

Idioms And Phrases

a bear with a sore head	irritated/bad mood
a bit of a dark horse	person with hidden abilities
a bitter pill to swallow	a difficult fact to accept
a different kettle of fish	a totally different situation from the one just mentioned
a dog's life	a difficult, hard life
a fish out of water	sb who feels uncomfortable
a long shot	a wild guess/ a risk
a memory like a sieve	a poor memory
a night owl	person who enjoys staying up late
a pain in the neck	annoying person/thing
a piece of cake	sth very easy to do
a red rag to a bull	action, comment, etc. liable to provoke sb
a red-letter day	a very important day
a sitting duck	an easy target

a storm in a teacup	a lot of fuss about sth that is not important
a wild-geese chase	a hopeless search
above board	honest
Achilles heel	weakest point of sb's character
against all odds	despite the difficulties
agree to disagree	stop arguing because there is no chance of agreement
all along	from the beginning until now
all but	nearly, almost
all in	exhausted
all in all	when everything is considered
all the same	yet, however
all told	altogether; in total
an old wives' tale	false belief
an unknown quantity	person or thing that one has no experience of
as a last resort	when all else has failed

as the crow flies	in a direct line/ by a direct route
at close quarters	from a short distance
at large	free, not caught
at the cutting edge	at the forefront of
bark up the wrong tree	have a false idea about sth
be ahead of one's time	have modern ideas
be all at sea	be in a state of confusion
be all fingers and thumbs	be awkward, clumsy
be all very well	appear satisfactory but in fact not be
be as busy as a bee	very busy
be as thick as a brick	be stupid
be beside oneself with anger	to be extremely angry
be born yesterday	be easily deceived/ naive
be broke	have no/very little money
be caught red-handed	be caught while committing a crime

be dying for sth	really want sth
be fit for	be good enough for
be for the high jump	about to be punished
be full of beans	be very lively
be green	be inexperienced
be in a quandary	be confused; undecided
be in sb's black books	out of favour
be in sb's shoes	be in sb's position
be in the dark about sth	be unaware of sth
be in the doghouse	be out of favor, in trouble
be in the know	be well-informed
be in the same boat	be in the same (usually bad) situation
be in two minds about sth	not be able to decide what to do
be on the cards	be likely to happen
be on the defensive	protect oneself because one feels insecure or threatened
be on the up and up	improve steadily

be out of practice	lacking practice
be over the moon	be elated
be second to none	be the best
be sound asleep	sleep deeply
be the apple of sb's eye	be very precious to sb; be sb's favorite
be the perfect image of sb	look exactly like sb
be the splitting image of sb	look exactly like sb
be thrown off balance	be surprised
be tickled pink	be really pleased
be up and about	have recovered from an illness
be up in arms	be very angry
be worn out	be very tired
be/get soaked to the skin	be/get very wet
be/have a close shave	barely avoid an accident/ a bad situation
bear fruit	be successful

beat about/around the bush	avoid saying what one means directly
beat sb black and blue	hit sb repeatedly until bruised
before one can say Jack Robinson	extremely quickly
beg the question	makes people want to ask a particular question
behind bars	in prison
behind the scenes	in secret
below the belt	cruel and unfair
bide one's time	wait for a good opportunity
big cheese	person with important job/position
big-headed	conceited; boastful
bite off more than sb can chew	try to do sth which is too difficult
black and blue all over	covered with bruises
black tie	formal clothing
blaze a trail	discover sth new

blessing in disguise	sth which appears bad at first but then turns out favorably
blow a fuse	become very angry
blue-eyed boy	a favored person
bolt from the blue	suddenly
brainwave	sudden clear idea/thought
break even	show neither loss nor profit
break the ice	ease the tension when one first meets people
bring sth home to sb	make sb understand how important or serious sth is
bring to one's knees	destroy, humble
browed off	fed up; bored
bury one's head in the sand	avoid or ignore reality/responsibility
butter sb up	flatter sb
by and large	generally speaking
by definition	having a quality simply because of what it is

by force of habit	used to doing sth without thinking
by trial and error	learning from one's mistakes
call it quits	give up/stop
call sb names	insult sb
cast aspersions	criticize
catch sb red-handed	be caught while committing a crime
chair a meeting	preside over a meeting
chip off the old block	sb who is very like one of his parents
chop and change	keep changing (your mind)
claim to fame	thing which makes sb unusual
clear the air	remove suspicion/bad feeling
come clean	admit the truth
come out of one's shell	gain personal confidence
come to a head	reach a critical point
come to a standstill	not progress/stop
come to terms with	accept a difficult situation
come to the fore	become important or popular

come to the point	reach the main point in a discussion
cook one's goose	end one's plans abruptly
cost a bomb	very expensive
cost an arm and a leg	be very expensive
cramp one's style	restrict one's behavior in some way
crocodile tears	false tears
cross one's mind	think of sth
cry over spilt milk	grieve over sth that can't be put right
cut corners	be less thorough
cut sb dead	ignore sb
cut sb to the quick	deeply hurt sb's feelings
cut to the bone	reduced to the minimum
deal a blow to	damage one's hopes
different as chalk and cheese	totally different
does it show?	Is it obvious?
dog eat dog	ruthless competition, rivalry

dog-eared	(of books) with the corners bent and turned down through use
don't give up your day job	continue to do sth you know rather than trying sth new
don't hold your breath	don't wait for sb/sth anxiously
donkey work	boring, monotonous work
donkey's years	a long time
down in the dumps	depressed/miserable
down the drain	wasted; lost
drive a hard bargain	be a tough businessman
drive sb up the wall	make sb angry/annoy sb
drop a brick	say sth tactlessly
drop sb a line	send sb a letter
ease off	reduce in degree, speed or intensity
eat one's heart out	feel jealous/ sad about sth
every nook and cranny	everywhere
face the music	be criticized or punished for sth you have done

fair and square	within the rules
fall head over heels	fall in love quickly
fall into place	become clear
feel down in the mouth	feel discouraged/depressed
feel in one's bones	feeling sth instinctively
feel one's ears burning	have a feeling that sb is talking about you
few and far between	scarce/rare
fight like cat and dog	disagree violently
fine kettle of fish	confused state of affairs
flat broke	penniless
flog a dead horse	waste time doing sth useless
fly off the handle	quickly become very angry
fly on the wall	see/hear sth in a situation which does not involve you
for all	in spite of
for all I care	I don't care
for all I know	as far as I know

for donkey's years	for a very long time
for the time being	temporarily
frosty welcome	unfriendly reception
gatecrasher	sb attending a party without an invitation
get a bit hot under the collar	get angry, upset or embarrassed
get a move on	hurry up
get a problem off one's chest	tell sb else about your problem
get cold feet	lose courage to do sth
get cold feet	be nervous or frightened because sth might fail
get nowhere fast	make no progress
get off on the wrong foot	argue or disagree at the beginning of a relationship
get on one's nerves	irritate/annoy sb
get out of bed on the wrong side	be in a bad mood
get out of hand	become out of control

get rid of sth	give sth unwanted away
get the hang of it	get in the habit of doing sth
get the sack	be dismissed from one's job
get the wrong end of the stick	misunderstand completely what has been said
get wind of	receive information about sth indirectly
get your own back	take/get revenge
give and take	compromise
give chapter and verse	give every exact detail
give sb the cold shoulder	ignore sb
give sb the slip	escape from sb
give the green light to sth	give permission to proceed with sth
give vent to	express sth freely
give way to	give in/yield
go back on one's word	not fulfill a promise
go by the board	be rejected

go for a song	be sold very cheaply
go to any lengths	do anything necessary to get sth you want
go to one's head	make conceited
go to the dogs	worsen
go without saying	be a foregone conclusion
golden opportunity	the best chance to gain sth
grease sb's palm	bribe sb
green belt	the area on the outskirts of a town adjoining the country
green with envy	very jealous
grey matter	brains; intelligence
grow out of sth	become too big for sth
hand in glove with sb	be in very close contact with sb
have a bee in one's bonnet	have an obsession about sth
have a frog in one's throat	inability to speak due to nervousness

have a job to do sth	find sth difficult to do
have a sharp tongue	tend to say unkind or hurtful things
have a yellow streak	be a coward
have an early night	go to bed early
have an eye for	be a good judge of sth
have an eye for	be good at judging the worth of sth
have at one's fingertips	have easily available
have butterflies in one's stomach	be very nervous about sth
have kittens	be nervous/anxious about sth
have many irons in the fire	have lots of plans in progress at the same time
have no fixed abode	be homeless
have no option but	must; have no choice
have one's heart in one's mouth	be extremely anxious about sth
have sb's hands full	be very busy with sth
have the cheek	dare to do sth

have the gift of the gab	be able to talk well
have time on one's hands	have free time
have words with sb	have an argument
hear it through the grapevine	find out information indirectly
hit the nail on the head	say exactly the right thing
hit the roof	get very angry
hit the sack	go to bed
hold one's horses	wait; be patient
ill at ease	embarrassed; uncomfortable
in a flash	very quickly
in a nutshell	briefly; in few words
in a rut	be stuck in a monotonous routine
in a tick	shortly, soon
in abeyance	halted temporarily
in arrears	have not paid the money they owe

in black and white	in writing
in broad daylight	in full view of the public
in clover	living a luxurious and comfortable life
in deep water	in trouble/difficulty
in full flow	talking at length
in public	in the presence of other people
in the abstract	in a general way
in the act of	while performing the act
in the air	uncertain
in the balance	uncertain
in the black	not owing anybody any money
in the flesh	in person
in the long run	after a long period of time
in the nick of time	just in time
in the offing	likely to happen
in the red	owe money to a bank
it stands to reason	it is logical

it's all Greek to me	sth new or foreign; not easily understood
jack of all trades	sb who is able to do a variety of jobs
keep a straight face	manage to look serious under difficult circumstances
keep an eye on sth	guard/protect sth
keep in check	control
keep one's chin up	not be discouraged
keep one's fingers crossed	hope that sth will turn out well
keep one's wits about one	be alert and able to deal with difficulties
keep oneself to oneself	live quietly, privately
keep sth quiet	keep sth secret
keep sth under one's hat	keep sth secret
keep up with the Joneses	compete with others in status/material goods
kick the bucket	die

kill time	pass time while waiting for sb/sth
kill two birds with one stone	achieve two things with one action
know the ropes	know all the details of sth
lay bare	make public
lay the table	set the table for a meal
lend an ear	listen to sb in a careful and sympathetic way
lend sb a hand	give help to sb
let sleeping dogs lie	avoid mentioning a subject which could cause trouble
let the cat out of the bag	reveal a secret
like a bull in a china shop	behave in a clumsy/ awkward way
like the back of one's hand	be very familiar with sth
like water off a duck's back	having no effect
live out of a suitcase	travel often/not have a permanent home

look at sth through rose-coloured spectacles	see sth from an unrealistically positive point of view
look down one's nose at sb	feel/act superior to sb
lose heart	become discouraged
lose one's head	lose self-control
lose one's nerve	lose courage
lost cause	hopeless situation or case
make a clean breast of	confess
make a dog's dinner	make a mess of sth
make a flying visit	make a quick trip
make a fool of oneself	make oneself look stupid
make a killing	have a sudden, great success
make a living	earn money
make a mountain out of a molehill	cause a fuss about a trivial matter
make a name for oneself	become famous/respected for sth

make allowances for	take special circumstances into consideration
make amends for	try to compensate for a past action
make common cause with sb	act together to achieve aim
make hay while the sun shines	take advantage of favorable circumstances
make head nor tail of	understand sth
make light of	treat sth as unimportant
make money hand over fist	make a lot of money quickly and easily
make one's blood boil	cause sb to become very angry
make one's getaway	escape
make quite a scene	become angry in a dramatic way
make sb's day	make sb very happy
make waves	cause trouble
meet behind closed doors	meet secretly
moon around	look miserable

more to sb than meets the eye	sb is more important or interesting than is first seen
mutton dressed as a lamb	dress in a style younger than or inappropriate to your age
no room to swing a cat	no room at all
no wonder	not surprising
not all it's cracked up to be	not as good as people say it is
not be one's cup of tea	not suit one's taste
not count one's chickens before they're hatched	not assume sth before it happens
not have it both ways	refuse to make a decision between two pleasant things
not have the foggiest idea	not know sth at all
not hold water	not seem reasonable or in accordance with the facts
not lose any sleep over sth	not worry about sth
null and void	invalid; not legally binding

of all people	used to express annoyance/surprise
of its own accord	automatically
of no consequence	of no value
off color	look/be slightly unwell
off the cuff	without preparation
off the point	irrelevant
off the record	unofficial(ly)
on a shoestring	on a very small budget
on account of	because of
on edge	tense/nervous/ anxious
on no account	under/in no circumstances
on second thoughts	having changed one's mind
on the air	broadcasting
on the alert	watchful and prepared
on the ball	alert
on the blink	stop working properly (of electrical equipment)

on the dole	receiving unemployment benefit/social security
on the dot	punctual, exact on time
on the face of it	judging by how sth appears
on the level	honest/sincere
on the quiet	secretly
on the spur of the moment	without thinking about sth
on this/that account	for this/that reason
once and for all	for the last time
once in a blue moon	very rarely
one's flesh and blood	family member
open to debate	not decided/settled
out and about	outdoors; traveling from one place to another
out in the open	(of secrets) revealed, known
out of bounds	prohibited, forbidden (place)
out of print	(of books) not available anymore

out of the blue	suddenly and unexpectedly
out of the frying pan into the fire	from a situation to a worse/similar one
out of the question	impossible
out of turn	not in the correct order/time
out-and-out	complete, total
paint the town red	have a great time
part and parcel of	basic part of
part company with	end association
pay sb's way	contribute your shares of a bill
pick someone's brains	ask sb to help with a problem
pitch black	very dark
play cat and mouse with sb	keep sb in a state of uncertain expectation treating them alternatively cruelly and kindly
play it by ear	act in a situation by responding to events rather than according to plan
play one's cards right	act cleverly

play truant	stay away from school without permission
plenty more fish in the sea	many more opportunities in life for love
point the finger of suspicion	blame sb for sth
pop the question	make a proposal of marriage
pull a few strings	use influential contacts in order to obtain an advantage
pull one's leg	tease or trick sb
pull one's socks up	make a greater effort
put a damper on	ruin sth or make it less enjoyable
put down roots	settle down
put on a brave face	try to hide one's disappointment
put one's foot down	insist on sth
put one's foot in it	make a tactless comment
put one's heart and soul into sth	be devoted to sth
put sb's name forward	nominate sb

put the cat among the pigeons	cause trouble/controversy
put two and two together	arrive at the truth by looking at facts
put words into one's mouth	pretend that sb has said sth that they haven't actually said
rack sb's brains	think very hard about sth
rain cats and dogs	rain heavily
red herring	sth which distracts you from sth important
red tape	unnecessary bureaucracy
ring a bell	remind sb of sth
rise to the challenge	act and be successful even though sth is new
see eye to eye with sb	agree with sb
see fit	think suitable or right
see red	suddenly become very angry
see the back of	be glad to see sb leave

set in one's ways	fixed in one's habits
shed light upon	give new/further information
short and sweet	brief but pleasant (usually ironic)
show one's true colors	reveal one's real character
sleep like a dog	be sound asleep
sleep on it	think about sth
slip one's mind	forget about sth
slow on the uptake	slow to understand
smell a rat	suspect that sth is wrong
sour grapes	say unpleasant comments because of jealousy
speak volumes	be strong evidence of sb's feelings or merits
spill the beans	reveal a secret/the facts
stand in sb's way	prevent sb from doing sth
status symbol	property/possession that shows sb's high social rank wealth etc.
stay clear of	avoid sb/sth

stew in one's own juice	suffer the consequences of one's own action
sth comes in handy	be very useful/practical
straight from the horse's mouth	from the most direct source
strike a chord	make sb feel sympathy
strike gold	come across sth useful
sweet tooth	enjoy eating sweet things
swim like a fish	swim very well
take it easy	not work too hard/relax
take one's time	not to hurry
take sb for granted	not appreciate sb
take sth into account	consider sth
take sth on the chin	bravely accept criticism
take sth to heart	take personally/be influenced by
take sth with a pinch of salt	not believe sth completely

take the bull by the horns	deal with sth boldly and directly
take things to pieces	dismantle things
take to one's heels	run away
talk the hind legs off a donkey	talk for a long time, uninterrupted
the black sheep of the family	a disgraced family member
the ins and outs	the details of an activity
the last straw	the last and worst episode in a chain of bad experiences
the life and soul of sth	the most lively and amusing person present somewhere
the lion's share	the biggest part/portion
the pot calling the kettle black	accusing sb of a fault one has oneself
the rat race	the competitive nature of modern urban life
the tip of the iceberg	small evident part of a much larger, concealed situation
the year dot	a long time ago

thick-skinned	insensitive
through thick and thin	whatever happens
throw a party	have/hold a party
to no effect	unsuccessful
tongue in cheek	not serious, ironic
tooth and nail	fiercely
touch and go	with uncertain result
turn a blind eye to sth	ignore
turn over a new leaf	make a new start
under the weather	depressed/unwell
until one is blue in the face	as hard/long as one possibly can
until the cows come home	for a long time
up and coming	likely to be successful
up in the air	existing, but not talked about
ups and downs	good things with bad ones

wash sb's hands of sb	refuse to be involved with sb
wet behind the ears	inexperienced
wet blanket	dull person who spoils people's happiness
whet sb's appetite	make sb eager to have/experience more
white elephant	useless/unwanted possession
white-collar job	office/clerical work
with a view to doing sth	with the intention or hope of doing sth
with flying colors	with great success
without fail	do sth no matter what
work a miracle	make sth almost impossible happen
work to rule	adhere strictly to the rules as a form of protest