

Book of Idioms From A to Z

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Aa

A

A 1 excellent; first-rate.

❶ The full form of this expression is *A1 at Lloyd's*. In Lloyd's Register of Shipping, the phrase was used of ships in first-class condition as to the hull (A) and stores (1). The US equivalent is *A No. 1*; both have been in figurative use since the mid 19th century.

from A to B from your starting point to your destination; from one place to another.

1987 K. Rushforth *Tree Planting & Management* The purpose of street tree planting is to . . . make the roads and thoroughfares pleasant in their own right, not just as places used to travel from A to B.

from A to Z over the entire range; in every particular.

1998 Salmon, Trout & Sea-Trout In order to have seen Scotland's game fishing in its entirety, from A to Z, visiting 30 stretches of river and 350 lochs a year, you would have to be travelling for a hundred years.

aback

take someone aback shock, surprise, or disconcert someone.

❶ The phrase is frequently used in the passive form (*be taken aback*): this was adopted in the mid 19th century from earlier (mid 18th-century) nautical terminology, to describe the situation of a ship with its sails pressed back against the mast by a headwind, preventing forward movement.

1991 Kathleen Jones *Learning Not To Be First* They were taken aback by the shabbiness of the hotel and lack of cleanliness in the city generally.

ABC

as easy (or simple) as ABC extremely easy or straightforward.

❶ From the 15th to the 17th century, a child's first spelling and reading book was commonly called an *ABC*, and this led to the development of its metaphorical use, 'the basic elements or rudiments of something'.

abdabs

give someone the screaming abdabs induce an attack of extreme anxiety or irritation in someone.

❶ *Abdabs* (or *habdabs*) is mid 20th-century slang whose origin is unknown. The word is sometimes also used to mean an attack of delirium tremens.

abet

aid and abet: see AID.

about

know what you are about be aware of the implications of your actions or of a situation, and of how best to deal with them. informal

1993 Ski Survey He ran a 3-star guest house before this, so knows what he is about.

above

above yourself conceited; arrogant.

1999 Frank McCourt 'Tis Many a man made his way in America by the sweat of his brow and his strong back and it's a good thing to learn your station in life and not be getting above yourself.

not be above — be capable of stooping to an unworthy act.

1991 Maureen Duffy *Illuminations* The copyist was not above turning author or forger and several MSS from this period must be viewed as highly suspect.

Abraham

in Abraham's bosom in heaven, the place of rest for the souls of the blessed. dated

❶ The phrase is taken from Luke 16:22: 'And it came to pass, that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom'. In the Bible, *Abraham* was the Hebrew patriarch from whom all Jews traced their descent.

acceptable

the acceptable face of the tolerable or attractive manifestation or aspect of.