measures to preserve the planet, the Scandinavians are streets ahead of us.
sublime to ridiculous	If something goes *from the sublime to the ridiculous,* it deteriorates in quality from serious or admirable to absurd or unimportant. An opera followed by a Mr.Muscle contest is going from the sublime to the ridiculous!
ticks all the right boxes	If something *ticks all the right boxes,* it is perfect for you because it meets all your criteria. We're in luck! We visited an apartment today that ticks all the right boxes!
top notch	To say that something is *top notch* means that it is of the highest possible quality or standard. The hotel was wonderful and the service was top notch.
tough as old boots	If something, specially meat, is *(as) tough as old boots*, it is hard to cut and difficult to chew. (This can also refer to a person who is strong either physically or in character.) I was served a steak as tough as old boots.

up/down one's alley	If something is *(right) up or down your alley,* it is exactly the sort of thing that will suit your tastes or abilities. Alex loves reading, so a job in a bookshop is right up his alley.
up-to-the-minute	Something that is *up-to-the-minute* is the very latest or most recent version available. The internet is the best place to find up-to-the-minute news.
the works	Something that has *the works* contains everything that is possible, or the full range of options. The first thing he did was order a new computer with the works.
worth its weight in gold	Someone or something that is *worth their weight in gold* is considered to be of great value. We couldn't run the farm without him. He's worth his weight in gold.

A to z idioms

abbreviated piece of nothing	This slang expression refers to someone who is considered to be insignificant or worthless. Bob doesn't think much of his new colleague. He calls him an 'abbreviated piece of nothing'.
to the best of one's ability.	When someone does something *to the best of their ability*, they do it as well as they possibly can. I felt nervous all through the interview, but I replied to the best of my ability.
(of) no fixed abode	A person *of no fixed abod*e has nowhere permanent to live. A 30-year-old man of no fixed abode was charged with the burglary.
about turn/about face	This term refers to a complete change of opinion or policy. The ambassador's recent declarations indicate an about turn in foreign policy.
above and beyond the call of duty	If a person does something which is *above and beyond the call of duty*, they show a greater degree of courage or effort than is usually required or expected in their job. The fire-fighter received a medal for his action which went above and beyond the call of duty.

above board	If a situation or business is described as *above board*, it is open, honest and legal. There are not secret negotiations. Our dealings have always been above board.
more by *accident* than by design	Something that happens *more by accident than (by) design* is done without deliberate intention. I became an interpreter more by accident than design; nobody else could speak the language of the refugees.
accidentally on purpose	If you do something intentionally, but pretend it was an accident, you do it *accidentally on purpose*. I accidentally-on-purpose erased his email address so I couldn't contact him again.
an accomplished fact (also 'fait accompli')	Something that has been done or completed, before those affected by it can intervene or change it, is called an *accomplished fact.*
of your own accord	If you do something *of your own accord*, you do it spontaneously or willingly, without being influenced or forced by anyone. The boy went to see the owner of his own accord and admitted breaking the window.
no accounting for taste	This expression is used to indicate surprise at another person's likes or dislikes. She fell in love with a guy who is short, fat, bald and poor ... there's no accounting for taste!
ace a test	If you obtain a very high score or an excellent result, you *ace a test or exam.* Maria's parents said she could go to the party if she aced her English test.
have an ace up your sleeve	If you *have an ace up your sleeve*, you have something in reserve with which you can gain an advantage. I'm well prepared for the negotiations. I've got an ace up my sleeve.
hold all the aces	A person who *holds all the aces* is in a very strong position because they have more advantages than anyone else. Given the high unemployment figures in some countries, employers hold all the aces.
Achilles heel	This expression refers to a vulnerable area or a weak spot,

	in an otherwise strong situation, that could cause one's downfall or failure. He's extremely intelligent, but his inability to speak in public is his Achilles heel.
acid test	To refer to something as' *the acid test*' means that it will prove how effective or useful something is. The training course was very interesting but the acid test will come when I start my new job.
acquired taste	Something that you dislike when you first taste it, but begin to like after trying it several times, is *an acquired taste*. Tony has always loved olives, but for me it was an acquired taste.
act of God	This term refers to an natural event or accident, for which no person is responsible (such as an earthquake, lightning and similar acts of nature). The insurance company refused to pay for the damage because it was caused by an act of God.
get your act together	If you tell someone to *get their act together*, you mean that they need to organize their affairs more effectively in order to be more successful. You'd better get your act together if you want to find a job!
add fuel to the flames	If you *add fuel to the flames*, you do or say something that makes a difficult situation even worse. He forgot their wedding anniversary, and his apologies only added fuel to the flames.
much ado about nothing	When people *make much ado about nothing*, they make a lot of fuss about something which is not important. There was a meeting to discuss the name for the new playground. "Much ado about nothing" said my Dad!
afraid of one's own shadow	A person who is *afraid of his/her own shadow* is very nervous or easily frightened. I've never seen anyone so easily scared. She's afraid of her own shadow!
after the fact	If something is done *after the fact*, it done too late, after something has actually happened, especially a crime or an accident. He said he realized he had put people in danger, but that was of no help after the fact.
against one's	If you do something, even though you feel it is not a

better judgement	sensible thing to do, you do it *against your better judgement*. Bob persuaded her to go by car, against her better judgement, and she regretted it as soon as she saw the heavy traffic.
against the clock	If you do something *against the clock,* you are rushed and have very little time to do it. They are working against the clock to have the presentation ready for Monday.
ahead of the pack	If a person or organization is *ahead of the pack*, they are better or more successful than their rivals. Our products will have to be more innovative if we want to stay ahead of the pack.
set the alarm bells ringing / alarm bells start to ring	If something *sets the alarm bells ringing*, it makes you begin to worry, because it shows that there may be a problem. Alarm bells started to ring when my old neighbour didn't open his shutters all day and didn't answer his phone.

all along	If something has existed or been somewhere *all along*, it has been there all the time, from the beginning. I had been looking for my keys for some time before I realized they had been in my pocket all along.
all the better for (something)	If you are *all the better for something*, you benefit from it or feel much better as a result of it. You'll be all the better for a good night's rest.
all brawn and no brain	Someone who is physically very strong but not very intelligent is said to be *all brawn and no brain*. He's an impressive player to watch, but he's all brawn and no brain.
all clear	If you are allowed to do something after a check-up to make sure that everything is all right, you get the *all clear*. Dad says he's going to play golf again as soon as he gets the all clear from his doctor.
all ears	To say that you are *all ears* means that you are

	listening very attentively. Of course I want to know - I'm all ears!
all hands on deck	When there is a need for *all hands on deck*, everyone must help, especially when there is a lot of work to be done in a short amount of time. As the opening day approached, it was all hands on deck to have everything ready in time.
all in your head	If something is *all in your head*, it is not real. It is in your imagination. Don't be silly. Nobody is trying to harm you. It's all in your head!
all hell broke loose	If you say that *all hell broke loose*, you mean that there was a sudden angry or noisy reaction to something. All hell broke loose when it was announced that the plant was going to close down.
all that jazz	This expression means 'all that stuff', 'other similar things', or 'everything of that kind'. Let's get out the tinsel, the fairy lights and all that jazz to decorate the Christmas tree.
of all people	To use the term '*of all people*' emphasizes that the person you mention, more than anyone else, is the one you would expect to do something. As an artist, you, of all people, should support the new art gallery.
all systems go	When everything is ready for an activity or event to begin, you can say that *all systems go.* *We've got an office, a telephone and the internet, so on Monday it's all systems go!*
all things to all people	If you are *all things to all people,* you please or satisfy everyone. She's exhausted trying to be a good wife, a good mother and a good teacher, but she can't be all things to all people.
all things being equal	This expression refers to a probable situation if, in all other ways, the conditions remain unchanged or equal. All (other) things being equal, a reduction in the cost of transport should enable us to lower our prices.
all the rage	When something is *all the rage*, it has become very

popular or trendy.
Twittering text messages is all the rage these days, both among individuals and companies.

all sizzle and no steak	Someone or something that turns out to be disappointing, after a promotional campaign or marketing operation which led us to expect something better, is called *all sizzle and no steak*. Because of the electoral promises he made, which so far he has failed to keep, many people call the new president 'all sizzle and no steak'.
all skin and bone	If someone is *all skin and bone*, they are very thin or too thin. After trekking in the Himalayas, he was all skin and bone.
all things to all people	If you are *all things to all people*, you please or satisfy everyone. She's exhausted tying to be a good wife, a good mother and a good teacher, but she can't be all things to all people.
all thumbs / all fingers and thumbs	If you are *all fingers and thumbs*, you are awkward and clumsy and do things incorrectly. Would you mind wrapping this for me? I'm all fingers and thumbs!
all told	*All told* means the final number, when everything has been counted. The number of visitors to the exhibition, all told, was 2543.
up/down your alley	If something is (right) *up or down your alley*, it is exactly the sort of thing that will suit your tastes or abilities. Alex loves reading, so the job in the bookshop is right up his alley.
also-ran	This term refers to an unsuccessful competitor whose performance is so much poorer than the winner's that it appears insignificant. He entered the contest hoping that he wouldn't end up as an 'also-ran'.
alter ego	The term *alter ego*, which in Latin means 'other self', refers to a very close and trusted friend who is very like yourself.
ambulance chaser	A lawyer who finds work by persuading people injured in accidents to claim money from the person who caused the

	accident is called an '*ambulance chaser*'. Peterson and Scott are well-known ambulance chasers - that's how they make their money!
answer for something	If someone has to *answer for something*, they have to accept responsibility for their actions. He will have to answer for his dishonesty.
answer the call of nature / nature's call	When a person *answers the call of nature*, they go to the toilet. I had to get up in the middle of the night to answer the call of nature.
ants in one's pants	People who have *ants in their pants* are very restless or excited about something. I wish he'd relax. He's got ants in his pants about something today.
anyone's call	This expression is used when the result of a contest or election is difficult to predict. "Who do you think will win?" "It's anyone's call."
any port in a storm	When you have no choice, *any port in a storm* refers to a solution you accept, which in normal circumstances you would find unacceptable. The hotel was substandard, but it was a case of any port in a storm; all the others were full.
the apple of your eye	A person, usually a child, who is *the apple of your eye* is one for whom you have great affection. My grandson is the apple of my eye.
upset the applecart	If you *upset* (or overturn) *the applecart*, you spoil a satisfactory plan or situation. I hope Julie doesn't attend the meeting; she could upset the applecart.
apple-pie order	If something is *in apple-pie order*, it is well organized or in perfect order. They made sure the house was in apple-pie order before their parents arrived back home.
apron strings	If one person is *tied to another's apron strings*, they remain dependent at an age when they should be

	independent. All his decisions are influenced by his mother. He's still tied to her apron strings.
argue the toss	If you *argue the toss*, you dispute a decision or choice which has already been made. The final choice was made yesterday, so don't argue the toss now!
arm of the law	This expression refers to the extent to which the authority or power of the law extends. He fled to South America hoping to escape the arm of the law.
give your right arm	If you say "Id give my right arm for that", you mean that you want it a lot and would do almost anything to obtain it. I'd give my right arm to have an apartment on Central Park.
cost an arm and a leg	If something *costs an arm and a leg*, it is very expensive. The house cost us an arm and a leg, but we have no regrets.
be up in arms	If you are *up in arms* , you are very angry about something and protest very strongly. The population was up in arms over the demolition of the old theatre.
keep someone at arm's length	If you keep someone *at arm's length*, you do not allow yourself to become friendly with them. It's not easy to become friends with Sophie; she tends to keep everyone at arm's length.
armchair critic	An *armchair critic* is someone who gives advice based on theory rather than practice. That guy is such an armchair critic - no experience but plenty of advice.
armchair traveller	Someone who reads books or watches TV programmes about other places and countries, but doesn't actually travel anywhere, is called an *armchair traveller*. A surprising number of adventure books are bought by armchair travellers.
asking for trouble	Someone who is *asking for trouble* is behaving so stupidly that he/she is likely to have problems.

	Driving fast on these roads is really asking for trouble!
asleep at the wheel	If you say that someone is *asleep at the wheel,* you mean that they are not sufficiently attentive, especially at a critical moment when vigilance is required. When the firemen arrived too late at the scene, the night watchman was accused of being asleep at the wheel.
at all costs	If you are determined to obtain or achieve something *at all costs*, you want it regardless of the expense, effort or sacrifice involved. The journalist was determined at all costs to get a report from the war zone.
at this stage of the game	This expression refers to the current point reached in a process, activity or developing situation. At this stage of the game I think any further intervention would be unwise. Let's wait and see how things develop.
at stake	Someone who has a lot *at stake* is in a risky situation, with a lot to be won or lost. He was nervous about signing the agreement because there was a lot at stake.
automatic pilot	If you are *on automatic pilot*, you do something without thinking about it or having to pay attention, because you do it regularly. Fred's on automatic pilot today - he didn't even hear my question!
of no avail	Something which is *of no avail* is not at all helpful or useful. The coffee machine wouldn't work, and the instruction leaflet was of no avail.
avowed intent	When someone makes a public declaration of their objective or goal, this is their *avowed intent*. The avowed intent of the new government is to reduce unemployment.
a rude awakening	If you get *a rude awakening*, you are forced to accept the unpleasant truth or reality. She thought Charlie would want her back, but she

	got a rude awakening - he was already dating another girl.
away with the fairies	Someone who is *away with the fairies* is in such a dreamy state that they are not totally in touch with reality and give the impression of being slightly mad. It's no use trying to explain the problem to her - she's away with the fairies!
have an axe to grind	If you *have an axe to grind,* you have personal reasons for becoming involved in something or adopting a particular attitude. It was decided that the best candidate would be selected by a recruitment agency who had no axe to grind within the company.

Some selected idioms

The lists below show the first and last idiom on each page:

- **Alphabetical idioms - lists A :**
  - list A1 : abbreviated piece of nothing → (hold all the) aces
  - list A2 : achilles heel → alarm bells
  - list A3 : all along → all the rage
  - list A4 : all sizzle and no steak → apple of your eye
  - list A5 : (upset the) applecart → at all costs
  - list A6 : at this stage of the game → (have an) axe to grind
- **Alphabetical idioms - lists B :**
  - list B1 : (leave someone holding the) baby → in bad shape
  - list B2 : badger someone → whole new ball game
  - list B3 : ballpark figure → battle lines are drawn
  - list B4 : battle of wills → beat a dead horse
  - list B5 : beat a hasty retreat → before your very eyes
  - list B6 : beggar can't be choosers → beside yourself
  - list B7 : best bet → beyond any reasonable doubt
  - list B8 : beyond one's wildest dreams → bite the bullet

- list B9 : bite the dust → blamestorming
- list B10 : blank cheque → blow away the cobwebs
- list B11 : blow a fuse → above board
- list B12 : in the same boat → bored to tears
- list B13 : born with silver spoon in your mouth → all brawn no brain
- list B14 : know which side your bread is buttered → a breeze
- list B15 : bricks and mortar/bricks and clicks → pass the buck
- list B16 : kick the bucket → burning question
- list B17 : bury your head in the sand → by degrees

- **Alphabetical idioms - lists C :**
  - list C1 : (in) cahoots with → burn the candle at both ends
  - list C2 : (paddle one's own) canoe → carrot and stick
  - list C3 : carry the can → fat cat
  - list C4 : cat nap → catch as catch can
  - list C5 : caught in the crossfire → change the face of
  - list C6 : change of heart → chicken out
  - list C7 : chickens come home to roost → chips are down
  - list C8 : (as useful as a) chocolate teapot → clip someone's wings
  - list C9 : clock in/out → cold calls
  - list C10 : cold turkey → come to grips
  - list C11 : come to a head → common ground
  - list C12 : common knowledge → couch potato
  - list C13 : cough up → cream of the crop
  - list C14 : cream rises to the top → at cross purposes
  - list C15 : cross the Rubicon → a cut above
  - list C16 : cut both ways → cut it fine

- list C17 : cut it out → cutting edge

- **Alphabetical idioms - lists D :**
  - list D1 : dab hand at something → dead in the water
  - list D2 : dead loss → (like a) deer caught in the headlights
  - list D3 : (by) degrees → dice are loaded
  - list D4 : dice with death → disappear into thin air
  - list D5 : disaster written all over → dog-eat-dog
  - list D6 : dog and pony show → (in the) doghouse
  - list D7 : (in the) doldrums → down in the mouth
  - list D8 : down payment → dressed to kill
  - list D9 : dressed up to the nines → dry (or dummy) run
  - list D10 :sitting duck → dying for

- **Alphabetical idioms - lists E :**
  - list E1 : eager beaver → eat crow
  - list E2 : eat dirt → (walk on) eggshells
  - list E3 : ego trip → even keel
  - list E4 : even the score → eagle eyes
  - list E5 : eyes in the back of your head → eyes on stalks

- **Alphabetical idioms - lists F :**
  - list F1 : face like a bulldog → facts speak for themselves
  - list F2 : fair and square → fall on deaf ears
  - list F3 : fall on sword → fat cat
  - list F4 : fat chance → feet of clay
  - list F5 : (back on your) feet → (play second) fiddle
  - list F6 : fiddling while Rome burns → finger in every pie
  - list F7 : put a finger on → in the first place

- list F8 : (of the) first water → fit for purpose
- list F9 : fit to be tied → fly-by-night
- list F10 : fly by seat of one's pants → (on a) fool's errand
- list F11 : fool's paradise → forewarned is forearmed
- list F12 : forty winks → freudian slip)
- list F13 : friends in high places → fur coat

- **Alphabetical idioms - lists G :**
  - list G1 : gab of the gab → get cracking
  - list G2 : get down to brass tacks → get off the hook
  - list G3 : get on your high horse → get your skates on
  - list G4 : get to bottom → give run-around
  - list G5 : give the shirt off one's back → go against the tide
  - list G6 : go all out → go hand in hand
  - list G7 : go haywire → go postal
  - list G8 : go to hell in a handcart → gone with the wind
  - list G9 : good as gold →green fingers
  - list G10 : green light → gutter press
- **Alphabetical idioms - lists H :**
  - list H1 : (old) habits die hard → half a mind
  - list H2 : hammer home → hands tied
  - list H3 : (wash your) hands of → happy as Larry
  - list H4 : happy-go-lucky→ have you gone out of your mind?
  - list H5 : have kittens → hear through grapevine
  - list H6 : heart's content → heebie jeebies
  - list H7 : hell broke loose → hidden agenda
  - list H8 : high and dry → hit panic button
  - list H9 : hit the road → (not) hold water

- list H10 : holier-than-thou → horns of a dilemma
- list H11 : horse of a different colour → (not give) house room
- list H12 : (on the) house → hustle and bustle

- **Alphabetical idioms - lists I :**
  - list I1 : break the ice → in essence
  - list I2 : in the first place → in retrospect
  - list I3 : in safe hands → be an item
- **Alphabetical idioms - lists J :**
  - list J1 : jack of all trades → jump the gun
  - list J2 : jump for joy → just the ticket
- **Alphabetical idioms - lists K :**
  - list K1 : kangaroo court → keep your nose to the grindstone
  - list K2 : keep your options open → kick yourself
  - list K3 : a kickback → kowtow to someone
- **Alphabetical idioms - lists L :**
  - list L1 : labour of love → laugh all the way
  - list L2 : laugh off → leave high and dry
  - list L3 : leave no stone unturned → let bygones be bygones
  - list L4 : let me bounce this off you → keep a lid on
  - list L5 : lie in → see in new light
  - list L6 : (shed) light → lipstick on a pig
  - list L7 : live beyond your means → (a) load off your mind
  - list L8 : loan shark → look the picture of health)
  - list L9 : look a sight → at a loss
- **Alphabetical idioms - lists M :**
  - list M1 : mad as a hatter →make an exhibition of

- list M2 : make flesh crawl → make nothing of
- list M3 : (can't) make an omelette → (find your) match
- list M4 : matter of time → middle of nowhere
- list M5 : (smack dab in the) middle → mind your Ps and Qs
- list M6 : (in one's) mind's eye → money for old rope
- list M7 : money doesn't grow → (once in blue) moon
- list M8 : reach for the moon → move heaven and earth
- list M9 : move in the same circles → my way or the highway

- **Alphabetical idioms - lists N :**
  - list N1 : nailing jelly to the wall → nest egg
  - list N2 : never a dull moment → night owl
  - list N3 : nine-day wonder→ no hard feelings
  - list N4 : no holds barred → not give the time of day
  - list N5 : not in the same league → nuts and bolts
- **Alphabetical idioms - lists O :**
  - list O1 : odds and ends → can't make an omelette
  - list O2 : on the cards → one good turn
  - list O3 : one hand washes the other → open secret
  - list O4 : open-and-shut case → out on a limb
  - list O5 : out to lunch → over and done with
  - list O6 : over the hill → world is your oyster
- **Alphabetical idioms - lists P :**
  - list P1 : put through paces → paper tiger
  - list P2 : paper trail → not a patch on
  - list P3 : pay dearly for → penny drops
  - list P4 : in for a penny → no picnic)

- list P5 : picture of health → pillar to post
- list P6 : (at a) pinch → play with fire
- list P7 : play footsie → pleased as punch
- list P8 : pluck out of the air→ politically correct
- list P9 : pop one's clogs → pour one's heart out
- list P10 : power behind the throne → (a) proper do
- list P11 : proud as a peacock → push one's luck
- list P12 : if push comes to shove → put one's house in order
- list P13 : put in one's place → Pyrrhic victory

- **Alphabetical idioms - lists Q :**
  - list Q : quaking in one's boots → quiet as a mouse
- **Alphabetical idioms - lists R :**
  - list R1 : race against time → rake in the money
  - list R2 : ram down someone's throat → rear its ugly head
  - list R3 : recharge one's batteries → refresh someone's memory
  - list R4 : regain one's composure → (a) rip-off
  - list R5 : ripple effect → (when in) Rome do as the Romans
  - list R6 : (go through the) roof → (bend the) rules
  - list R7 : run down → (in a) rut
- **Alphabetical idioms - lists S :**
  - list S1 : (get the) sack → (in the) same boat
  - list S2 : (by the) same token → scales fall from your eyes
  - list S3 : scarce as hen's teeth → sea legs
  - list S4 : seal of approval → seen better days
  - list S5 : sell down the river → settle a score
  - list S6 : shake like a leaf → ship has sailed

- list S7 : ships that pass in the night → short end of the stick
- list S8 : short fuse → shrug something off
- list S9 : shut the stable door when horse ... → simplicity itself
- list S10 : since time immemorial → skeleton staff
- list S11 : skin a cat → slice of the cake
- list S12 : sling mud → (a) smash hit
- list S13 : smoke like a chimney → sneak preview
- list S14 : (not to be) sneezed at → spanner in the works
- list S15 : (go) spare → spin a yarn
- list S16 : spinach cinema → (no) spring chicken
- list S17 : (on the) spur of the moment → starter marriage
- list S18 : state of the art → step on someone's toes
- list S19 : step out of line → sticky fingers
- list S20 : (on a) sticky wicket → (a) storm is brewing
- list S21 : (a) storm in a teacup → stretch the truth
- list S22 : (in) strict confidence → stubborn as a mule
- list S23 : stuck in time warp → sweet nothings
- list S24 : sweet tooth → (all) systems go

- **Alphabetical idioms - lists T :**
  - list T1 : tail wagging the dog → take with a grain of salt
  - list T2 : take the law into your own hands → take the rough with the smooth
  - list T3 : take shape → take stock
  - list T4 : take to the cleaners → (run a) taut ship
  - list T5 : (not for all the) tea in China → text-walking
  - list T6 : thank one's lucky stars - thick as thieves
  - list T7 : through thick and thin → thrilled to bits

- list T8 : (at each other's) throats → (rule of) thumb
- list T9 : (all) thumbs → time after time
- list T10 : (for the) time being → toing and froing
- list T11 : token gesture → toot your own horn
- list T12 : (fight) tooth and nail → toy with an idea
- list T13 : trade secret → tunnel vision
- list T14 : turkeys voting for Christmas → (in the) twinkling of an eye
- list T15 : twist someone's arm → put two and two together

- **Alphabetical idioms - lists U :**
  - list U1 : ugly as sin → up in arms
  - list U2 : up in the air → useful as chocolate teapot
- **Alphabetical idioms - lists V :**
  - list V1 : vanish into thin air → vote with one's feet
- **Alphabetical idioms - lists W :**
  - list W1 : on the wagon → walk a tightrope
  - list W2 : walking on air → wax lyrical
  - list W3 : ways and means → wet blanket
  - list W4 : whale of a time→ white lie
  - list W5 : whiz kid → get wind of)
  - list W6 : (know) which way wind blows → wise after the event
  - list W7 : wise up to → can't see the wood for the trees
  - list W8 : touch wood → work like a charm
  - list W9 : work to rule → best of both worlds
  - list W10 :worlds apart → written all over your face
- **Alphabetical idioms - lists X-Y-Z :**
  - list X-Y-Z : xerox subsidy → zero tolerance